

# ACTS OF BEING

SELECTED WEBLOG WRITINGS  
FROM 2006 TO 2019



# ACTS OF BEING

Loyd L. Fueston, Jr.

Published by Loyd L. Fueston, Jr.

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[J]ust as a disciple reaches an understanding of the teacher's wisdom by the words he hears from him, so man can reach an understanding of God's wisdom by examining the creatures He made. . .

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Page 17 of St. Thomas Aquinas' commentary on (1 Corinthians) as translated by Fabian Larcher, O.P. and published on the Internet by Ave Maria University. It is now published as a book by *The Aquinas Institute* and may be made available on [aquinas.cc](http://aquinas.cc).



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# Preface to the Tenth Edition Including 2019

I've added another 12 or so chapters to this Ninth Edition. All but this chapter are reformatted essays from my writings during 2017 which were published on my active weblog, *Acts Of Being* at <http://loydfueston.com/>.

In 2019, I endured some visual problems which have been solved but which made it difficult for me to do any significant reading or writing from March to September. It has taken me more time to regain my mental energy. As a consequence, I wrote only those 12 or so chapters and also failed to do much with my next novel, *The Return of the Mastodons*. I plan to return to that novel and also to work on a nonfiction book, *Love and Stuff*; four very preliminary chapters from that book appear in this collection.

I'm turning to more focused efforts to deal with individual, 'large' problems. This will likely be the last general update I'll provide of my blog writings; future books will likely be novels or nonfiction works with particular topics.

Enjoy.



# Preface to the Ninth Edition Including 2018

I've added another 25 or so chapters to this Ninth Edition. All but this chapter are reformatted essays from my writings during 2017 which were published on my active weblog, *Acts Of Being* at <http://loydfueston.com/>.

In 2018, I continued to work—very fitfully—on the next novel in the series which started with *Gathering the Silence* [54], a story of a conversion to being an author on top of a conversion to Sacramental Christianity. This second novel, *Stranger in a Strange Land*, was put to the side for a different set of excuses than in 2016 and 2017: I was spending too much time trying to make sense of the gangsterish ruling elite of the United States but I was already starting to write about more fundamental matters in metaphysics and theology. As a result, a larger number of essays made it into Part VIII, *What Means It All?*. I hope to finish *Stranger in a Strange Land* by February or March at the latest. I've also begun to work on other mothballed novels and seem to have little or still have little interest in working on a nonfiction book though I continue to study mathematics and science, trying to draw concepts from those fields which experienced such explosive growth in various ways in recent centuries. I'll continue writing shorter nonfiction pieces for my blog.

Enjoy.



# Preface to the Eighth Edition Including 2017

I've added another 30 or so chapters to this Eighth Edition. All but this chapter are reformatted essays from my writings during 2017 which were published on my active weblog, *Acts Of Being* at <http://loydfueston.com/>.

In 2017, I continued to work—very fitfully—on the next novel in the series which started with *Gathering the Silence* [54], a story of a conversion to being an author on top of a conversion to Sacramental Christianity. This second novel, *Stranger in a Strange Land*, was put to the side due to various personal issues in the second half of 2016. I hope to finish *Stranger in a Strange Land* by July or so. I've also begun to work on other mothballed novels and seem to have little or no interest in working on a nonfiction book. I'll continue writing shorter nonfiction pieces for my blog.

Enjoy.



# Preface to the Seventh Edition Including 2016

I've added another 40 or so chapters to this Seventh Edition. All but this chapter are reformatted essays from my writings during 2016 which were published on my active weblog, *Acts Of Being* at <http://loydfueston.com/>.

In 2016, I continued to work on the next novel in the series which started with *Gathering the Silence* [54], a story of a conversion to being an author on top of a conversion to Sacramental Christianity. This second novel, *Stranger in a Strange Land*, was put to the side in the second half of 2016 as I concentrated on a nonfiction book nearly completed by the end of 2016, *The Shape of Reality*. I hope to finish *The Shape of Reality* by the end of February at the latest and *Stranger in a Strange Land* by July or so.

Enjoy.



# Preface to the Sixth Edition Including 2015

I've added nearly 40 chapters to this Sixth Edition. All but this chapter are reformatted essays from my writings during 2015 which were published on my active weblog, *Acts of Being* at <http://loydfueston.com/>.

In 2015, I continued on the course I'd set in 2014. I began work on the next novel in the series which started with *Gathering the Silence* [54], a story of a conversion to being an author on top of a conversion to Sacramental Christianity. I also moved on with studies of certain topics in mathematics and genetics and anthropology and other sciences and started work on a book about understanding human being by way of a more sophisticated use of modern empirical knowledge.

Enjoy.



# Preface to the Fifth Edition

## Including 2014

I've added nearly 50 chapters to this Fifth Edition. All but this chapter are reformatted essays from my writings during 2014 which were published on my active weblog, *Acts of Being* at <http://loydfueston.com/>.

In 2014, I shifted course slightly and began working on a more than half-completed novel which has sat in storage for nearly 10 years—how the time does fly. I continued my study of mathematics of a sort which might help to develop the qualitative tools, concepts and words, which can help generate proper descriptions of human being and its various relationships, including the issue so important in an age in which the 'positive' sciences (including empirical studies of history and literature and so forth) have been so successful: how much can be understood by way of quantity and what is left over to be understood by way of those non-quantitative modes of understanding which often seem to be as necessary as they are ghost-like in recent generations?

And it remains true that I hope your thinking is stimulated by what you find in this book.



# Preface to the Fourth Edition Including 2013

I've added about 70 chapters to this Fourth Edition. Nearly all of those chapters are reformatted essays from my writings during 2013 which were published on my active weblog, *Acts of Being* at <http://loydfueston.com/>.

In 2013, I shifted course slightly after publishing *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53]; this book completed a major phase of my efforts to understand human relationships and the formation of the Body of Christ in this mortal realm, a formation not to be completed or perfected on this side of the grave. I began to move toward the closely related issues regarding proper descriptions of human being and its various relationships, including the issue so important in an age in which the 'positive' sciences (including empirical studies of history and literature and so forth) have been so successful: how much can be understood by way of quantity and what is left over to be understood by way of those non-quantitative modes of understanding which often seem to be as necessary as they are ghost-like in recent generations?

And it remains true that I hope your thinking is stimulated by what you find in this book.



# Preface to the Third Edition Including 2012

I've added about 80 chapters to this Third Edition. Nearly all of those chapters are reformatted essays from my writings during 2012 which were published on my active weblog, *Acts of Being* at <http://loydfueston.com/>.

In 2012, I remained on the course I set in 2011. I was strongly inclined to deal with the issues of relationships and of the formation of the Body of Christ in this mortal realm, a formation not to be completed or perfected on this side of the grave.

I still hope your thinking is stimulated by what you find in this book.



# Preface to the Second Edition Including 2011

I've added about 70 chapters to this Second Edition. Nearly all of those chapters are reformatted essays from my writings during 2011 which were published on my active weblog, *Acts of Being* at <http://loydfueston.com/>. I've also added a couple of older writings because of references in the essays from 2011.

In 2011, I turned more strongly to making sense of being so far as it's used by God in telling His story which is this universe seen in light of the Almighty's purposes. Specifically, I turned towards the issues of relationships and of the formation of the Body of Christ in this mortal realm, a formation not to be completed or perfected on this side of the grave. It should probably be noted that I considered the corruption of the modern political and economic systems, trying to determine what they tell us about the world and the mortal Body of Christ. Roughly speaking, I decided that these systems have been taken over by gangster conspiracies which play roles in human moral and community life roughly comparable to the roles of parasites and infectious agents and cancers in the biological world.

I hope your thinking is stimulated by what you find in this book.



# Preface to the Original Edition Through 2010

In July of 2006, I started publishing entries at the blog, *Acts of Being* found at <http://loydfueston.com>. I intended this to be a blog for further developing my view of God's Creation as first proposed in my first published book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* as described at [http://loydfueston.com/?page\\_id=17](http://loydfueston.com/?page_id=17). In November of 2006, I started publishing at a free blog, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/>, supplied through the generosity of those who develop the Wordpress blogging software. I made the probably bad decision to use the same title as my first published book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*. I intended to use that second blog to reach out to the more general public without an interest in more technical metaphysical matters.

Things never work out quite as planned, at least for me. I've more or less abandoned that blog at the wordpress.com site, though I keep it up as an archive of sorts. Readers do still come for a few modestly popular essays. And I have included in this ebook many essays from that site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*. Originally, I had planned to include only those to which I make reference in my other blog but I've decided to include a number dealing with the issues which are named as the titles of chapters in this book. I held back a few of no lasting interest and a number which are commentaries on parts of the Christian liturgical year. I hope to eventually fill out the entire liturgical year and then publish an entire set of commentaries in a separate book.

I'll be trying to publish an annually updated version of this book, though I haven't thought through my work schedule. As I update and maybe make some esthetic improvements, I might add some sort of an index though I know enough about the difficulties of constructing a useful, high-quality

index to be a bit intimidated by that prospect.

So far, though I've made not a penny from this work, I've been happy in a qualified way with my writings and I do feel guided by God in my work. He doesn't speak so clearly to me as He has supposedly spoken to some, but the results seem, at least to me, to be in better agreement with His Creation, with reality. I'll continue to move erratically and uncertainly in the ways I feel to be directed. I suspect that might lead me to divert more of my efforts to larger-scale works, books written as such. For now, I'll continue to publish these sorts of shorter weblog writings while trying to gear up my efforts on both nonfiction books and novels.

In any case, I hope that you, the reader, find something of interest and of help in this book. Even if you disagree with what you read, I would hope it will encourage you to make your own efforts to engage Creation as a whole, even if you don't see it as the Creation of the God of Jesus Christ as I do.

# Introduction

This book is the result of my floundering at writing a series of books which I hoped would give smoother and updated versions of my views on a wide variety of metaphysical and theological issues. As I see things, that includes also views on the nature of man and his activities in this mortal realm, even political and economic activities. I found I didn't really have that much to add to my weblog writings on many topics and have set the new goal of writing a book where I can provide some additional insight on the formation of the human brain as a re-creation of God's Creation. I might also finish a book on my efforts as a Christian to make peace with empirical reality. Other efforts will come as I see a need, including perhaps a book in which I show how to borrow concepts from abstractions based on modern empirical knowledge, to derive higher-level abstractions, and to apply those to our moral thought.

The parts, major sections, of this collection of weblog writings correspond to those topics:

- Part I Making Peace With Empirical Reality
- Part II The Human Mind as a Re-creation of God's Creation
- Part III Love and Stuff
- Part IV What is a Universe?
- Part V Human Being
- Part VI The Narrative We Know as a World
- Part VII What Means It All?

At times, I was not sure where to place an individual essay or article, but there is a certain amount of homogeneity of subject matter in the chapters. It would seem that my decision to include many of the essays or articles from my alternate weblog, *To See n a World in a Grain of Sand* at <http://loydf.wordpress.com/> had a good effect at times of lowering the intellectual tension though not, I hope, the intellectual quality.

I've not been very selective; I don't think I eliminated as much as 10%, deleting the occasional administrative announcement and only a few essays on topics which didn't seem to me so central to my purposes. This leaves much in the way of repetition and some clumsy wording, but I've tried to ease the worst of these defects.

The scholarly apparatus of this book isn't very impressive. I have set the goal of adding more writings each year from my active weblog, *Acts of Being* at <http://loydfueston.com>. I don't always note the original publication date for reprints or later editions or paperback editions of books published earlier with hardcovers. It's not unseemly, by scholarly standards, to make casual reference to, say, *Moby Dick* without noting the edition but I sometimes even commit the sin of providing nothing but a title for a more recent book. I don't think this should be a problem in this day and age when bookstores and libraries and publishers put information on the Internet for public use.

Part I  
Overview



# 1 Copyright Issues

*To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41] and *The Peace of Christ* [44] are published by Wipf & Stock (see <http://www.wipfandstock.com>) under a traditional copyright. All of the other writings discussed in this catalog are released, as of January of 2015 or earlier as noted in the particular book. For copyrighting, I use Version 3.0 or later of the Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works license as written and published by Creative Commons Corporation. This license can be found at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>.



## 2 Writings by Loyd Fueston

### 2.1 Overview of Writings by Loyd Fueston

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

### 2.2 Novels

#### Novels as Part of My Mission

Consistent with my view of the unity of human knowledge, at least true knowledge, I consider my fictions to be part of the same effort as my non-fictions. I've made six novels available for free download under a Creative Commons non-derivatives license.

#### The Open Independence of the Seas

*The Open Independence of the Seas* can be downloaded at <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/open.pdf>.

This novel is the second that I wrote but the oldest of my novels which still exists (substantially finished in 1999 or thereabouts). I trashed my first novel and have started to rewrite it. In any case, *The Open Independence of the Seas* [45] is an early and perhaps sometimes successful effort to unleash

my language to speak more truly of the world in terms of our modern knowledge of empirical bits and pieces of the world.

*The Open Independence of the Seas* [45] is the story of a young man who is trying to make sense of the stories of a grandfather who built churches and hospitals in Africa as well as missile-launching systems in America, a dead cousin who was more than half Nigerian and also more than half Welsh, a long-dead grandmother who had a reputation as being a nervy biologist, a 400-pound man who liked to sit on other people's faces, a 400-pound gorilla who was far gentler, a wise killer, a world devastated by nuclear war, and various other creatures. The protagonist, presenting himself as being borderline autistic, particularly struggles with the science-tinged poetry of that dead cousin who had made himself aware of the forwards and introductory chapters of many classics in science and mathematics.

## Safe Harbours and Open Seas

*Safe Harbours and Open Seas* can be downloaded at <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/safe.pdf>.

I wrote the first version of *Safe Harbours and Open Seas* [46] more than ten years ago. I believe the current version was finished about seven or eight years ago, though I did reformat it and also made some minor edits just before making it available for download in August of 2011. It's another novel about the conflicts in modern men because of our inability—so far—to deal with modern empirical knowledge and with the complexity of life in modern human communities. This novel is a comedy. Even a meta-comedy in a manner of speaking.

It's closely related to *The Open Independence of the Seas* [45] which I made available for download in September of 2010.

*Safe Harbours and Open Seas* [46] was written after the publishing industry showed no interest whatsoever in *The Open Independence of the Seas* [45]. Some chapters in *Safe Harbours and Open Seas* [46] are copied over from an early version of that other novel. *Safe Harbours and Open Seas* looks at a conflict between one author who is trying to make sense of God's Creation, both science and human history and another author who has a literalistic and superficial understanding of modern empirical knowledge. The first author, Parnell Lopez, is one of the main characters, and narrator, of *The Open Independence of the Seas* [45].

## Corporate Sex

*Corporate Sex* can be downloaded at <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/corpsex.pdf>.

*Corporate Sex* [39] was named *Unleashed Desires* when I submitted it to publishers and agents during the late 1990s going into the post-9/11 period. It is about the mating rituals and forms of reproduction that take place in the New York City financial districts. This is one of several novels where the main character(s) came to life before I began writing the book. Mary Pride was born more or less fully mature as I walked some quiet streets in the town where I grew up—Ludlow, MA—a year or more before I could get the plot straight.

## The Modern Critic

*The Modern Critic* [48] can be downloaded at <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/critic.pdf>

In 2012, I uploaded the novel, *The Modern Critic* [48]. This book was 99% complete ten years ago but I'd been procrastinating on the publication because I thought I might expand it substantially. That expansion now seems unnecessary and even esthetically unappealing. The book was complete after I added a few comments to fill in as little information as is necessary about some characters who chased or escaped each other out of the pages of the novel discussed above: *Corporate Sex* [39].

Anyone who reads this book could probably guess the truth: I wrote it in a good-natured phase of my state of despair at discovering that books requiring good reading skills and active minds don't appeal at all to the editors of the American publishing industry. In this, the denizens of that industry seem to be in front of the herd, not leading but going along in front.

*The Modern Critic* [48] is some non-essential middle to my novel *Corporate Sex* [39], a tale of courting behavior on Wall Street, though this book is about a literary world which is rarely visited these days by the sorts who are successful on Wall Street or Avenue of the Americas.

## A Man for Every Purpose

*A Man for Every Purpose* [37] can be downloaded at <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/aman.pdf>

*A Man For Every Purpose* [37] is a tale of a man who fragments when he is not able to deal with some of the problems in his life. It is told from the point of view of that character. One of my motivations in writing this tale is to show that true and moral fantasy has more to do with human perceptions than with magical events. Nothing impossible occurs in this novel but the telling of the possible events twists them and colors them in strange ways.

In any case, the fragmented protagonist is us as we go about our lives in this modern world. As was true of Mary Pride from *Corporate Sex* [39], Milt Jackson came to life well before I knew what he would do. In fact, I ran through several possible plots while Milt stayed pretty much the same.

## The Hermit of Turkey Hill

*The Hermit of Turkey Hill* [36] can be downloaded at <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/hermit.pdf>

*The Hermit of Turkey Hill* [36] is a story based upon a friendship, of sorts, that my grandfather, Charlie Milroy, had with a man who was the gentler sort of sociopath. The man lived in Ludlow for 35 years or so and spoke so few words that people weren't sure where he was from. I changed the name of the town, changed the name of the police chief—my grandfather, and made up a number of characters and little events to flesh out the few facts I knew about this story.

## Gathering the Silence

*Gathering the Silence* [54] can be downloaded at <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/silence.pdf>

*Gathering the Silence* [54] is the first volume of a modern conversion story, that of a young man who finds himself on the path to becoming a Christian thinker and author. The story runs parallel to mine but is much different at times, elaborated in a way to make things clear as they were to me after years of contemplation. I am currently planning on writing

another two volumes to complete the story, perhaps one to be published toward the end of 2015 and one toward the end of 2016.

## The Simple Life

*The Simple Life*[55] can be downloaded at <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/simple.pdf>

It's the story of some men and women and children gathering together in New England to form a community and take care of the vulnerable and the abandoned. After they start to form that community, the climate turned a little ice-age cold. Many have moved down to sunnier regions.

Adam Smith? The Invisible Hand? This is a concrete world which resists too consistent an application of abstractions...

Maybe we just need better abstractions or better ways of applying the ones we already have?

In any case, something invisible is working. Sometimes building and nurturing. Sometimes smashing.

## A Stranger in a Land of Strangers

*A Stranger in a Land of Strangers* [57] can be downloaded at <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/stranger.pdf>

*Gathering the Silence*, a novel described above, began a fictionalized, spiritual biography of someone much like me in some ways, very different in others. This novel, *A Stranger in a Land of Strangers*, continues that spiritual biography—if that be the proper term.

In the announcement of the availability of *A Stranger in a Land of Strangers* on my blog, I wrote:

This is what I wrote about that earlier novel in the announcement of the availability of the first edition:

In a sense this is both my latest and my first novel. It's about the fifth version of what started out as a straightforward fictional telling of my spiritual life, climaxing in my entry into the Catholic Church. Now, it's the first half of a story about the conversion of a man into a Christian author and its not nearly so straightforward.

The story continues with a certain success—though not of the financial sort—in the conversion of the protagonist to Christian author. There is serious regression in the more important religious conversion, though there are hints the two conversions are intertwined and, perhaps, ultimately one.

The Christian author might pull himself along on a spiritual recovery?

Who yet knows?

## 2.3 Nonfiction Books

### To See a World in a Grain of Sand

*To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41] can be purchased at *Wipf & Stock* which has a website at <http://www.wipfandstock.com> or at many internet booksellers.

In 2006, my first published book appeared due to the kindly intervention of the theologian Stanley Hauerwas and the generosity of Jon Stock at *Wipf & Stock*, a republisher of Christian works of merit and a first publisher of works marketed in the academic community. That book was *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41] as described at [http://loydfueston.com/?page\\_id=17](http://loydfueston.com/?page_id=17). Only a paltry number of copies have been sold.

The synopsis for that book, printed on the back-cover, is:

With some modifications, certain insights of St. Thomas Aquinas can be used to make good sense of this dynamic universe of evolving things. These foundational insights cover the nature of human knowledge and the importance of acts-of-being.

The human mind is formed by interaction with God's effects in His Creation and this interaction takes place during three billion years of evolution and also during the lifetime of an individual human being. Creation is a manifestation of thoughts which God wishes to share with us.

God Himself is His own Act-of-being or the Supreme Act-of-being while all the underlying stuff of created things is ever and continuously brought into existence by God's acts-of-being. Complex things and living beings are brought into existence by

acts-of-being best described as parts of a story being told by God. Even metaphysical and mathematical truths are better described as being facts created by the same God who created things. God is the source of all being and all truths.

## The Peace of Christ

*The Peace of Christ* [44] can be purchased at *Wipf & Stock* which has a website at <http://www.wipfandstock.com> or at many internet booksellers.

My second published book about struggling through a difficult period, *The Peace of Christ* [44] as described at [http://loydfueston.com/?page\\_id=89](http://loydfueston.com/?page_id=89) did no better than *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41].

The synopsis for that second book, printed on the back-cover, is:

This universe is a battleground where forces of order and disorder struggle. We can eat or be eaten but even if we survive the struggle between predator and prey, we have to face floods and hurricanes, asteroids and volcanoes. True peace is possible even on this battleground because of Christ's victory on the Cross. This true peace can be understood when given its proper name: the Peace of Christ. We can understand better when we pray to God, when we read the Bible, and when we worship Him. We should pray, asking for God's help and praying the Psalms. We should sit quietly, letting ourselves become better aware of God's Presence and learning how to pray along with God, to listen along with God, to think along with God. We should read the Bible, the word of God as recorded by His prophets and evangelists. We should worship God at least once a week, preferably participating in the Eucharistic Rite, eating the Body of Christ and drinking His Blood as He commanded for the sake of our salvation (John 6:53). In various ways, we should allow God to fill us up with His Son that we might become Christ-like persons. Only in that Christ-like state can we obtain true peace.

## Four Kinds of Knowledge

*Four Kinds of Knowledge* [43] can be downloaded at <http://loydfueston/downloads/know.pdf>.

I set out on a different path and published my next book, *Four Kinds of Knowledge* [43], on the Internet intending to allow personal use though I reserved derivative rights. This book is a discussion of human knowledge and a denial of the ‘problem’ of human knowledge usually studied under the name of ‘epistemology’, a branch of philosophy forbidden to those who accept the claim of St. Thomas Aquinas that things are true. We know what we know by actively perceiving what lies around us and what is happening in our own bodies and we know truly when we know in such a way as to respond properly to the truth that is in the world. This way of putting it points to the similar views of the pragmatists who would be nearly Thomists in my updated sense, existentialist and relationalist as well as trusting reality, if only they were willing to admit our knowledge is local knowledge of a world, indeed, of a Creation.

In any case, I claim that human knowledge of all being is of two kinds though we can best see in terms of the four kinds in the full title of the book: revealed knowledge, speculative knowledge, scientific empirical knowledge, practical empirical knowledge. The two kinds of knowledge beneath this framework are knowledge of God in His necessary being and knowledge of God in His freely chosen role as Creator of a **specific** Creation.

## **Human Rights: An Evolutionary and Christian Perspective**

*Human Rights: An Evolutionary and Christian Perspective* [47], can be downloaded from <http://loydfueston/downloads/rights.pdf>.

This book is an expanded and radically revised version of an article I’d written to deny the metaphysical status of human rights. The book argues that rights have been unfolding in history as a result of human communities developing as part of the Body of Christ in this mortal realm. Rights have some sort of absolute sense only in this Christian context and I think some have suspected that something like this is true given the close relationship between Christian civilization in the West and the type of human rights found in the *Declaration of Independence* or the writings of John Locke.

## **Justice: The First Step Towards God**

*Justice: The First Step Towards God* [40] is a short article which can be downloaded from <http://loydfueston/downloads/rights.pdf>.

The article begins:

St. Thomas Aquinas taught that justice is the first step towards true religion. In Chapters 119 and 120 of *Summa Contra Gentiles, Book Three: Providence*, Aquinas speaks in terms of the service we owe and uses terminology appropriate to the well-ordered societies of the Medieval Age. The discussion is solid but somewhat distant to modern human beings with our poorly founded and abstract systems of political and moral thought.

In some way, anyone who will be able to enjoy sharing God's life has to at least render God the justice of acknowledging Him as our Maker. From that point, we need to develop a true sense of life, we need to learn how to live by actively engaging God through His Creation, a Creation which includes churches and synagogues, prayer groups and bible-study groups, but also includes many other thoughts of God manifested as forests and lakes, human technology and human arts and letters. Let us prepare for Heaven by responding actively to God's Creation so that we shape ourselves to encapsulate the thoughts He manifested in created being of all sorts.

### **A More Exact Understanding of Human Being**

*A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53] can be downloaded at <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/human-being.pdf>.

In this book, *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53], I claim that: To the extent we human beings are truly images of God, we are encapsulations of the thoughts manifested in Creation by God in His freely chosen role as Creator.

There is more to a human being than mind and all that more contributes greatly to human understandings of Creation. Moreover, mind contributes to all that we place in the realms of heart and of hands. But heart contributes to mind and hands. Moreover, hands contribute to mind and heart. Man is a creature who thinks and feels and acts and needs to be understood in such terms. I first sought to understand the human mind as it tries to understand Creation and years ago wrote a sketch of this book which contained the following paragraph.

The human mind is an entity which is shaped in response to our environments, to the world at a higher level, or even to

Creation as a whole. In this way of thought, a human mind is an encapsulation of reality so far as we actively perceive it and actively respond to it. When we realize this is the nature of our minds, we can better develop them and we can begin to see that relationships, such as those which largely make up our minds, is primary over stuff. Relationships make stuff and shape stuff. God's love creates contingent being and His love continues to shape being right to the concrete realm of things. We can play our role in shaping that concrete realm of things with our active love and our other forms of relationships, some of which shape entities of God's Creation into evil forms.

What I said about thinking in that early version of the book can be said also about human feelings and acts. A more complete understanding of reality comes from considering human nature in light of those three aspects: mind, heart, and hands. We need thought both practical and abstract, feelings which are properly disciplined for the moral ordering of our lives, and actions toward an ordered life and an ordered relationship with the physical realms of Creation. Mind, heart, and hands.

## The Shape of Reality

*The Shape of Reality: Restoring Our Faith in the Unity, Coherence, and Completeness of Creation* [53] can be downloaded at <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/shape.pdf>.

## 2.4 Collections of Writings from Weblogs

I've released ten editions in book-form of lightly edited versions of the essays I've posted on my two blogs since 2006: primarily *Acts of Being* [38] at <http://loydfueston.com/> but there are a fair number of essays from my inactive blog *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [42] at <http://loydf.wordpress.com/>. That book, *Acts of Being: Selected Weblog Writings From 2006 to 2014* [51], is available for free download at <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/acts.pdf>. It's large and contains about 560 chapters counting front matter.

I've added another 12 or so chapters to this Tenth Edition. All but this chapter are reformatted essays from my writings during 2019 which were

published on my active weblog, *Acts Of Being* at <http://loydfueston.com/>.

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

1. *Making Peace With Empirical Reality*,
2. *The Human Mind as a Re-creation of God's Creation*,
3. *Love and Stuff*,
4. *What is a Universe?*,
5. *Freedom and Structure in Human Life*,
6. *The Narrative We Know as a World*, and
7. *What Means It All?*.

By the beginning of 2015, I had published two samplers:

1. *A Modern View of Creation: Making Peace with Empirical Reality* [49] downloadable at <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/acts-emp.pdf>, and
2. *A Modern View of Creation: The Human Mind* [50] downloadable at <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/acts-mind.pdf>.

These samplers don't seem to have drawn much interest and I probably won't release any more.

## 2.5 Other Writings to Come

My general plan is to return to writing novels in 2020 and to get back to reading serious materials in mathematics and physics to see what might result.

In my opinion, we can't move forward in developing better and richer understandings of God in His role as Creator, of His manifested thoughts (Creation), or of man in particular until we have a body of words and

concepts which are drawn from current understandings of Creation as we can perceive and explore it. In other words, we have to rely on the Creator's thoughts as we can discover them in Creation; our imaginations are simply not powerful enough to match what God has actually done.

Any understandings we can develop from our explorations of Creation would have to be in the form of a narrative which is an image of God's story, the story which is this world. Homer and the great lyric poets of ancient Greece are said to have blazed the paths followed by the ancient Greek scientists and philosophers. We also need poets and novelists to do this sort of work though I suspect they would nowadays have to follow Einstein and Darwin, if only to catch up.

### 3 Why Should We Care About These Sorts of Thoughts?

It's hard for a thinker to truly understand his own thoughts, if those thoughts are rich and complex. Mine are and I'm more self-aware than most prior thinkers just because I was born in the modern age when literate men are aware of their historical context and their own selves, sometimes to a painful degree. Even those modern men not highly literate have – until recently – had some awareness of history, if only that of their country of residence or of origin.

Something has gone wrong. The ongoing and intensifying problems being endured by the West and all parts of the world intertwined with our political and economic systems aren't just technical problems resulting from mistakes of political technicians or financial regulators. These problems were predicted decades ago, or even centuries ago, by the deeper thinkers of various beliefs. In these pages are references to some of those thinkers: Alexis de Tocqueville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Hermann Melville, Albert Jay Nock, Gareth Garret, Hannah Arendt, Jacques Barzun, and Flannery O'Connor. All of those writers, and many others, saw moral weaknesses in the moral character of modern Americans and others of the West and also what might be classified as structural weaknesses in the political and economic systems of the West. Gareth Garret also saw (circa 1950) a certain irrationality which led Americans to invade and conquer various countries without even profiting from those imperialistic activities – though certainly some individuals and corporations have always profited from those invasions and general troublemaking by the American government. Jacques Barzun, in *From Dawn to Decadence: 1500 to the Present* [9], narrated these past five centuries in the West using the theme of decreasing standards of literacy – which certainly implies decreasing standards of abstract reasoning

and maybe other forms of reasoning. Partly for those intellectual reasons, we are in a state of total moral disorder.

Those who saw the loss of respect for the “permanent things” knew something had gone wrong generations ago, starting perhaps with Edmund Burke and with the Catholic Right circa 1800, all of them fearing that the French Revolution’s blood-letting might prove to be a sign of the true nature of modernity. In evaluating these claims and trying to understand from our position 200 years later, we should remember that blood-letting is also a part of the story God is telling, the blood-letting of biological evolution and that of human history and pre-history.

I’m a soft and overly gentle man of the modern West and I fear the suffering which might be coming down upon us in this period of great change which is opening up. It seems likely to me that Jacques Barzun’s highly qualified prediction of a century of stupidity and poverty and violence might well come true – see the aforementioned *From Dawn to Decadence: 1500 to the Present* [9]. Professor Barzun went on to predict that a new dawn would come when some poorly educated young man would find a store of the old books, old learning, and be fascinated. He would realize, in my words, there is something interesting in that old learning and worth the struggle to master.

I look at our current situation and our possible oncoming disaster this way:

Why not cut out the century and get right to an intellectual recovery?

We must be able to derive some good from our historical awareness and self-awareness and we might have a chance if a substantial number of young men and young women were to join in the effort to found a new Christian civilization or perhaps a new phase of Western Civilization. After all, we still have something of forward momentum though it seems at times we’re mostly sliding back down some hill into a more brutal and more impoverished form of barbarism. Yet, we still hold on tight to our computers and still put some tax moneys into the maintenance of dusty and ill-frequented library stacks of those old books as well as a healthy number of new books worth the effort to read. Still yet again, those libraries are purging books and putting up banks of computer monitors and racks of DVDs.

A recovery while we still have the keys to those libraries, even if we don't often enter the stacks of books, would be radically different from a recovery from a standstill. Mostly, it might eliminate some of those decades of ignorance and suffering. If we play our cards right, I suspect those who live a couple generations from now might realize that this period of suffering was actually a rebirth. Yes, I suspect that something wonderful will be born in a process as painful as so many births are. Can we minimize the period of pain and be holding the cleaned-up, screaming baby soon?

Maybe.

By the grace of God and by some of my own actions, I've been put in a situation where I have an eclectic store of knowledge along with the feisty and sometimes obnoxious attitude of a creative thinker who feels himself called into the breach, in a manner of speaking.

And so I'm putting together this strangest of books – a collection of writings from a blog or weblog, a form of publication used by most for works as ephemeral as those hardcopy books which appear on the best-seller lists of our dumbed-down, but still prestigious, newspapers and magazines. I'm confident that these writings speak of the truths God manifested in this world, and speak in such a manner as to help us shape our minds in preparation for sharing the life of God.



## Part II

# Making Peace With Empirical Reality



## 4 Introduction: Making Peace With Empirical Reality

In *Twilight of Authority*, Robert Nisbet quotes “the great bishop Butler”:

Things and actions are what they are, and the consequences of them will be what they will be; why, then, should we desire to be deceived. [102]

In this part, I’ve collected essays or articles from my weblogs, *Acts of Being* at <http://loydfueston.com/> and *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* at <http://loydf.wordpress.com/>, in which I deal with the issue which is the title of the chapter. Usually, our responses to reality are at second-hand, that is, we respond to our own bodies or to our environments as perceived according to our “cultural assumptions”, taking this term in a vague sense to be explored by other thinkers if they think it necessary. For good or bad or indifferent, these “cultural assumptions” are mostly implicit. So far as I can tell, even seemingly well-educated men and women have no clue that their view of physical reality or human history or human moral nature is a speculative construction built up over a number of generations. My goal in the writings collected in this chapter is to argue in favor of a more active, courageous, and faith-filled response to God’s Creation, starting with those empirical realms which we can explore by our own senses or other empirical means.



# 5 The God of Jesus Christ: Transcendent God and Immanent Creator

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, <http://loydfueston.com/?p=25>. It was finished and uploaded on 2006/07/29.]

God is transcendent and immanent. That is, He lives as a necessary being, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, His own Act-of-being, but He also exists in each and every thing, each and every second of time, each and every cubic inch of space. Not even the emptiest space of our universe could continue to exist if God were not immanent in that bit of space, executing acts-of-being.

By creating, God chooses to become immanent in His Creation, else that Creation could not be. It is God's relationship to that Creation, His freely chosen decision to inhabit it as an act of love that brings that Creation into being.

Modern secularists remain willfully blind to God's presence in Creation, at least partly because they share the errors of most human beings throughout history—they think of substances as existing in and of themselves. When they think of God as Creator, they are likely to think in terms preferred by the neo-pagans of modern scientific thought. If God exists, then surely He is some sort of Mathematician or Physicist or Engineer raised to gigantic proportions. One might write humorously of those who see the limitations of traditional ways of viewing God as a human-style King and then go on to see God as an infinitely bloated version of themselves. I'll pass on and not do so in this short entry.

Instead, I'll point to the limited truth in seeing God in those terms

– as Mathematician or Physicist or Engineer. That is, there are aspects of reality which can be best understood by a serious mathematician or physicist or engineer. As I pointed out in my book *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], God the Creator can also be seen as a King or Lawmaker through some of the aspects of His Creation. I would tend to believe this is less of a distortion than most other ways of seeing God since—at the least – it allows the Almighty His truly free will. I’ve also emphasized the way in which God is an author and I think that also is less of a distortion than thinking of God as a Mathematician or Physicist or Engineer since it emphasizes that He is a Creator Who has a purpose in His work. Creation is ordered in the way of a moral narrative, however brutal or amoral some of the action seems to be. But that is true of the greatest of human novels as well.

In any case, I’m going to shift to a restatement in more accessible terms of a critique a Jesuit scientist recently made of Intelligent Design. That critique was in the very dense, meaning-packed language of Catholic Scholasticism: Intelligent Design reduces God to being a secondary cause rather than being a primary cause, a true Creator. That is, it reduces God to a being who works in the way of a human mathematician or physicist or engineer, or lawmaker or author for that matter.

But we see God through His effects. We see God the Creator as a God who made specific decisions which are aligned with human skills and interests—necessarily so since we are part of this world. This world can be seen, and seen truly, by studying its mathematical and scientific aspects, by studying the ways in which nature is similar to human technology, by seeing the ways in which it is its orderly is quite contingent—personal decisions seem to be involved. We see God by telling stories, including our version of the story which is this world, the universe seen as ordered to God’s purposes.

We should be careful at this stage. That God, the Creator of this universe, is far too small. He is the true God but He is the true God acting freely to create a particular universe. Because He is acting freely in a specific way to create a particular universe, we see Him in a peculiar role. He is the true God but He is acting in a way analogous to human beings, the inhabitants of this world who have the unique property that their brains, and the minds rising from those brains, are an encapsulation of this developing world, this world which is much like a dynamic narrative.

Our minds themselves, in the way in which they work and in which they

encapsulate the world, are the truest source of information about Creation. Our minds are themselves ultimately an encapsulation of those truths which are labeled as ‘natural theology’. God’s world is a manifestation of those thoughts which God wished to share with us, wished us to have as our own. We form our minds properly when we respond freely and humbly to our immediate environments and then to the physical universe seen as a pagan cosmos or an Einsteinian universe and then to God’s moral ordering of that universe. It is in that moral ordering that the human being can see Pan as being a mask of the Creator of Christian revelation.

By forming our minds properly, we become truer images of God and begin to align our very beings with God, but there is a problem. First of all, those who form their minds in response to only their immediate environments or even to those environments and some plausible view of the universe are becoming better images not of God but of a finite number of actions of God. They are responding to God the Creator but are not to the revelations which tell us something of the God of Jesus Christ, the Triune God in His completeness. That God, the immanent Creator, is far too small. That God is the God of the higher pagans and not the God of Jesus Christ.

I admit to floundering a bit in trying to develop an intuition into a more complete idea. I am fighting my own words and the inflexibility of my own mind. I’ve done that before and truly believe that a proper fight will lead to a more relaxed state in which my mind begins to align itself with not only the Creator seen through His effects but also the God of Jesus Christ with whom we can all have a personal relationship.

It is mostly good to try to see the revelations of Jesus Christ in terms of the current culture, and there is a great value in seeing God the Creator through the eyes supplied by modern science—just so long as we realize that we are seeing God, thinking of God, in analogical terms. And now I’ll follow that thought. If we take seriously the Creator in terms of His actions as Creator, we can be ready to revise many of the speculations of Christian thinkers. I’ll be trying to explore those possible revisions over the remainder of my life, in nonfiction books and novels alike. For now, it is sufficient to point out two major directions in my thoughts, directions already discussed vaguely in *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41] and also in my blog entries and in computer files containing unpublished works in various stages.

1. We have perhaps reached the end of the usefulness of viewing God's offers of salvation in terms of human systems of justice; and
2. We have rich possibilities for re-envisioning our own selves and our unrealized possibilities and, equivalently, for re-envisioning our relationship to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, as well as our relationship to His Father and Their Spirit.

If we suddenly return to paganism by seeing a far-too-small God, God seen only in His effects as Creator of a particular world, we risk losing contact with the true God who is far greater than that, far greater than even He who brought what-is into existence from nothing.

## 6 The Peace of Christ: A Short Book in Process

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, <http://loydfueston.com/?p=53>. It was finished and uploaded on 2006/12/23.]

In most of my posts, I've certainly seemed a pessimist, targeting the great problems of our age: moral decay and profound illiteracy in particular. As I've presented matters, modern men have the moral sensibilities of either self-righteous twelve year-olds or perverse twelve year-olds. Not options which are particularly attractive. Reading skills have decayed to the point where even those with large vocabularies and the ability to parse complex grammatical structures can't distinguish between given truths (of logic or of Biblical revelation) and the conclusions to complex speculative arguments. Few there are who understand even their own beliefs, or the history of their beliefs, well enough to put a complex text in context.

What are we to do? Are we to simply hunker down, admitting it's likely that Western Civilization will take another two generations or so to hit bottom and then might not even rise again? Hunkering down would be difficult at best for the disorder of this world would invade any conceivable refuges available for larger numbers of human beings. External order would be likely to corrupt any internal order which might develop by efforts of family and friends, local community or church community.

But a Christian has no right to be truly pessimistic just as he has no right to be triumphalistic. The world is not evil just as man is not inherently and inevitably depraved. But the world cannot save itself in the sense of coming to a moral conclusion. Nor can we men save ourselves by achieving the immortality that most great thinkers and spiritual leaders have considered so desirable, thought often teaching wrongly that man is born with an

immortal component, though perhaps not a component containing all that we value in ourselves.

We insist on interpreting our lives and God's story as a whole in terms of ideas and images which were once plausible but have decayed into superstitions. And we modern men not only produce strange images in place of the empirical realities of God's Creation, we also tend to follow the likes of C.S. Lewis in elevating magic over empirical investigation of God's Creation. Such ways will prevent us from finding even hints of the true peace of Jesus Christ, He who created this world along with His Father and Their Spirit. The same Triune God who continues to create this world, an empirical world subject to investigation and contemplative wonder. Not a world of occultist magic.

This world of galaxies and rattlesnakes is being born, a birth not to be completed in its own time and under its own terms. Men also are being born under similar limitations, but we can also abort this birth by our own actions and our own failure to act.

Birth is a painful and violent process, though some births are certainly less so than others. It's hard to see how peace can be secured in the midst of the conflicts caused by this birthing process. Some might be lucky enough to live during relatively calm periods, that is, periods when the earth has good climate conditions and few earthquakes, periods when the sons of men are at peace and are minding their local business.

Peace is hard to bring about, even hard to define. I speak not of the peace of a corpse—that is inertness. I speak not of the peace of human politics which often proves to be nothing but a truce while weapons are being developed and soldiers trained.

I speak of the dynamic peace of a true world or a true person. In my book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], I defined both worlds and persons in terms of three attributes: unity, coherence, and completeness. This is a limited and tentative definition for sure, providing some necessary but maybe not sufficient conditions. My claim should also be qualified, of course, to account for our creaturely nature. The qualification is simply that we can have such attributes though they seem divine, by pagan standards, simply because it is still God who brings us into existence, each and every instant, and it is still God who also carries out those secondary acts-of-being which shape us.

And we must come to peace with the world as God created. To be sure, we can only know the world by way of limited facts and much in the way of

human speculations. We should be at peace with our descent from apes if that is the empirical truth. It is God who guided the evolutionary descent towards humanity, from amoeba to worms to toads to shrews to monkeys to human beings.

From here, I'll by-pass the theological and philosophical complexities and move on to speak of spiritual matters.

Peace is to be had. A tentative and imperfect peace to be sure. But a true peace for all that. A true peace that is but a hint of the perfect peace to be enjoyed by those blessed souls who will be resurrected to live with the Lord Jesus Christ for time without end.

How is this imperfect peace to be achieved? Well, the bad news from the human perspective is that we can't grab hold of it, only God can give it to us. The good news is that God seems to give a measure of this peace to all who seek it in good faith, though some of his greatest saints live in torment and spiritual dryness for long periods – Mother Teresa of Calcutta lived in such a state for nearly her entire adult life.

How do the rest of us go about seeking this imperfect peace? Easy enough—in principle. We prepare for a life with God.

We worship Him faithfully, at least once a week as was the true point of the so-called Creation stories of Genesis. And we try to reach a state of humility and gratitude during our worship service, whether Catholic or Orthodox or Protestant or Jewish. We are reverent, silent during the holy moments in whatever worship service we attend.

We pray daily. We should pray both by a regular routine, perhaps starting the day with a simple, “Good morning, God,” followed by the Shema or the Lord's Prayer. In the evening, a similar routine, with a short examination of conscience would be appropriate. We should also reserve some time, a few minutes a day and perhaps a longer session once a week, to simply sit quietly in the presence of God. There are various ways to achieve a quiet state though neither Christians nor Jews should be worrying about techniques to the extent of some of the followers of Oriental religions. This is not to deny the importance or utility of techniques. The Christian and—I believe—Jewish position is that techniques should be transparent. Techniques help us to quiet down but the point is to be open to God, to sit quietly and become aware of the God who is always present.

Most would say that we are trying to listen to God. I have more of a Thomistic viewpoint: we do not listen to God so much as we learn to both speak and listen with Him. Most of all, we learn to think with Him, to live

in His presence so that He has filled us up, ultimately to complete us but only at our resurrection.

For a sacramental Christian, Catholics and Orthodox and maybe some Protestants, there is more to say because the sacraments also play a role in bringing us into the Presence of God. When we eat the very Body of Christ and drink His Blood, we allow Him to infuse our very being with His Presence.

When we try to understand God's world, we are trying to move with Him as He shapes and sustains that world. If we try to understand the original act of Creation of this world, we even try to create along with Him. This is in the same sense that a three year-old girl moves behind her mother and imitates the actions of making a cake. Our acts have no effect, but they seem to enrich God's world in a way He desires. Such acts make us more aware of God's presence and teach us to have faith in God, the all-powerful God Who created this world, the all-powerful God who has promised to take care of His friends.

To the extent that we can see true peace in this world, we see it in the faithful way in which martyrs have accepted torture and death rather than betray their God. We can see it in a tormented woman like Mother Teresa as she devotes her entire life to caring for God's children, helping them to feel a measure of the love and peace she herself couldn't feel.

And this is what I speak about in the book I'm currently writing, actually re-writing from a draft completed nearly a year ago. That draft was as 'philosophical' and as dense as my one published book – *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], but I intend to write *The Peace of Christ* [44] as a simpler book, a spiritual guide rather than an intellectual exploration.

## 7 God as The Creator of Truths

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, <http://loydfueston.com/?p=60>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/01/13.]

It sounds strange to speak of God creating truths—even God, but I have two lines of reasoning that lead to this conclusion that God has created the truths of our universe, mathematical and metaphysical, as well as the things of our universe. I discuss this claim in my book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41] though I’m still working on a richer and deeper understanding of my own claim. I’m going to present a rough outline of the reasoning behind my claim rather than a complete argument, the initial form of which was the text of my book. It might not be clear even to me for a while if this presentation moves towards that richer and deeper understanding of my claim.

In this first installment about the creation of truths, I’ll address some aspects of the theological and metaphysical reasoning. Basically, the reasoning falls out naturally from Thomistic existentialism though that ‘naturally’ part depends upon an expansion of Thomistic existentialism in response to modern empirical knowledge. Our understanding of the universe, this phase of God’s Creation, has widened and deepened, leading to new possibilities regarding other phases of Creation, and new possibilities regarding the greater totality of Creation.

The first line, and more important line, of reasoning comes from my basic beliefs: an expanded and updated version of Thomistic Existentialism. God has no substance, not even something that could be labeled as ‘divine substance’. God is a pure act-of-being, His own Act-of-being. He is the supreme Act-of-being. As such He is the only being who truly exists. He is being itself. This is the line of reasoning I’ll be exploring in this entry. Soon, I’ll be posting an entry discussing the second line of reasoning which

involves the modern discovery as to the true nature of random numbers and the questions it raises about the nature of human mathematics and the truths which seem to be its foundations.

St. Thomas Aquinas upset a lot of thinkers over the past seven centuries with the claim: things are true. I would say that this claim makes him the most consistent empirical thinker in history amongst the more famous philosophers and theologians. This led me to a crazy line of thought culminating in the speculation that not only are things true, but truths are thing-like in a sense. This is not to say that all truths are thing-like but only those manifested in the underlying, abstract stuff of this universe—the Primordial Universe as I called it in my book. These manifested truths must include all those accessible to human thought, which is mediated through mostly the brain but through the entire human animal and its relationships with other physical entities. Even revelations of truths beyond Creation, those regarding God Himself, have to be expressed in terms of truths which are manifested in the Primordial Universe and then are included in the stuff which God shaped into this universe.

Things are true. They have to be true. How could something exist if it were not true? Well, that might be possible under pagan conceptions of physical reality where matter co-exists from eternity along with any possible Creator, more accurately—a shaper. There is — possibly—a realm different from the realm of concrete beings and there might even be a realm of untruths. So why is it different for a Christian? A simplified explanation is:

In a Christian worldview, God creates all that is not Him from nothing. Any creaturely entity—quark or rock or porpoise—is a manifestation of a thought of God. A thought of God is necessarily true.

God told us Creation is good. It's also beautiful and true. Since this phase of Creation, our universe, develops over time, the goodness and beauty and truth can sometimes be obscured or under development and appearing to be quite grotesque.

It's important to note that a Thomistic-existentialist viewpoint can handle a developing universe—still a great difficulty for philosophies, Christian or other, which accept the pagan claim that matter exists co-eternally with any Creator—who might Himself be the universe. More importantly, dis-

tortions come in the dualistic concept that there are separate realms of truths and concrete being.

Some might be surprised that I say there are Christians who accept that pagan claim that matter co-exists with God. This pagan, or paganistic-Christian, God is really a Shaper and not a Creator. Or else Himself the universe. Unfortunately, many of the philosophies of Christian history, including that of St. Augustine, took pagan philosophies based on that view and then patched them crudely with the valid but inconsistent claim that God created this universe from nothing. You can't patch up a metaphysics that undervalues the act-of-being, or slights it completely, by pasting on vague statements about the acts-of-being which are God's acts of creating from nothing.

Yet, there is a truth in this view of God as shaper, a truth easily absorbed into a Thomistic existentialist worldview. God is seen as both He who created the Primordial Universe from nothing and He who shaped this universe from that Primordial Universe.

Things are true. There is another way to argue to this claim and that is simply to note that any metaphysics which separates thing-ness and truth is inherently and dangerously dualistic. If truths are not in the things of this universe, where do we get them? Our very thinking organs are things. If we can have thoughts which are true, especially thoughts about very abstract mathematical objects, then we are all forced to be dualists or to fall into a state of mute stupidity before a universe which has no contact with truth.

The computational philosophies of intelligence have produced, as an accident, the realization in clear-headed observers that these sorts of pseudo-empirical philosophies merely replace a brain and mind duality with a brain and software duality. The mind and the software have to somehow live in an immaterial realm of truth while being able to show up in the brain or computer or sunspots as I vaguely recall from my days of reading science-fiction. The unanswerable question, one known to the supposedly muddle-headed Medieval Scholastics is:

How does the brain interact with mind or software if they are truly different sorts of stuff? Or non-stuff?

Computer software should be viewed as states of a certain type of organized matter—'circuits' which are electronic or optical or other sorts of

devices. The same is true of human thoughts being states of a certain type of organized matter—the human brain.

This is not to propose a reductionistic form of materialism. Quite the opposite. I'm saying that all the truths which humans can perceive or conceive are embodied in some deep sense in the very matter and organization of the human brain. As a Thomistic existentialist, I am willing to have the courage of my Christian convictions:

Matter is not 'mere' matter, it is sacramental stuff, manifestations of thoughts of God. As such, this universe in its totality somehow embodies all those truths which are accessible to human thought.

And that raises the question: What is human thought?

## 8 Staking Your Faith on Gaps in Empirical Knowledge

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, <http://loydfueston.com/?p=69>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/02/16.]

*BrainWork* is a free newsletter distributed by *The Dana Foundation*, with a website at <http://www.dana.org>. This foundation is run by some of the most prominent neuroscientists, geneticists, and other biologists in the United States and—I believe—Canada. In the July-August, 2006 issue, there's an interesting article, *Out-of-body but in the Brain*.

The article tells us:

At every moment, the brain effortlessly integrates information from the body into a strong seamless sense of self. The proprioceptive system, for example, sends signals to the brain that allow you to know, without looking, where your hands, legs and feet are. The vestibular system in the inner ear relays information about your orientation to gravity. (Are you vertical, horizontal, or somewhere in between?)

The brain's synthesis of this and other information creates a sense of being inside your body. The out-of-body experience, in contrast, produces a sensation of consciousness floating upward, providing a view of the body from an elevated perspective. It results from a breakdown of the brain's ability to synthesize signals from the body.

It seems that near-death experience:

... involves a disruption of the sense of body integration, says Kevin Nelson, a neurologist at the University of Kentucky, but this disruption has a different cause. It involves rapid-eye movement (REM) sleep intruding into waking consciousness.

The final paragraph in the article reads:

Although recent research undercuts the notion that consciousness can exist apart from the body, it also demonstrates that consciousness is a tenuous creation of the brain. As Blake says, out-of-body experiences “show that the perception of our own body and self are prone to illusion.”

In my book *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], I raised the claim that Christians should have enough confidence in the Creator to accept the results of empirical investigations, in history as well as biology or physics. If God created us as bodily creatures without a separable soul, what does that matter to us? Why would we settle such a matter independent of an investigation of man’s nature?

Too many people have staked their faith on beliefs which actually arose as speculative understandings of the best empirical knowledge of past centuries. Human speculation will often be seen as wrong, perhaps in the sense of incomplete or simplistic, in future ages. Much of the knowledge which fleshes out traditional Christian theologies is such speculation from past ages, based upon outmoded understandings of God’s Creation. Most Christians, and ex-Christians, seem incapable of recognizing the difference between the parts of their beliefs which are revealed truths and those parts which are speculative or even tied directly to empirical knowledge. As a result, many have lost their faith—especially in younger generations; surely, the Big Bang and all those bones in Africa prove the Bible is wrong. Not really, but they do prove that much of our inherited stock of speculative and empirical knowledge is wrong. Others have retained their faith by the bad strategy of either rejecting modern empirical knowledge or—more often—believing in both those bones in Africa and also in the literalistic interpretation of the story of Adam and Eve.

Given the great progress of empirical knowledge, in various fields of study and not just the physical and biological sciences, the opposition of many Christians to the best theories of the empirical world, including human nature, seems to put Christians in opposition to facts and plausible

theories. Those Christians seem to be in opposition to the truth. True it is that empirical investigation can only discover partial truths or even false truths about the physical universe. But, on the whole, empirical investigations point towards real truths about this physical universe and—in my terms—real truths about the world which is this physical universe understood in light of God's purposes in creating it. It even seems true that pure physical facts and theories might give us some clues to God's work as Creator, that is, His purposes in making this world.

There are not two truths and there is not your truth and my truth. Human beings either have souls separable from their bodies or they don't. Right now, there is growing evidence that the various events of the human mind and human soul, that is—soulish aspects of our physical natures, are tied directly to physical events in the brain. That shouldn't bother us Christians at all. We should move on, accepting the best empirical knowledge of our day and trying to understand it in light of the more important truths revealed to us in the Gospels of our Lord Jesus Christ.



## 9 Is the Concept of Original Sin Itself a Matter of Sinful Pride?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, <http://loydfueston.com/?p=70>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/02/17.]

So far as I can tell, the concept of *original sin* arose because St. Augustine of Hippo and some other important Fathers of the early Church were trained as lawyers. Moreover, the Hebrew Bible was the sacred works of a people who organized their lives by strict legal codes. Consequently, God was depicted as a Law-giver and Judge rather than as a Creator. This is an analogical depiction, as is true of all human efforts to depict God other than the existentialist view of St. Thomas Aquinas. That Dominican theologian would have been the last to deny the need for analogies once the existentialist insight is in place. The insight is: God is His own Act-of-being, the Supreme Act-of-being. All else that exists is the result of acts-of-being that only God can perform. Aquinas would have been the last to deny that analogies are necessary for human beings to try to understand God's self-revelations to us or to try to understand God in His freely chosen role as Creator. But we should be careful not to try to imprison the Almighty Himself in human analogies.

The concept of *original sin* builds on the pagan idea of a Golden Age in the past when all things, and the earth as a whole, were in a state of perfection. Moreover, they were at peace with each other.

So, why is the earth a place of struggle and decay? Why is the earth a place where things, or living creatures, come into being only to die after a short while?

The story of 'Original Sin' tries to answer those sorts of questions:

Clearly, there was a great fall. Since God is a generous and all-

merciful God, then the fall was not due due to His actions but rather to some great crime on the part of our ancestors, a rebellion against the Creator. Man's nature, once perfect in a creaturely sense—at peace with God and Creation, was injured beyond all possibilities of human repair. Most importantly, death came upon men.

All else being equal, this doesn't strike me as so implausible a viewpoint, except that it's in conflict with modern empirical knowledge. Man is not a fallen god-like creature but rather a hairless ape who shares a common ancestor with chimpanzees. Back beyond that ancestor, we share a common ancestor with rats.

Rather than being a fallen creature who needs a Judge Who will overlook the crime of his ancestor, a crime in which we all somehow shared, it seems man is inherently a rather modest creature whose natural fate is death. We're made to live for a few short decades and then to pass away.

There is a certain amount of pride some can feel in thinking of man as made for eternity but for a crime of his ancestor. Some enjoy thinking they are descended from Jesse James or Attila the Hun. The humble truth is that we are humble creatures and not much godlike or even perfect in a creaturely way—whatever that might mean. The possibility of resurrection, of life after death, of life for time without end as a companion of God, is the purest of gifts. Immortality isn't a lost property of man, it's something he never had and couldn't have had on his own.

Sometimes, talk about 'original sin' or 'depravity' reminds me of the Pharisee beating his chest in public. We would be gods, if only gods exiled to a penal colony. Forgiveness we'll accept but not the free gift that would raise a apish creature to a higher state of being, not the free gift that gives a peaceful life to a creature who is a battleground between order and disorder during his mortal life.

As a Catholic who aims to bare my soul in the Confessional once a month, I don't deny the reality of sins in the sense of acts or omissions for which I'm responsible, yet, if I were perfect, I would still not 'deserve' a resurrection from my grave. By God's commands, I feel bound to aim for perfection, for sinlessness, but that's simply my duty to my Creator. I would have the same duty even if He had not sent His Son to be the first of the resurrected.

We shouldn't think of our human selves in prideful terms as descendants of a god-like man and woman who fell by their own acts. In fact, I don't think a fresh reading of the book of Genesis would support such a view. We're apes and should be surprised and grateful that God would even consider giving us characteristics that will have to be super-added to our mortal selves.



## 10 An Ugly Retreat

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, <http://loydfueston.com/?p=84>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/03/19.]

Even an armchair historian can tell you that a good general prepares for his retreat as soon as he sees the need for it. He tries to arrange an orderly retreat to minimize casualties and loss of equipment and other materiel. He knows not to try to hold ground which is indefensible, being well aware of examples from history of painful retreats such as that of Napoleon's retreat across the frozen plains of western Russia. Many young men from France and Austria and other countries were left on those frozen plains.

Christians, including Catholics, have been retreating in this way, but it's still worse than it was with Napoleon's retreat—it's not bodies being killed but rather minds and souls and moral characters. The thrusts of the enemy at the beliefs of Christians have often been horribly effective because servants of false gods have been more true to at least the physical aspects of this universe, this phase of God's Creation, more true than the servants of the Church of Christ. And if we Christians are not true to verifiable physical facts, who will listen to our talk of a resurrected Christ who was true God and true man?

Once it was plausible to see almost all movement as being due to living creatures, including movements in the direction of corruption and decay. Angels or gods moved the planets. Demons invaded human bodies and caused diseases of body and spirit. God wasn't properly viewed as the Creator who could energize the universe without these various spirits, whether labeled as 'angels' or 'nymphs' or 'gods'. In a word, God was seen as a bit less than all-powerful. He was a secondary cause who had to use tools rather than being a primary cause or Creator.

We've defeated small-pox—so long as remaining stocks of the virus don't

escape from a laboratory. We put a man on the moon and could do so again in five years or less if we were willing to commit the funds. We've seen the beginning of the expansion of this universe, before the birth of the stars themselves, and we've seen deep inside the atom. We've seen deep into the human brain as well and also traced hormonal flows—tying human mental and emotional phenomena to specific physical events in our bodies. And yet the drama of human salvation is still taught as if we have some sort of soul which is separable from our bodies. The skeptics can point to facts which show that it's unlikely we have souls made of stuff independent from our flesh and our blood.

Other facts indicate strongly that the common ancestors of all human beings were apish creatures who lived about 70,000 years ago. They were human but they weren't inherently capable of either abstract moral reasoning or abstract theological reasoning. We now know, partly from some horrible cases of child abuse, that we modern human beings develop even basic language skills only when they're nurtured by those who already have those skills. The development of more complex and abstract words and concepts must have taken tens of thousands of years.

When we Christians have tried to stick to stories proven wrong, how can we have any credibility with our children or others when we speak of the Son of God taking on human flesh to become our brother? Yes, most Christians have more recently and very reluctantly accepted the interesting and difficult facts about the evolution of *homo sapiens* and our close relatedness to chimpanzees and gorillas, our more distant relatedness to rats and toads. Even though we've formally accepted the truth of biological evolution, we insist on speaking of that all-important drama of salvation in terms given us by earlier thinkers who conjectured that human beings had been created in a state of creaturely perfection, a state of grace. Those wonderful beings, so god-like, had fallen from grace during the first generation.

Disciplined empirical investigation has greatly advanced our possibilities of understanding God's Creation. True faith leads to understanding and that implies that we don't have a true faith because we've not developed an understanding of God's world, a world which turns out to be different from what was assumed by those who set Christ's story in specific understandings of this world created by God. The Gospel is the Gospel but we men can't even understand why Christ died on the cross unless we understand our natures and what it is that He had to do to redeem us. From a simplistic viewpoint, this is all that needs to be changed: we need to see Christ

as offering a chance for true Life when we, and our ancestors, had never had any such chance. He wasn't offering to restore us to a life as God's companions. He was offering it for the first time. I don't think God would have waited so long to send His Son, wouldn't have endangered so many souls, if human beings would have been ready for Christ at an earlier time.

We Christians are moving too slowly in this matter. We need to make it a priority to update our telling of the story which is God's world, a story which exists for the sake of the one chapter which tells of Jesus Christ but that chapter must be set inside a human narrative which speaks of human history but also of other creatures, living and non-living. We've kept the old stories even as they decayed into superstitions and tales of magic. This was dangerous. We live in lands where impious skeptics dominate the entertainment industry and the schools. Those same sorts of skeptics are fairly prominent in science and literature. They're taking advantage of the situation. There's no reason to give them any such weapons to use against us and our children. The God of Jesus Christ created this world and still creates it each and every instant. We simply need to have faith that it all makes sense and makes sense together with the Gospel.

It's not sufficient to say the Bible is true and those bones dug out of the sands of Africa are also true. There is one truth and that truth lies beyond our perceptions and our capacity to understand, but we're to do the best we can—that's part of our efforts to imitate God. God tells the story which is this world in the strongest possible sense—His telling of the story is one with His acts of creating the world. We do our best to tell some version of that story in the way of children imitating their human father as he goes about his work.

We need to speak a story in imitation of the story which is God's actual work of creating this world. To do this, we need to be as true as possible to the story God is telling and not to some ancient versions of the story which are no longer true to what is known of the world. God has spoken the most important of His revelations to us in Holy Scripture but He's also spoken through those bones dug out of the sands of Africa. We need a story which speaks of both the incarnate Son of God and those bones. Let's be bluntly honest: we need to explain why the Son of God took on the flesh of an ape.

We're fighting a bloody retreat because we've been fighting the wrong battle for centuries. Thinking we were fighting to save souls, we were engaged in a battle against God's own Creation and our only allies were mythical creatures and magical incantations. Even C.S. Lewis, who was

a giant in moral thinking and in explaining the basic truths of the creeds of Christianity, was trying to rally the troops to fight alongside angels and elves. He imagined himself to be fighting Satan but he was fighting God's world and fighting also those human beings trying to understand the physical aspects of this universe. Even those scientists who were nasty sorts of skeptics were carrying out the divinely ordained task of understanding God's Creation—and many scientists have been, and still are, pious men and women, whether or not believers in Christian truths. Far too many Christians have been fighting against God Himself. Unfortunately, many saw, in empirical terms, the uselessness of this war and stopped being Christians—though sometimes still attending some sort of worship service and maybe even wearing clerical robes or collars.

It's God who shaped us from apish flesh and God who created a universe where there are hurricanes and volcanoes and small-pox. It's God who created a world where there are levels of reality which don't behave according to the brilliant, and still valuable, misconceptions which are our heritage from earlier generations of scientists and philosophers and theologians. Unfortunately, we'd rather accept ancient stories than deal with modern empirical knowledge. And it's not easy to deal with modern empirical knowledge. It takes the sort of discipline which comes only with years of effort to deal properly with modern science and mathematics and history and philosophy. Not every Christian should or could make this effort but it's bothersome that so many smart young men are steered towards the ancient stories if they show any talent or inclination for leadership in the Church. We need some to follow the path of Father Georges Lemaitre, the Belgian priest who was a co-discoverer of the so-called Big Bang model of the universe. Still more than that, we simply need some priests, and a multitude of teachers, who are literate in modern science and mathematics and in some branches of modern philosophy.

Modern scientists and historians and philosophers may sometimes bear despicable attitudes—but so do some believers, including some priests. The best of empirical thinkers are highly disciplined thinkers, better followers of Aquinas in a sense than the many theologians and priests who glorify him without having a clue about the depth of that great saint's commitment to honoring empirical knowledge.

We've made great progress against disease by recognizing that it's caused, typically, by microbes which are part of God's world as much as we are. We're starting to make great progress against natural disaster by

sending planes through developing hurricanes, by building super-computers which can model those hurricanes, sometimes accurately. We need to update the story of human salvation because that will force us to be honest about the most important role of human beings in God's story—we need to actively take moral responsibility for our own selves and for the nurturing of our children. But we're descended from creatures who had to struggle to survive and we have a tendency to relax when possible and we readily cede our moral responsibilities to our employers and our governments. Far too many will then blame Satan when those morally unguided human organizations begin to exploit and corrupt us or our children.

If we wish to understand disease, we should listen to doctors and evolutionary theorists. If we wish to understand natural disasters, we should listen to the geophysicists and oceanographers. If we wish to understand the moral problems of our days, our social decay and our political disasters, we should listen to the reliable historians and also scientists such as neurobiologists. Neither Satan nor St. Michael make sense in terms of modern empirical knowledge, nor would they play much of a role if they did exist. All that's necessary to understand Auschwitz is what the Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt told us: the Nazi programs worked because nice, middle-class Germans were willing to man the bureaucracies and the chemical plants, to build the railroad lines into Poland, so long as they didn't have to actually kill anyone. They were willing to cede their moral responsibility to Hitler and his henchmen in order to keep their paychecks and their benefits. More recently, Robert McNamara has spoken in similar terms of the bureaucrats who ran the war in Vietnam even after the facts were accumulating that it had become a criminal war waged against the people we were supposedly there to defend. These sad situations are illustrations of the evil possibilities in what Adam Smith labeled *the Invisible Hand*.

We need to nurture a new generation of philosophers and theologians who are broadly educated in modern empirical knowledge, including modern mathematics which has proven to be far richer than the mathematics which has been a basic part of the foundation of human thought since at least Pythagoras. Maybe some of them could be specialists as was Fr. Lemaitre, but that's not necessary. Aquinas didn't have the specialized scientific knowledge of his master, St. Albert the Great, but he learned enough that there is even a leading neurobiologist who thinks Aquinas to be the best philosopher for understanding modern science. Aquinas simply paid

attention to God's world rather than trying to impose angels and demons upon it, nor did he try to impose *a priori* criteria in the manner of Kant. We need to understand the world which God created, we need to understand the new possibilities and dangers of huge human organizations, if we are to understand Auschwitz and Vietnam and our various ecological crises. We also need to understand them to learn how we can create new forms of communities in which flesh-and-blood human beings can lead good lives. We even need to learn what a good life is in the context of a human race so powerful, wealthy, and populous by any earlier standards.

The belief in Satan and St. Michael is quite useful to the human forces of evil in our age. We'll happily cede our moral responsibilities to our corporate employers and our governments, sure that any evil which occurs is due to that fallen angel, sure that St. Michael will protect us in the end.

To properly disengage from this useless war against God's own world, we need to have priests and teachers who know enough to have an appreciation for God's world. We need to inspire Christian youth to become neurobiologists and oceanographers while retaining their faith. That will happen only if those better-educated priests and teachers appear. Until then, we Christians will be little more than sheep wandering around in company with our shepherds who don't understand God's world any better than we do.

The truth, so sad under the circumstances, is that no war should have been fought. There should have been no retreat in which souls were lost even more than bodies. We were not holding indefensible land. We were standing on holy ground, land given to all creatures of earth, but given in a special way to those who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. The enemy has been retreating from that holy ground along with us because the enemy is us.

# 11 Engaging the Thought of Pope Benedict XVI

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, <http://loydfueston.com/?p=122>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/12/18.]

In his first encyclical and in his book *Jesus of Nazareth*, Benedict has invited criticism of those parts of his thought which deal with speculative thoughts, including the nature of the human being. What is a speculative thought? Roughly speaking, it's the result of an act of the imagination, a faculty stunted and deformed in modern men, scholars and authors and musicians and politicians, butchers and bakers and candlestick-makers.

I should make a few preliminary statements about this entry and some upcoming entries on the thought of Pope Benedict. First, I don't feel qualified to criticize his theological thought as such. For what it's worth, I greatly admire his theological work. He has a rare ability to appreciate tradition without being rigidly bound to the speculative aspects of tradition. I do feel qualified and willing to criticize the foundations of his theological thought and any speculative (philosophical) thought which appears in his work from the viewpoint of empirical knowledge. And there is much speculation and empirical knowledge to be found in any system of human thought, even a system dealing with aspects of God in His transcendence. Speculative knowledge of the form called 'metaphysics' is a lesser sort of knowledge than revealed truths and less necessary in its truth content than those revealed truths but it's the glue that holds together that system.

Moreover, as I've argued in Chapter 69, Hellenistic metaphysics grew up in parallel to Hellenistic mathematics. Our understanding of mathematics has expanded greatly in recent centuries, including our understanding of such metaphysical concepts as infinity and randomness—which now seems

to be a sort of very raw fact rather than some number or event coming out of a process mysterious to even God. The truths we've inherited from Pythagoras and Plato and Aristotle are still truths, but they now seem to be possibilities in far greater realms of truth, just as Euclidean geometry is one set of 'realized' truths in a far greater realm of possible geometries.

Pope Benedict XVI seems to be ill-served by his advisers and conversation partners in the areas of empirical knowledge (at least in mathematics and biology and physics) and speculative knowledge. I'll speak of this in a later entry where I'll deal with some issues of randomness and chaos.

At this time, I'll note that Etienne Gilson once claimed of St. Augustine of Hippo, arguably the greatest of all Christian theologians: he was a great theologian despite having an inadequate metaphysics. Because of his inadequate understanding of modern empirical knowledge and of modern mathematics—empirical and speculative, because of the consequent inadequacy of some parts of his metaphysics, Pope Benedict is in danger of earning a similar epitaph: an important and very good theologian despite having an inadequate metaphysics and an inadequate understanding of the empirical knowledge of his day.

In any case, we can notice that Pope Benedict's first encyclical began with a section dealing with speculative matters, including the human soul. The Holy Father is quite aware that we have a problem in the confusion of revealed truth and other sorts of knowledge and seems open-minded about seeking a solution. He wants to actively tell his admirers and others that speculations, even from popes in the context of an encyclical or from a saint in the context of his greatest writings, are still human thoughts and open to criticism.

Pope Benedict has done a lot to clean up Christian theology, to restate traditional Catholic theology in particular so that his books illuminate rather than clouding and obscuring as do so many older books when read through modern eyes. Along this line, I've noticed in conversations with intelligent Catholics who've read the works of St. Augustine, say *The City of God*, that they read books of substantial human thought as if through a dark glass. Able to recognize words and to scan many pages of text, they seem to have little background knowledge of the history of human thought and other fields, only rudimentary skills of understanding thought which stretches much beyond a single sentence, and little ability to distinguish between revealed truths, empirical knowledge, and speculative knowledge. Those readers will scan a number of pages on which a high level of specula-

tive human genius and the best of the empirical knowledge (of circa 400AD) is applied to the task of understanding, for example, the story of Adam and Eve. And those readers will miss the contingent elements on those pages, taking the conclusion as if a revealed truth, or—more accurately—the clear and only intelligible understanding of that story. That particular story, read with a fresh mind, seems to be dealing with an awakening from animal lack of self-awareness rather than a fall from grace as a modern Christian would understand such an event.

Modern theologians and philosophers are not so easy to deal with. They are as bereft of imagination and as institutionalized to the needs of bureaucracies as much as any insurance claims-processing clerk or corporate marketing executive. And, yet, every moral theologian feels he must be creative, whatever he might mean by ‘creative’. This has led to the apparent production of one heresy after another in some circles, even when those circles are made up of men who are Catholic or Protestant clerics formed in respectable seminaries. I say “apparent production” only because the body of modern heretics is composed of two groups:

1. Those like Fr. Hans Kung of whom we can apply a statement that the physicist Wolfgang Pauli once made after a presentation by a fellow scientist: “He’s not right but he’s not even wrong.” [As is often the case, I quote from memory.] I read one of Kung’s tomes once and didn’t have a clue what he was talking about. His expressed thoughts have not enough coherence to be considered right or wrong.
2. There are also those like the modernists condemned by Pius X and others. There was a certain coherence to much of the proclaimed thought of the true modernists but they did nothing more than discover ideas raised by the heresiarchs of the early centuries of the Church and convincingly denied by the likes of St. Irenaeus, St. Athanasius, and St. John Chrysostom—within the context of the Christian community. [But we should remember that Jaroslav Pelikan, the great historian of Christian thought, once said that St. Augustine was the father of both orthodox and heretical Christian theology in the West. We should also remember that the heretics were sometimes important and creative thinkers who raised the important questions and forced more orthodox thinkers to a deeper understand-

ing of the Bible and the creeds and the liturgy and prayers of the Church.]

We don't yet understand God's Creation and thus don't fully understand our relationship to our Creator or even the relationship of God in His role as Creator to God in His fullness and transcendence. We were given the task of exploring this world, in its physical aspects and in its aspects that can only be seen when we try to apply revelation to understand the goals to which God is moving the world. It takes some creativity to do such work. In past centuries, men such as St. Augustine of Hippo and St. Thomas Aquinas showed us how to go about those tasks and gave us plausible systems of thought which worked well within the context of the speculative and empirical knowledge of their times. Unfortunately, the vast expansion of modern knowledge has forced us to return to drawing board and modern thinkers have shown little sign of the creativity to redo this important task.

One problem in an age of excessive specialization is the loss of the big picture. By saying this, I'm not recommending that everyone become a creative, big-picture theologian or philosopher. I am saying that we should attend to the larger scope of any theological or philosophical or exegetical task. Let's take a couple of points raised by Pope Benedict XVI in his book, *Jesus of Nazareth*:

1. We shouldn't read any part of the Bible out of the context of the entirety of that book. Without Moses and Elijah, without the Davidic Kingdom and Temple worship, the words and life of Jesus can't be understood. The interested reader can find good reasons for this in *Jesus of Nazareth* but the major one is that Jesus Christ is the Word of God, the Torah and also the rest of Holy Scripture.
2. We should remember that the Son of God incarnated Himself in a specific place at a specific time and as a member of a specific people. Jesus of Nazareth was a devout Jew who was a descendant of Abraham and Elijah, David and Jeremiah, even if He was also their Creator. His words were spoken in the context of such a concrete-minded people of very specific beliefs and practices.

There is another aspect to Pope Benedict's thought which appeals greatly to me, partly because I hold a similar view but I came to it by

a dramatically different path. He realizes that even with Christ Himself, what's most important is His relationship to the Father. In my work which has concentrated on Creation, I've conjectured that relationships create substance, relationships shape things and living creatures. There is obviously a great truth underlying this sort of a view. The real question is whether it's the best and most fruitful way to speak. (See Chapter 156, for a short and early discussion of this speculation.)

I'll now confess to something: I learned my Catholic theology from reading books by Pope Benedict or thinkers tied closely to him. This is odd in a way since my faith in God's Creation and my common-sense acceptance of empirical knowledge were influenced strongly by his thoughts and yet I seem to be more accepting than those thinkers of that knowledge which comes from human exploration of Creation.



## 12 The Metaphysics of Position, Momentum, and Missed Field-goals

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, <http://loydfueston.com/?p=125>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/01/01.]

After discussing a use of Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle to understand the results of experiments in the fairly straightforward case of the polarization of light-waves and of individual photons, Alastair Rae speculates:

[If] we understood properly what the concepts of position and momentum mean on an atomic scale we might find it... illogical to possess definite values of these quantities simultaneously. [120]

The point to be made is more general and can be more understandable in light of one of the biggest errors that history records on the part of a brilliant thinker: Kant tried to turn his understanding of Newtonian dynamics into a metaphysically necessary system. In fact, Kant died thinking he'd succeeded in presenting physical reality as necessarily existing in a Euclidean three-space with an absolute and uniformly moving time dimension.

Einstein knew better not because of metaphysical reasoning but rather because he knew the literature of important experiments and he had a deep understanding of Maxwell's work on electromagnetism. To cut to the chase, Einstein speculated that our physical environment seems to be a four-space with three dimensions of space and one of time and found he could develop a new dynamics (special relativity) which was consistent

with Maxwell's equations. (Time retains its own properties as do the spatial dimensions, but they can bend each other in various sorts of interactions that can't be explained so much as accepted as raw facts of how things are.) Over a period of years, by way of hard work and with the help of a mathematician friend who helped him learn differential geometry and tensor calculus from research papers, Einstein also restated gravitational theory to include his understanding of spacetime and his belief that a gravitational field is impossible to distinguish by way of experiment from an accelerated frame of reference. This means that, if you're in a sealed box, you can determine if it's accelerating but you can't tell if you are in an elevator in free-fall or a box being accelerated through space by a smoothly operating rocket.

Einstein's gravitational theory would eventually lead to an understanding that matter shapes the four-dimensional spacetime, even creating spacetime in a sense by stretching it out. The American physicist John Wheeler told us that matter shapes space which then tells matter how to move.

We probably don't have the best possible understanding of these matters but we have more understanding than in those centuries without radio telescopes, those centuries during the slow maturing process of mathematics.

Philosophers, theologians, and other thinkers don't make the best possible use of our modern empirical knowledge because they refuse to remember what Aquinas told us: metaphysics uses the specific sciences. This isn't a purely instrumental 'uses' but rather a fundamental interaction. Metaphysics truly is what its name implies: an abstraction from our empirical knowledge of physical reality, including the mathematics we develop as we explore that reality. Metaphysics isn't just an ivory-tower activity which is done independently of empirical reality and then applied to judge that reality. It's our way of creating a language, including the words for complex concepts, that we might talk about reality.

God is multi-lingual. When He works to shape this universe and to tell the story I call a world, he speaks the languages of quantum physics and chemistry and chaos theory and biological evolution – including moral evolution. When God creates from nothing, creating the basic stuff of this world and the world of the resurrected, He speaks the languages of transfinite set-theory and algorithmic complexity theory and metaphysics. Don't take these analogies too seriously—they won't bear up under much weight, but I do intend to point the reader towards a new view of the

relationships between this universe and the more abstract foundation of Creation which I call the Primordial Universe. I intend to point towards a new view of the relationships between different fields of knowledge as well.

But not entirely new. Alastair Rae seems to have some substantial understanding of the possibilities. In my way of thinking, thing-like reality is shaped from more basic levels of reality. Speaking very vaguely: the various elements of this universe must be derived in some sense from the elements of the Primordial Universe, but that doesn't tell us immediately what those elements are or even what sorts of entities they might be. The underlying stuff of our thing-like universe are abstract and the difficulties in quantum mechanics come from our inability to understand how this abstract and well-determined stuff collapses to the concrete stuff of this universe, concrete stuff which seems to have some freedom not found in the underlying stuff. If we are to understand that underlying stuff, the truths God manifested as the foundations of Creation, we must study those levels and aspects of Creation which we can and explore and analyze. We must understand the more contingent levels of created being to be able to generalize to the more abstract levels.

Position and momentum aren't metaphysically necessary parameters and aren't even necessary—so far as we know—at the level at which quantum effects occur. At the same time, there is something corresponding to position which shows up when we try to measure position but in such a way as to destroy the possibility of measuring something corresponding to momentum at the same time. A crude analogy: when we look at copper ore, we shouldn't expect to find all the attributes of finished copper piping and valves. When we look at the more raw components of created being, we shouldn't expect to find all the aspects or attributes which exist at the level of this concrete realm of rocks and rats and robots.

We live in exciting times and the open possibilities for human thought and action have unsettled us a little more in these turbulent times, these times when much is being destroyed in one way or another and the new societies and political structures are but dream-like and nightmarish possibilities.

Modern man has piled up mountains of as-yet undigested empirical facts and theories. Many of these facts and theories are very disturbing, casting in doubt our post-Kantian intuitions that the sort of time and space that we experience are necessary foundations of any sort of reality, casting in doubt our traditional understandings of what numbers are and what logic

is, casting in doubt our belief that there is an infinite chasm of sorts between us and other sorts of animals, casting in doubt much that gave us the illusion that we understood God's Creation in certain important ways.

We need to show the courage and creativity appropriate to our opportunities to gain richer understandings of our human selves and our world. As it is, many Christian leaders and scholars seem determined to see these opportunities only as problems, refusing to do their duty to lead their flocks towards good pastures because of the rocky trails that lie between us and those green meadows.

# 13 Einstein and Bohr: Don't tell God what to do!

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, <http://loydfueston.com/?p=126>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/01/01.]

Alastair Rae adds a wrinkle to a famous comment by Einstein:

When Einstein said that “God does not play dice”, Bohr is said to have replied, “Don't tell God what to do!” [120]

He notes that there's some doubt as to the 'historical accuracy' of this exchange, but there's an important point to be raised about Bohr's response. I don't know that Bohr was much more disciplined in his metaphysical thought than Einstein was, but Bohr seems more clearheaded than Einstein in metaphysical matters, at least from a Thomistic viewpoint. St. Thomas told us that metaphysics uses the specific sciences, and that would certainly include the most fundamental of physical sciences—physics.

Metaphysics uses the specific sciences, not slavishly as Kant did with Newtonian dynamics. It was Kant, and not Newton, who derived a metaphysical system founded upon the parameters and operational principles of Newtonian dynamics and the absolute time and space in which that dynamics was set.

Metaphysics uses the specific sciences to discipline itself to reality. When a philosopher or anyone else tries to understand reality using too many *a priori* principles, he's essentially trying to impose his speculations upon reality. The proper use of knowledge from the specific sciences will supply the dose of reality which fights against this wrongful human tendency.

“Don’t tell God what to do!” Wise words though there might be some doubt whether Bohr actually said them and much doubt as to whether he would have understood the full significance of that advice.

Listen to God. Listen to His direct words in the Bible and pay close attention to the Story and the stories He tells in that Holy Work. Listen to God in the traditional worship and prayer practices of His Church. Listen to God in your experiences of His world and in the results of hard thought and contemplation and empirical research as recorded in the best works of men.

Don’t tell God what to do, listen to Him when He speaks in the Bible and when He speaks in the experiments and theories of the quantum physics. Listen to Him even in that story which is your own life.

## 14 Theory of Knowledge

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, <http://loydfueston.com/?p=128>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/01/11.]

Pope Benedict has an appropriate respect for the human mind and its products, cultural and intellectual and spiritual. Yet, there's a big gap in his thought that could be filled only by a proper appreciation for modern empirical knowledge, including in a very explicit way the problem areas of mathematics, physics, and evolutionary biology. I also question if he's being given good information about some of these areas, such as evolutionary theory and chaos theory—both of which he seemed to dismiss as sources of any sort of truth in *Jesus of Nazareth*, his first book of a series on the Lord Jesus Christ. But the real problem is the fundamental gap in his thought about human knowledge: he speaks openly and carefully of speculative knowledge and revealed knowledge (or truths) but doesn't seem to have an explicit view of how empirical knowledge fits in to the total picture.

In many of my writings, I'm primarily interested in creatively viewing God's Creation, viewing it as clearly as possible given our stock of knowledge, revealed knowledge and speculative knowledge (such as metaphysics) and empirical knowledge (separated in one of my books [43] into scientific and practical). Pope Benedict doesn't seem to take seriously enough the work of empirical thinkers who work in the domain of physics and mathematics and evolutionary biology and other such-like sciences, but this might simply be a problem of not having a way of relating the results of those fields of study to revealed and speculative knowledge.

Aquinas told us that metaphysics uses the specific sciences. I've gone beyond that, noting that Hellenistic metaphysics was a Siamese twin of Hellenistic mathematics. Our idea of what mathematics is has expanded greatly, implying that we should expand our ideas of what metaphysics is

in a parallel way. (See Chapter 69 for a discussion I posted after Pope Benedict's well-publicized speech at Regensburg.) In an argument that a couple thinkers found fascinating (one well-known mathematician and one theologian), I used modern understandings of randomness as being a high level of algorithmic complexity—factuality—to argue that only God could make a random number, only God could act in a random way, a truly personal way. I leave it to the reader to draw the meanings of this way of thought, perhaps by exploring my posts at my major website, *Acts of Being* [38], or in my first published book *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41].

There's more too it than that, such as the realization that modern physics points to the likelihood, at least as I see matters, that physical matter and energy and fields are shaped from a strange stuff that is almost abstract, almost a ghostly manifestation of mathematical truths and metaphysical truths and 'arbitrary' facts. Speaking somewhat poetically, matter is frozen soul-stuff.

For the current discussion, the point is simple and clear: modern mathematics and physics point to richer possibilities for metaphysical understandings of created being. In addition, the shaping processes which turn that abstract stuff into thing-like matter are more a narrative than a tinker-toy construction using pre-formed components. In terms of Hellenistic metaphysics, this implies that the *Timaeus*, the only dialog Plato wrote to deal directly with the God and His creative acts, needs to be used as a strong corrective to the more prosaic, and pantheistic, views of Aristotle as well as Plato's more 'philosophical' dialogs in which matter and human souls seemed more god-like than the gods and the God seemed much in the background. Aquinas, of course, had the Bible as a corrective to his use of Aristotle, a use which Etienne Gilson thought to be a complete reshaping of Aristotle's thought. It's also interesting to note that Plato the religious believer denied that any creature, human soul or god, could be immortal but only the God, the Father and Creator of all.<sup>1</sup>

Though many Christians who fret over empirical knowledge are mostly worried about evolutionary biology, it's actually a trivial intellectual maneuver to talk even about the evolution of moral nature once the basic story

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<sup>1</sup>I have subsequently learned that some scholars think that Plato, when speaking of the immortal human soul, was referring to an entity which existed at the level of Man, the entire human race and had no connection to an individual human being.

of the physical universe is in place, a universe shaped from some strange stuff, manifested truths, into thing-like being.

We Christians need to pay close attention and give proper respect to all sorts of human knowledge. In a book I've published on the Internet for free download, *Four Kinds of Knowledge* [43], I classified (true) human knowledge into four categories: revealed truths, speculative knowledge, 'scientific' empirical knowledge, and practical empirical knowledge. I went on to claim that this is a division made necessary by our creaturely perspective. Ultimately, there are only two sorts of knowledge: that of God in His necessary and transcendent Being and that of God in His chosen role of Creator making contingent decisions about the stuff and events of created reality. And that leads to an understanding of the importance of physics which is not the study of some sort of neutral stuff upon which the drama of salvation will take place. The basic stuff of our universe, including energy and fields as well as matter, is an active part of that drama. Again, I recommend the interested reader explore the posts at one of my websites, *Acts of Being* found at <http://loydfueston.com/>, or read my first published book *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41].

My philosophical and theological writings aren't always easy to read but this is because I eschew the textbook style and also the modern rules about separation of different 'realms' of knowledge. Believing that many of our wrongful views of even mathematics and physics are due to our moral problems, I'll intertwine discussions of moral issues and the birth and development of stars.

Our empirical knowledge tells us how it is that we receive and understand even revealed truths. We have no truth-organs in our bodies upon which God stamps those truths. We have brains which, ideally, shape themselves to encapsulate our environments (which we can pray to include a morally well-ordered human society), the universe as a whole if things go well, and God's world (the universe seen in light of God's purposes) if things go very well. From there, we can even move on, by way of mathematics and metaphysics and revealed truths, to an understanding of Creation as a whole – including the world where the resurrected live for time without end with the Lord Jesus Christ. Not only is our speculative knowledge and our stock of revealed truths mediated in the human body through mundane things such as brain-cells and hormones, but our understanding of speculative possibilities and our understanding of revealed truths can be enriched by a better understanding of empirical knowledge, knowledge of God's uni-

verse, knowledge of some of the decisions God made in shaping the raw stuff of Creation into the thing-like stuff of this world.

To complete his system of thought, Pope Benedict, perhaps along with a co-worker, needs to consider empirical knowledge in addition to revealed truths and speculative knowledge.

# 15 Priests, Ministers, Monkeys, and Truth

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=121>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/01/12.]

Here's another statement of my goals in my writing:

I'm trying to build a vocabulary and stock of concepts that would allow Christians to speak truthfully to the greatest extent allowed by our current stock of knowledge (early in the 21st century).

Recently, I heard a homily by a new priest. While wishing to remain respectful of a man with some very good qualities, I have to say I was horrified at the way he dealt with a situation. He was speaking of a young girl who came to him and announced sadly, "Somebody told me we're descended from monkeys and that means we're no good," words to that effect. His response, as far as I understood his incoherence at that point, was to tell her she wasn't descended from monkeys.

I could have been listening to a fundamentalist preacher who'd stepped out of the pages of a Flannery O'Connor novel. That's not all bad. One of the points she was making in her novels was: those fundamentalist preachers had remembered some truths (such as the all-encompassing demands of faith) which had been forgotten by more liberal clergymen as well as by the skeptics of our age. Admitting that, I'd say that a Catholic priest should be educated well enough to realize that we are descended from monkeys (and also to know that St. Augustine admitted the possibility of a descent from some non-human species back in *The City of God*, 1400 years before the birth of Darwin). It's the duty of a faithful clergyman, Protestant

or Catholic, to deal truthfully and openly with the world as God made and then to give a reason why that doesn't affect our faith or our moral principles, not to deny the world as it presents itself to us.

If the best a clergyman can do in defending human morality is to sneer unintelligently at the idea that we're descended from monkeys, then he shouldn't be in the pulpit. Over the course of her life, that girl will realize she does share a common ancestor with monkeys and, assuming that she does no better in finding an intelligent Christian understanding of the human condition, she'll see a straightforward scientific fact as being in conflict with her worth as a human being and perhaps in conflict with her faith. She might even realize that our modern medical technology was developed by research that assumes we're members of the animal kingdom, descended from 'monkeys' and metabolically very similar to pigs in important ways. She'll see Christian clergymen who have no intelligent way to speak about human nature go into the hospital to take advantage of all that technology which assumes we're—yes—descended from monkeys.

At the same time that I see a deep problem here, I can understand why the typical clergyman has neither the time nor the talent for the particular task of engaging in large and eclectic readings and then interpreting a vast body of human knowledge from the viewpoint of a Christian. What I can't understand is why so few of those clergymen have good enough instincts to realize there's a problem. The skeptics and atheists are winning the battle of the minds to a greater extent than some realize and they're winning partly because of the intellectual incompetence of Christian clergymen who haven't clue how to deal with modern science from the viewpoint of Christianity. So, they sneer at the idea that we're descended from monkeys and they continue to talk as if Adam and Eve literally existed. Those who then admit to the truth of biological evolution make the weakness of their positions all the more obvious.

If it's really necessary for either Catholic Church or the various other Christian churches to ordain men who have poorly developed minds, for whatever reason, those men should at least have better scripts to read from. More importantly, neither the ordinary church-goer nor the children in formation should have to live in two domains of truth, one which he or she leaves behind when walking out of church at 11:00 on Sunday morning, that same one which is left behind even by those priests and ministers when they walk into a hospital.

# 16 Walling Off Our Christian Beliefs

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, <http://loydfueston.com/?p=129>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/01/18.]

I'm puzzled by those who think we can be Christians without having a way to think of God's Creation on its own terms but from a Christian viewpoint. They worship and then move back into a society more skeptical than pagan. The big problem is that we modern men have piled up huge mountains of empirical facts, some of those mountains being put in the context of greater maps, but not from the viewpoint of Christian believers.

Many have retreated, perhaps from personal preference, to magical views of reality. Despite the recent claim by a Cardinal of the Catholic Church that C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien taught that magic leads to evil, their books were filled with good wizards and evil wizards. Magic, in their view, is like anything else in that it can lead to evil, but—far more importantly—they taught that magic is a fundamental part of the world in which we live. Magic is a way of – supposedly—making things behave according to our desires or needs, good or evil. Unfortunately for those who hold to that viewpoint, magic is false to what we now know of the workings of this world. When there's a conflict between verifiable knowledge of God's world and the preferences of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, I'll go with that verifiable knowledge.

Before all else, a Christian has to be honest. Certainly, he has to be honest in perceiving the world God did create rather than some world we might prefer. He also has to be honest in trying to make sense of that world, first on its own empirical terms and then in the light of revealed truths.

When we allow non-Christians or even Christians in their secular roles

to have a monopoly on interpreting modern empirical knowledge, we let them shape our minds and the minds of our children for most of our hours and in most of our activities. Our Christian beliefs retreat into a ghetto of sorts inside our own minds. (See my novel *A Man for Every Purpose* [37] for a tongue-in-cheek treatment of our modern ability to build walls between different ‘parts’ of our own selves.)

We modern Christians live in two realms of truth, a realm of Christian truths for a few hours a week and a realm of knowledge interpreted in non-Christian or anti-Christian ways for the remainder of our hours. This situation will erode our faith and that of the children we drag along behind us. Most adults and children will decide, “Why bother?”

Why bother? Indeed. As matters stand, my qualified sympathies go with those who’ve decided it isn’t worth getting out of bed to attend Mass or Protestant services. They’re willing to make a break with an unjustified habit when they’ve got other, more important things to do.

In our modern situation, for which we and our parents are largely to blame, we need strong and positive reasons to remain Christians and a listing of doctrine isn’t going to do it when we see reality in non-Christian or anti-Christian terms. We need to be able to perceive this physical realm as being truly and fully part of the Creation of the God of Jesus Christ. We need well-formed minds and sane imaginations. We need to consider modern empirical knowledge, the history of the Holocaust and of modern warfare as well as quantum mechanics and genetics, and revealed truths. We need to use our minds and imaginations to see this as all one body of truth, most plausibly by extending the story of salvation in the Bible outwards to the entire world, backwards to the so-called Big Bang, and forwards to the end of this universe which is more likely to be a whimpering heat death than a fiery confrontation between angels and demons.

Some are searching for the reasons that so many are leaving Christianity and are getting no help from Christian leaders and teachers, intellectuals and novelists. Christianity is a faith in which witnesses go out and catch the attention of God’s lost children so that their attention might be directed to the lamb. And there are still some being brought to Christ though the evangelists and preachers, the teachers and writers, no longer have a coherent account of this world and no strong argument that it belongs to the God of Jesus Christ.

# 17 The Poetics of Quantum Mechanics

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, <http://loydfueston.com/?p=130>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/01/25.]

I'm currently reading *The Principles of Quantum Mechanics* by P.A.M. Dirac, though I'm missing more than I'm getting. With a weak educational background and a lack of toughness to dig in, I'd abandoned my physics major in college more than 30 years ago. I made up a lot of ground since then, but I can't really recover those lost 'windows of opportunity' in my intellectual development. Literate in science in a general way, I'm not really so competent in abstract mathematics that I can easily follow Dirac's style of thought and presentation. Needing to beef up in quantum mechanics, and a few other areas of specialized knowledge, I'd be better off with some other books on my desk, such as the Dover reprint of *Quantum Theory* [12] by David Bohm. I will get to that book soon enough.

Why am I continuing to read Dirac's book when I'm missing so much that I could catch a little better if I read a more concrete book first?

Reading Dirac on quantum mechanics is an esthetic experience, but also an experience that helps to reshape the mind even when the content seems a little vague and beyond direct grasp. He writes a strangely abstract poetry rather than something to be found in a typical modern textbook. I suspect that much is slipping into the back of my mind while I'm wondering at the flow of symbols. That happens with certain poets: Herbert or Wordsworth or certainly Wallace Stevens. In fact, Stevens might be a good colleague for Dirac as would be the novelist Melville. Arguably, my style as a philosopher and theologian and novelist also involves heavy use of abstract symbolization of concrete reality. None of these writers, including me, is at

all attracted to the sort of magic glorified by C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and a host of other modern paganistic Christians or neo-pagans. There's enough 'magic' in reality as God gave it to us, enough that fascinates and irritates a healthy imagination.

It was nearly ten years ago that I bought Dirac's book. I read the early chapters at that time and wrote two novels not yet published, the first having as one of its characters a poet fascinated by the symbolism of Dirac's formulation of quantum mechanics. I wrote several poems in the name of the Poet, whose ordinary name happened to be Dylan Shagari since he was half Welsh and half Nigerian. A book like *The Principles of Quantum Mechanics* can induce contemplative states in a sensitive reader. It can induce streams of imaginative thought rather than just filling the mind with material organized in the bureaucratic way of a textbook.

Dirac, by all testimonies, was a unique thinker, exploring physical reality by way of mathematical abstractions, as if he wanted to insulate himself from more concrete reality until he found something interesting which would lead him back by way of an insight—such as the possibility of anti-electrons or positrons which was said to arise in a session of what might be called 'mathematical flow of consciousness'. Einstein, Heisenberg, and probably Newton constrained their thoughts to some understanding of physical reality and then looked for the mathematics necessary to communicate and further develop their insights. Einstein and Heisenberg were said to dislike mathematics in and of itself. They were conventional novelists, Tolstoy or Eliot, looking at concrete reality to find characters and narrative streams. Dirac was Wordsworth, character and narrative were abstracted away to symbols, or maybe Melville using novelistic styles to do what Wordsworth did with poetic styles.

Dirac's book isn't easy to read and I imagine I could have learned more, by most measurements, if I'd chosen to read Bohm's book first, but I'm learning some deep truths from Dirac's book, deep truths about the workings of the human mind and the odd ways in which our minds can be so well shaped to our world that some unusual thinkers can abstract away some aspects of that world, producing symbols that can be used to explore possibilities before returning to more explicit consideration of concrete reality.

# 18 The Need for Respectful Criticism

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, <http://loydfueston.com/?p=131>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/01/28.]

As I noted in a previous entry, I believe that Pope Benedict is open to respectful and meaningful criticism of the sort which might be given by one competent scholar to the work of another or by one devout Christian thinker to the thoughts of another—else why would he go out of his way to point out that some of his writings, even as pope, are speculative? He seems an honest truth-seeker who has a preference for *a prioristic* forms of speculative reasoning and has not yet properly responded to modern empirical knowledge.

I would like to begin a Catholic debate about the meaning of modern empirical knowledge and the need for honest efforts to update Catholic speculative thought to better accord with what is now known about God's Creation. Pope Benedict seems reluctant to move forward into what seems so brave a new world and that's certainly understandable since he's protecting some important truths and some important institutions. Realistically, there's no one who's yet provided him with a way of treating modern empirical knowledge on its own terms while respecting our stock of theological and metaphysical truths.

In recent centuries, there's been a split of human knowledge into multiple realms in a way generally intended to allow proper freedom to specialists, but that way has led to at least an implicit belief in multiple realms of truth. In my way of thinking, there are ultimately only two 'realms' of knowledge: knowledge of God in His transcendent and necessary Being and knowledge of God as Creator in His contingent and free-will decisions. All

of empirical knowledge and speculative knowledge ultimately collapse into knowledge of God as a Creator. There are practical reasons to speak of a more detailed breakup of knowledge into realms of revealed knowledge, speculative knowledge, and empirical knowledge of various sorts, but such a scheme is no more than a concession to the weakness of our perceptive and cognitive abilities. We're limited in capacity and prone to error.

Pope Benedict is clearly a Christian thinker of great importance. That is, many are looking to him for guidance as we try to retain our grasp upon Christian truths, but he does need to be more open to modern empirical knowledge. He needs to encourage Christian thinkers to discipline themselves to learn more of this empirical knowledge and, by way of a contemplative (speculative) effort, to start building systems of thoughts which reflect both Christian truths and our best understanding of God's world. The Christian worldview which properly considers revealed truths and modern knowledge may or may not resemble the worldview I've worked to build.

Many Christian thinkers react against this modern build-up of empirical knowledge because we modern men all have mental indigestion of a sort caused by our samplings at this table covered with huge trays of facts and somewhat smaller bowls of truer knowledge. One of the symptoms of this indigestion has been a general conflict between Christian belief and empirical knowledge. We should do our best to ignore our discomfort and to courageously and confidently deal with that empirical knowledge and to make sense of it in terms of Christian revelations.

The spirits of the modern era have tried to increase prosperity and security by pushing all considerations of grounded truth away from us if they might lead to conflict in society. This has had the odd result of bloated nations growing up which have engaged in wars far more bloody than the 'religious' wars that Hobbes and the other founders of liberalism wished to end. These spirits have often used a strategy of glorifying empirical knowledge to soften or even destroy the absoluteness of any sort of truth. Such a strategy wasn't linked to any valid line of speculative thought but some defenders of Christian beliefs have reacted to this strategy of liberal political philosophers by building systems of thought in which even 'natural law' is strangely *a prioristic* which usually means that much of modern natural law thinking is based upon empirical knowledge of man and his world at the time of Aristotle or maybe St. Augustine. This is to say in Thomistic terms, that metaphysics uses the specific sciences. To remain

the foundation of speculative knowledge in general, metaphysics has to be updated to consider the specific scientific knowledge of the present.

This is an important time in history and we need to think clearly about the restatement of revealed, absolute truths. We also need to think through the nature of contingent truths and to reconsider which of our contingent truths have held up under the critiques of modern thinkers.

It would be nice if we could avoid making too many errors as we try to correct the errors we've already made or inherited. It would be even nicer if we could simply move to a position that recognizes the empirical knowledge which tells us so much about God's acts as Creator rather than continuing the somewhat embarrassing retreat before the forces of empirical knowledge-gathering. St. Augustine was himself a thinker who acknowledged the importance of empirical knowledge and St. Thomas Aquinas was perhaps the best empirical thinker of all theologians or philosophers. But their speculative thought had some errors introduced by the empirical knowledge of their day, as does the thought of any man at any time in history.

We should always be using the best understanding of God's world and not simply reacting to the use of modern empirical and speculative knowledge by those who may be our enemies or maybe be indifferent to Christians or may even be friendly to us but not willing to soften the effect of, for example, knowledge which makes a mockery of every homily or sermon or book that speaks as if the story of Adam and Eve was literally true. (Even allegories and metaphors become lies in an age when reading and thinking skills have decayed so badly as to make most of us literal-minded in the worst sense.)

We aren't enemies of those who are, in Christian terms, trying to understand what God did as Creator, in His primary acts of creation and in His acts of shaping a particular world and particular creatures. God has presented us with a great opportunity and too many Christians over the centuries have turned it into a problem and have, arguably at least, helped to generate a situation that's difficult to understand:

Modern men have decayed in many ways relative to their Medieval or early modern ancestors (see *From Dawn to Decadence* by Jacques Barzun for the definitive treatment, to date, of the decline in Western Civilization), but they've also excelled in certain areas, most especially in the empirical realms including not only physics and biology but also history and biblical exegesis

and many other fields. Yet, in those fields, decay will set in, and probably is already advanced because of the general decay in levels of literacy described by Professor Barzun.

We should see the struggle to make sense of modern empirical knowledge as an opportunity for understanding certain of God's decisions and actions as a Creator. The so-called Big Bang and the evolution of life on earth are backdrops, but very important backdrops, for the incarnation, life, crucifixion, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. For some reason, Pope Benedict, and many other defenders of Christian truth, don't seem to be fully open to the possibilities raised by the greatest accomplishments of modern man. For example, seeing the truth to be found in Hellenistic metaphysics, many shy away from the implications of modern empirical knowledge that the truth of Hellenistic metaphysics might be just a small region of the metaphysical truths God manifested in the raw stuff of Creation, the stuff from which He shaped concrete being. The very possibility of this expansion of speculative thought often doesn't seem visible to many of those who are defending traditional truths.

Most of the expansions of metaphysics which are implied by my work to date would actually involve an elevation of factual knowledge and historical development relative to knowledge based on a prioristic reasoning—a goal which I think to be justified by a simple respect for God as Creator.

# 19 Dealing with the Physical Universe

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, <http://loydfueston.com/?p=134>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/02/09.]

Where do I go from here? I probably should go more slowly than I did in Chapter 92, *The Ascent of the Human Mind*. In that posting, I was unleashing my mind and imagination, trying to map the entire path from here to there in one image.<sup>1</sup> In terms of the conventional descriptions of creative writing, I didn't just cut open a vein, I ripped open an artery and let it gush out onto my keyboard. Let's travel a bit more slowly for the next few postings.

As I noted in a prior entry, Bohr was said by some reports to have had a good response to Einstein's famous, "God doesn't play with dice." Bohr may have responded, "Don't tell God what to do."

Let me impose my own understanding upon this statement:

Listen to Creation to try to understand what God did. If your theories of physics or your supposed metaphysical truths are in conflict with the evidence of God's Creation, then do more research, thinking, contemplation, and praying. Try to understand what God did as Creator rather than imposing your presumptions upon Creation.

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<sup>1</sup>The reader should bear in mind that this book presents many of my blog postings with minimal changes. The book presenting a smoother and perhaps more coherent version of all this work is in progress, as many things are in this world. In any case, if this were that other book, I would rewrite that chapter rather than noting I perhaps went too fast in developing my ideas.

So far as I can see, empirical knowledge gives us our only possible picture of God in His freely chosen role as Creator just as revealed truths give us the only possible picture of God in His necessary and transcendent being but even revelations are uncertain precisely because they come through experiences. Revelations must also be treated as empirical knowledge to some extent, as the Catholic Church does in encouraging historical and literary studies of the Bible. In any case, speculative thought, especially metaphysics, typically functions as the glue to hold it all together, from our creaturely viewpoint, though speculation is the inferior of revealed knowledge (revealed truths mediated by human ways of thought).

But we need to go further, at least to the point of St. Thomas Aquinas that our interactions with our physical environments shape our minds. No, we must go further than that. We need to supplement the Thomistic claim with the findings of modern psychologists. For further development of my thoughts on this subject, see Chapter 78, Chapter 79, Chapter 80, Chapter 81, and Chapter 82. Gigerenzer points out in discussions of his various studies of the human mind in operation that much of our knowledge is found in our environments and remains there. In a sense, much of our conscious thinking is done by way of interacting with our environments in non-conscious ways. One reason that the term ‘mind’ is useful is this realization, explicit in our understanding of libraries, that our minds overlap into our societies and our physical environments. Our minds expand beyond our brains and the other parts of our bodies.

Before I’d even read Professor Gigerenzer’s *Adaptive Minds* [61], I’d made the claim in my first published book, (*To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41]), that the uniqueness of human beings lies in the ability of the human mind to expand out beyond its immediate environment to see the universe and beyond to see the universe as morally ordered to God’s purposes. It is when this moral order is perceived, however vaguely, that the universe becomes what I call a world, having the attributes of unity, coherence, and completeness. [The human mind shapes itself first to its environments but any intelligent animal forms something like a mind in response to its environments. There has to be more to define the human mind, or at least the potential for more.]

Notice that this process culminates in a human being which is a better image of God, having a mind which can encapsulate some of what God creates. It’s a playful image, much like the child who picks up sticks and rocks to use them in imitation of his father who’s building a shed with

saws and hammers. This is perhaps the major reason for the importance of empirical knowledge:

Empirical knowledge helps us to shape our minds in imitation of God in His freely chosen role as Creator.

By empirical knowledge, I mean not only knowledge of stars and galaxies, of long-ago ape-men and dinosaurs. I mean also knowledge of the events leading up to World War I and the American War Between the States, the proposed explanations for the development of science in Christian Europe and the plethora of high-quality novels written in Europe during the 1800s. For Americans, it would be of particular importance to understand the failure to produce a true American culture outside of some music genres. For European Christians, it would be of particular importance to understand why 2,000 years wasn't sufficient for Christianity to conquer the hearts and minds of their fellow-citizens.

We need a way of understanding the Gospel in so far as it is a human narrative <sup>2</sup> and our other empirical knowledge as being part of one story. We need a way of understanding and I can see no other way to understand all of this than as a story, a morally ordered narrative. God, as Creator, is more a story-teller than an engineer. In His story, which is this world, He is also the absolutely dominant character, but we are failing to see this story, acting as if the universe were somehow a region alien to moral truths or other truths. We are refusing to pay proper attention and proper respect to the empirical knowledge which is our perception of this story. We often think and speak as if we believe this world to be not good enough for us when this world is our birthplace, the womb in which the resurrected are growing now even if we can't be sure who is in that group. Rather than womb, we often think and speak as if it were a stage and we're pre-formed characters passing from stage left to stage right.

This world is the womb for those who will be re-born into life without end. We have little serious reason to believe that God provides us substance or nourishment from outside of this womb. He even sent His Son to also

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<sup>2</sup>I would argue the revelation in the Bibles is contained in the responses of the listener or reader rather than in the literal text. This isn't an endorsement of subjectivism but rather a part of my claim that, as organisms, we form ourselves only by way of active responses. Scriptural revelation from God becomes such only when it finds a willing listener or a loving reader.

develop His human nature in this womb. We have to remember that, in my terms, each human being—but also each rock and rattlesnake—is an object of God’s love. It’s that divine love which provides us with what we need and we should assume the Lord has provided a world adequate in itself to shape us to His purposes.

In his defense of the ultimate truths, Pope Benedict is sticking with traditional metaphysics, including its ways of interpreting experience, the basis of empirical knowledge and also that which shapes our minds. He’s sticking with a metaphysics that was, in fact, shaped by empirical knowledge including mathematics. It was shaped by the empirical knowledge of the ancient Greeks and has been enhanced in subsequent centuries but not nearly enough. Certainly, that knowledge was good enough to allow Plato and Augustine to see much in the way of truth and to allow Aquinas to achieve some insights which couldn’t really be appreciated before the development of modern neuroscience, mathematics, and cosmology.

We can do better now because we have better tools but the tools are themselves among the objects of study—they are also things and relationships in God’s world. The main purpose of the research is to shape the mind of the researcher and to shape it to encapsulate the world, the story being told by God. This and not utilitarian goals is the true motive for one who strives to understand the world as a duty he owes to his Maker. This is the understanding that can best make sense of this universe as more than just a collection of things that sometimes work in a way that implies some hidden order. The order is not fully hidden though it can be seen, however vaguely, only by those who have the faith that God is the Creator of this universe. Atheists and agnostics and Deists can see strong hints of the order, but not hints that allow them to even conjecture a world, unified and coherent and complete.

But there are problems also with Christians who see this world as not quite enough for God’s purposes, not really a manifestation of truths but only a setting for creatures who process knowledge as if they were some sort of data independent of the mind in which that knowledge resides. The human mind is the knowledge. The mind is the encapsulation of the world if it reaches that lofty shape. By being such an encapsulation, the mind has been shaped to an image of the thoughts that God manifests in His acts-of-being by which He created from nothing the foundational stuff of Creation and then shaped it into this world and also the world of the resurrected. When we learn to encapsulate this world in our minds, we learn to think

the thoughts God manifested in Creation. Each age has done something of this sort, but no one until Aquinas realized that our minds are shaped by our responses to our environment and no one was able to prove how it happens until the development of modern neurosciences. The thinkers of each age have the duty to their Maker to form the best possible story of God's world.

In this age, the major task for thinkers, especially Christian thinkers, is to understand the moral ordering by which the universe is a world. To fulfill this task properly, we must make modern empirical knowledge part of our thought even at the expense of a painful expansion of our understanding of what this world is and a corresponding contraction in our illusions about human minds being able to directly access truths, metaphysical and mathematical, which lie beyond this world. The truths God manifested in the basic stuff of Creation are part of this universe and empirical knowledge gives us the path to move towards better understandings of those truths, but – again—the better understanding is not separable from the mind in which it is contained in only a manner of speaking. It's this insight and not any particular views about biological evolution or randomness or the nature of matter which is important in my efforts to develop a worldview which gives us a new view of the unity and coherence and completeness of this world. We've not had such a view in recent centuries. The Cosmos which the early Christian Fathers adopted from the great pagan thinkers has been dismantled and Christian thinkers, including the leaders of the Church, have failed to respond properly.



## 20 Speaking the Language of Your Age

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, <http://loydfueston.com/?p=137>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/03/01.]

The [dogmatic] declarations [of the early Church] were uttered in the language of Greek philosophy because the false statements were uttered in that language. [*The Power and the Wisdom* [94], page 129]

The opponents of the Church, both the ones with good intentions and the hateful ones, have moved on. They no longer critique the claims of Christianity in terms of Hellenistic philosophy. More than that, the faithful speak the languages of their age and culture—as they generally should. It's not the fault of the sheep that the shepherds teach and preach the faith in a strange language, embedded with alien concepts, a language in which—for example—matter is assumed to be dead and inert and some sorts of spirits are needed to bring life to mere flesh and blood.

To be sure, the shepherds speak the more modern language when seeking medical treatments developed under the assumption we're evolutionary cousins of pigs as well as monkeys. The shepherds also use the mainstream language when they fight those fundamentalist Creation Scientists who are consistent enough that they wish the same language to be taught in schools that priests and ministers use when giving homilies or sermons on the moral condition of mankind. That is, they wish biology teachers to speak as if the human condition were explained by a literalistic understanding of the story of Adam and Eve as filtered through two doctrines of the early Fathers of the Church: the special creation of man and original sin. Those doctrines

made (some) sense in a world that didn't know much about brain-cells or DNA, but we know of such things. We know how mere matter can maintain itself in a living state. The transition from non-living matter to the first organic forms of organization remains a mystery but one solvable in principle.

The modern opponents of Christianity critique the claims of the Church based upon more or less coherent understandings of modern empirical knowledge, history and exegesis as well as physics and biology. I think we should listen to them. They may know something about this universe, this phase of God's Creation, something that was not known to those who built the traditional metaphysics and the systems of theology by which Christians interpret the revelations of Moses and Isaiah as well as that Revelation Who is the Lord Jesus Christ.

After all, Plato and Aristotle helped Christian theologians, and artists, to speak of the triune God and the Incarnate Son—by way of a forced response to those who used Hellenistic metaphysics against the Gospel. It's time for us to realize a similar process of critique has been under way for five centuries or more and the leaders, thinkers, and teachers of Christianity haven't produced much in the way of impressive responses. We've not yet seen the modern Basils and Cyrils and Augustines who can take on the critics of Christianity on the grounds of modern knowledge.

Skeptics, including some open to good Christian responses, can point to the tight correlations between brain-events and the thoughts and feelings which define human life. Defenders of the tradition immediately shoot back with some argument from Plato or Augustine which assumes mere physical matter isn't capable of doing what scientists are showing it does all the time. There's a lot of evidence that actions of physical matter can be the most sublime of thoughts and feelings. This is somewhat mysterious but no more so than explanations by way of some sort of soul-stuff which can't be seen or detected but somehow can interact with matter. (See my first published book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], for an early take on my worldview. In that worldview, it's possible to speak of matter as being frozen soul-stuff if that way of approaching the issue is more acceptable to many. The core relationships would remain the same.)

We can speak clearly and coherently of human nature if we simply speak as if modern empirical knowledge can be trusted. After all, we trust it when our lives are danger and we check into the hospital for tests or surgery or medication. Why do we speak as if the allegory of Adam and Eve were

literally true while we and our children are learning the words of evolutionary biology even in the movies we watch? Why do we speak of angels and demons when our children learn how the words which can tell the depressing stories of human cowardice and deliberate evil and also learn the words which speak of invisible hands and self-organizing systems and the ‘chaos’ which might give a direction to time <sup>1</sup>.

No wonder we Christians are losing our battles for souls, even those of our children. There are no souls to win, only human beings with soul-like attributes. Why would this bother us? The deceased human being who is my mother is true and I know she loved me in a special way when I was an infant and continued to love me all her life and I pray she’s with our Lord Jesus Christ, loving me still. What does it matter if the evidence gathered by modern science is providing ever more details of the neurological and hormonal foundation of my mother’s love for me? The love is real. Why would anyone think it a lesser feeling if it has no so-called spiritual component? Maybe I’m strange but it’s that love that matters to me not how God chose to manifest it in that particular woman who was my mother. It doesn’t bother me at all if that love could have been described as certain activities in a body of flesh-and-blood.

If we learn to speak and think of the universe as we modern men best understand it, then we can speak and think of our true relationship to Creation and to our fellow-creatures, even to God. We could perhaps even come to better appreciate the miracle of salvation given to inherently mortal creatures. Somehow, God allows us to see much when we base our understanding of Creation on the best available human knowledge. Refusals to do so will totally darken that glass we see through, even if our preferred form of knowledge is that which led St. Augustine or St. Basil to many good insights. Many Christians today try to think like Augustine and Basil (or saints of far lesser intellectual quality), but those ways of thinking, however fruitful and worthy of study, are irrational when a living man tries to use them to understand God’s Creation in an age when the underlying empirical knowledge is much different.

But the situation is worse than I’ve stated above. It’s not just that we speak a language ill-suited for the empirical knowledge of our age. Modern

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<sup>1</sup>What is usually called chaos theory is actually the theory of certain types of well-determined non-linear systems which lie beyond the predictive powers of human mathematics at least in its current state.

human beings in nearly all age groups and educational achievement levels speak a gibberish made up of words and fragmentary concepts drawn from scientific and historical discourse, added to words and fragmentary concepts drawn from Church teachings and Western traditions. Such a stew isn't conducive to rational discourse that can lead to understanding.

## 21 Can Hellenistic Metaphysics be Baptized—Part 1?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, <http://loydfueston.com/?p=143>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/04/15.]

In reading, Ernst Cassirer's *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy* [18], I realized I've been guilty of a major oversight in any discussions of 'Hellenistic metaphysics'. Cassirer doesn't speak much of Christianity or the Church in that book, but he does speak of swings between various forms of Hellenistic metaphysics. And there are indeed different beasts in that menagerie. Using Christianity as a reference:

1. The Hellenistic thinkers in the Apostolic era and for two centuries following were generally followers of Plato and Aristotle, Zeno, Pythagoras, Epicurus, and other thinkers who lived before Jesus Christ. While those Greeks (all were largely Greek by culture but not all were ethnically Greek) were wrong about the nature of being—some more than others, they were pretty much all rational and clearheaded at least in the formulation of their questions.
2. Two centuries after Christ, Plotinus completed the development of a bastard offspring of Platonism which was called Neoplatonism. Soon enough, intellectual life was a picnic for those who prefer a confused view of being so they can select from a cafeteria of inconsistent entrees. It was also a meal eaten in desperation by Christians trying to protect their faith in God the Creator when they had no coherent understanding of Creation or even of being.

None of the Hellenistic systems of philosophical thought are adequate for grounding Christian belief in Creation nor for providing the best possible language for speaking of God. Still, the followers of Plato and Aristotle and the other earlier Greeks hold to rational thought which allows at least the possibility of seeing the primary Christian revelations in their blazing glory without obscuring those truths with inconsistent speculations. A careful reading of *Being and Some Philosophers* [62] by Etienne Gilson would be well worth the time for anyone seriously concerned about these issues.

Somewhere, Etienne Gilson said he could imagine St. Thomas Aquinas throwing up his hands in frustration as he tried to make sense of the paganistic babblings of Pseudo-Dionysius. And a great cry came forth, “What does all this have to do with Christianity?” In fact, Aquinas’ respect for the data of our senses and his strong tendency to use common sense to order that data would have rendered Neoplatonism repugnant to him, however much he felt forced to put angels and demons into his system of thought as decorative elements.

Plotinus and his followers had introduced great confusion into their concept of being and beings and that confusion was appealing to some Christian Fathers, some of whom should have known better. The sorts of confusion which allow wishful thinking and the avoidance of discipline and hard-work has remained popular. For the more abstract-minded out there, the first error of Plotinus was to derive the nature of being from first principles and not from what can be seen in what lay around him. Plato also was somewhat committed to this error but was also committed to the principle he gave to the astronomers/astrologers of his day: Save the phenomena. To give a flavor of Plato’s situation by way of an unfair characterization: He was committed to both wishful thinking and scientific observation. Plotinus wasn’t much worried about the real world or its phenomena.

The Neoplatonic errors in being led Plotinus to the belief that an impersonal and impassive God—having nothing to do with the God of Jesus Christ—couldn’t even know that this imperfect world existed. Mediators, such as angels and demons or a demiurge weren’t just an option. At least one god-like creature was necessary for any communication between God and His Creation.

Clearly this was a philosophy not conducive to Christianity and, so it was, that members of a contrary race—even St. Augustine of Hippo – chose to build their Christian theologies upon such unpromisingly swampland. To be sure, as intelligent readers have noticed (see Jacques Barzun’s dis-

cussion of Augustine's thought in *From Dawn to Decadence* [9]), Augustine moved from a paganistic and Neoplatonic philosophy in his youth towards a shockingly blunt physicalism in his later years and later works such as the later chapters of *The City of God* [104] where he ponders the fate of our nail-clippings when we're resurrected in the body and also jokes about those who can control their bodily functions so well as to make music with their farts.

But the early Augustine influenced later Christians greatly with his Neoplatonic errors, errors to which many are attracted in any case. Christian thought was soon turned away from efforts to understand the world created as an act of love by God and turned towards grotesque imagery of hierarchies of angels ascending to a God sitting majestically on a throne in Heaven. The Neoplatonic Christians did believe in the Biblical revelations and this business of the throne in Heaven was about the best they could do to see the God of Jesus Christ as the creator of a Neoplatonic world, but they'd signed a deal with the devil, so to speak, and we're now paying what's due.

In any case, though considered a major thinker, Plotinus and even his 'sort-of' follower St. Augustine in his earlier years, seemed to share the belief of occultists and magicians that mediating beings (angels and demons) somehow create breaks in logical laws and cause-and-effect relationships. This gives a philosopher or theologian or ordinary believer an immense amount of freedom to exercise his imagination in an undisciplined manner. This unleashing of human thought about being from the empirical world has continued to be a blessing for those who are befuddled enough to draw part of their worldview from modern science and part from ancient superstitions about gods, our angels and demons, who were seen as movers of planets and agents of disease. Now their major task is to take the responsibility for our failure to pass on Christian beliefs or even civilized moral behavior to our children.

It's not that creatures of the sort of angels and demons are inherently impossible. It is true that they don't make sense to us as creatures of this universe unless they make sense in terms of what we know and believe about this universe, this phase of God's Creation. And no one has made sense of them in such a way. If anyone wishes to tell us how angels fit into a universe in which creaturely substance is so well-described by Einstein and Heisenberg, they're free to do so. And this universe as it is so powerfully and deeply understood isn't porous to different sorts of creaturely being.

This points to another reason to have a clear Christian philosophy: God Himself seems impossible in this universe if He's seen as having substantial being or at least He'd be excluded from this universe. I'll talk about this in later entries.

Let me put it bluntly:

We Christians have, quite literally, no coherent and rational way to talk about our most important beliefs.

We sound like lunatics both when we speak of our belief in a resurrection of the body and when we babble on about angels and Satan and even when we speak of God the Creator of this universe. Why do we sound like lunatics? Because 99% of our lives are spent talking the talk and walking the walk of a modern empirical viewpoint in which known creatures, including human beings, communicate by means of energy transfers mediated by particles. I happen to believe that modern empirical knowledge is the best way to understand this universe, this phase of God's Creation, but the immediate problem isn't even ultimate truths so much as incoherence, sheer irrationality.

Let me put the issue into slogans:

1. You can't have both Satan and MRIs.
2. You can't have both St. Michael and the National Hurricane Center.
3. You can't have the entire complex of angels and demons and also a rational understanding of modern history.
4. You can't have the God of Jesus Christ and also Neoplatonic wish-thinking.

There are certainly signs that many are beginning to see that modern-day Christians preach an irrational way of thought. As I noted above, we're paying the price for the deal our ancestors made with the devil, a deal we're struggling desperately to maintain. I see signs that many believers are unsettled and uncertain in their beliefs because they can see the validity of the criticisms of Christianity as it is preached and taught and written about in the modern world. Sure, the ordinary citizen doesn't understand these matters explicitly but that's never mattered. It's certainly doubtful that many

believers or scholars or artists understood the Augustinian underpinnings of their culture in the Middle Ages though post-Roman European culture was founded upon Augustinian foundations.

The ordinary believer knows something is wrong but he can't say what other than to wonder aloud why his children and grandchildren aren't sitting next to him in the pew. What's far more disturbing for now is that very few priests and ministers show any explicit awareness of what's gone wrong. Many of those clergymen are floundering about, aware that something has gone wrong but they can only vaguely blame Satan or a corrupt media for their sins of omission and our sins as well. Those well-intentioned men do much and accomplish many things but fail utterly at one of the most important things: nurturing the faith of the children and bringing to Christ those who left Christianity or were never baptized. Look out into the emptying pews. That's one of the signs that Christian faithful, clergymen and laymen alike, can't convince their children or friends that the God of Jesus Christ is the Creator of Einstein's universe.

Undoubtedly, most priests and ministers have a strong respect for modern empirical knowledge and at least some doubts about some speculations in the Christian traditions, but they go on babbling about Adam and Eve and original sin as if it were a revealed truth. Each time they do that, some bright 13 year-old who visits the *National Geographic* website each week will sneer to himself, "Right, two apes ate an apple and put me on the road to Hell and the only way I can save myself is to listen to this guy talk about a wise and loving God." That's a more explicit rejection than will usually occur. The more typical cases will be like my own situation. After being given membership in the Congregationalist church in which I was raised, I would have stopped going to church because there really didn't seem much point to it. I continued as a companion to my grandmother out of respect for her but stopped attending church for 15 years after I left for college.

Human beings have never gone to church or synagogue or temple just to sing to some Ethereal Fluff in the sky. They go when they have a reason to fear or love a God or gods who play a role in their world. In other words, they want a God or gods which give evidence of being real, a God or gods which are more than decorations for their inner-lives. Human beings want divinity with some oomph to it.

I hate having to write in such negative terms because the real point is that God is the Creator of the world in which we live, a world open to empirical investigation. What if it's a world bereft of the foo-foo stuff of

paganism or sloppy wish-thought philosophy? That doesn't matter. In fact, it seems a better world for being what it is instead of being Neoplatonic.

The real work, and the fun work, is the hard study and thought which will allow Christian thinkers to make sense of the world on its own terms. If talented, hard-working young thinkers can be turned to this work, then Christians might even start playing a role in forming the cultures in which we live. We might be able to walk out of the intellectual ghettos in which far too many devout Christians live. We might be able to speak in terms that make sense given what we now know about this universe, this phase of God's Creation. We might even give our children and our neighbors reason to wonder if the God of Jesus Christ might be the Creator of all those stars and gas clouds, rattlesnakes and rabbits.

## 22 Can Hellenistic Metaphysics be Baptized—Part 2?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=145>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/04/23.]

In this chapter, I continue with an analysis started in Chapter 21, *Can Hellenistic Metaphysics be Baptized—Part 1?*

Recent centuries have seen a mysterious retreat from the mainstream of modern thought on the part of Catholic clergymen and also Catholic laymen whose intellectual work is oriented directly to the needs of Christianity. I'm far from being a well-read historian but I've read enough survey works to see the retreat of Catholic thinkers into ghettos which seems to have taken place by at least the time of the Renaissance. Catholic thinkers, some very competent in their sadly limited expertise, often emerge from the walls of those ghettos to snipe at those who work in the mainstream. The main complaint of those snipers seems to be: those non-Catholics have developed worldviews which don't give proper respect to Catholic beliefs.

Let me state a general principle:

If you think you have some important information of any sort, information perhaps dependent upon a particular viewpoint for its complete understanding, then you are the one who has the responsibility of giving that information to other human beings in a plausible form.

Kant and Descartes and Darwin were under no obligation to teach a Catholic view of human moral nature if they didn't hold Catholic beliefs. Rather than just sniping at them, some Catholic should have come forward

to make better sense of physical reality than Descartes and Kant and Darwin. Instead, the best of them sniped and then proposed a view of this phase of God's Creation which makes little sense and shows great confusion. Some seem to think that Einstein is right in his description of the nature of space, time, and matter, but Pseudo-Dionysius is also right in his blabber about angelic beings. In fact, many are the Catholic thinkers who show the shallowness of their knowledge and the weakness of their minds by their lack of understanding that it was Einstein and not Darwin nor Kant who shot down the world in which demons and angels teem. I've written in Chapter 186 and Chapter 187 of the great gift Einstein gave us in his concept of this universe—though he himself saw this universe only gradually and with some reluctance.

A Christian thinker doesn't fulfill his responsibilities by playing to the pious practices of those of simple faith nor does he show much rationality when he uses elaborate theological structures to justify peasant superstitions while ignoring empirical knowledge. Whether priest or layman, he needs to be nurturing a faith that can accept those aspects of God's world which are in conflict with those pious practices and simple faith. That task can be carried out only by those who have a strong faith that even the nastiest discoveries of modern evolutionary biologists work towards God's good purposes. It takes commitment and personal discipline to keep up with modern empirical knowledge so that problems can be anticipated. As matters stand, Christian leaders aren't even responding to existing problems, preferring to place the blame upon anti-Christian scientists and philosophers for the disconnects between their favorite theological systems and knowledge of the real world. It's the younger Christians who grow up with that knowledge of the real world who have suffered by losing their faith. And the reaction is to pray for them a little and continue on with business as usual. "Surely, it can't be our fault because we're wonderful and we're comfortable with all this talk of St. Michael and Satan and Adam and Eve who sinned and pushed all of us in the direction of Hell." Those young men and women and many others are leaving because they have no reason to believe that Christianity has much to do with reality.

It began with that retreat by priests and other Catholic intellectual leaders, that is, the retreat from the responsibility to make sense of the real world as being part of the Creation of the God of Jesus Christ. It was a funny sort of retreat because Catholics and Protestants alike maintained very high standards of scholarship in, for example, Bible and language stud-

ies where discoveries in modern times have done a lot of damage to pious views of the Bible. Why have moral theologians not followed by developing a system of natural law theory which properly uses the discoveries of modern evolutionary biologists and brain-scientists? It's clear to me that God isn't going to let us live peacefully in our piously constructed views of this world.

In truth, the Church has never expected most priests to become high-level intellectuals. There have been some places and times when priests were barely literate. Nowadays. . . I wonder how many Catholic priests and seminarians have the skills to critically read a difficult book, such as St. Augustine's *City of God*. I wonder how many seminarians could fulfill an assignment to identify some key points where the arguments of Augustine or Aquinas break down because those arguments depend upon empirical knowledge now known to be incomplete or defective. My personal experience is that, as amazing as it seems, Catholics who read *The City of God* do so without realizing it to be one of the most complex books of sophisticated speculation ever written. In terms and style that made sense in light of the empirical knowledge of his age, St. Augustine did very much what I did in my book *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41].

If those seminarians and priests can't read the great books of the past in the context of the periods of those books, if they can't read a book in light of the author's assumptions—having first the skills to identify those assumptions, they aren't going to be able to speak intelligibly to those who have grown up in an age where it takes a struggle and even a bit of creativity to think and speak of the real world in Catholic terms or even in weaker Christian terms.

So many Catholic and Protestant clergymen, as well as lay intellectuals, are able to function competently in their liturgical or spiritual lives while also functioning competently in a world which presents itself to modern eyes as being incompatible with Christian ways of thought developed in past centuries. The very fact that they can function so well with one foot in two different realms of truth is itself a sign they hold, if only implicitly, a very strange idea of what truth is and of what reality is.



## 23 Pseudo-Dionysius

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, <http://loydfueston.com/?p=151>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/05/16.]

In a news item from the 2008-05-14 newsletter of the Vatican Information Service, we can read:

### PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE: MEDIATION AND DIALOGUE

VATICAN CITY, 14 MAY 2008 (VIS) - In today's general audience, held in St. Peter's Square, the Holy Father resumed his series of catecheses on the Fathers of the Church, concentrating his remarks on the figure of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite whose aim, said the Pope, was "to place Greek wisdom at the service of the Gospel".

Benedict XVI explained how, during a period marked by "harsh disputes following the Council of Chalcedon", this sixth-century author affirmed the fact that "the light of truth . . . eradicates error and brings the good to shine forth. With this principle he purified Greek thought, bringing it into relation with the Gospel".

The Pseudo-Dionysius used Greek polytheism "to show the truth of Christ and transform the polytheistic world into a cosmos created by God" in which "all creatures together reflect the truth of God."

"Because the creature is a glorification of God, the Pseudo-Dionysius' theology becomes a theological liturgy. God is found, above all, by praising Him and not just through reflection".

This Father of the Church created the first "great mystical theology. . . . With him the word 'mystical' took on a more

personal and intimate meaning: it expresses the soul's journey towards God. . . . The Pseudo-Dionysius shows that at the end of the road to God is God Himself, Who comes close to us in Jesus Christ".

"Today Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite assumes fresh relevance", said the Holy Father. "He appears as a greater mediator in the modern dialogue between Christianity and the mystical theologies of Asia, the well-known characteristic of which lies in their conviction that it cannot be said who God is, that He can be spoken of only in negative terms, . . . and that only by entering this experience of 'no' can He be reached".

Dialogue, said Benedict XVI "does not accept superficiality. It is when we enter deeply into the encounter with Christ that a vast area for dialogue opens before us. When one meets the light of truth, one realises that it is a light for everyone: disputes disappear and it becomes possible to understand one another, or at least to speak to and approach one another". AG/ PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS AREOPAGITE/. . . VIS 080514 (370)

Maybe Pseudo-Dionysius can be a mediator in a dialogue with mystics of Asia, though I find Pseudo-Dionysius's writings strange almost to the point of repulsiveness. To be sure, those writings are rational in a sense, but it's entirely what I call a 'top-down' rationality, a worldview imagined without a lot of contact with the nitty-gritty details of this world God inconveniently made. There are undoubtedly some Christian missionaries who can serve God by reaching out to those mystics of Asia, but it's dangerous right now for the Church, or her separated sisters, to be reaching out publicly in this way when our main ways of expressing the faith have already become implausible to so many in the West, including most young adults who'd been raised as Christians but educated in secular settings in which the knowledge presented is not so much biased as de-contextualized.

I would propose we Western Christians examine our thoughts and feelings to try to understand why Christianity is suddenly implausible even in a Christian culture before courting Asian mystics. My take on the situation is very simple: Christian thinkers fell into the trap set by Spinoza and his theories of separate realms of knowledge, theories which not only consigned theologians to various ghettos but also turned theology and philosophy into studies of fairy-tales. We need to reestablish Christian connections to God's

Creation before we go chasing after polytheistically grounded conversations with Asian mystics.

An honest, and non-hostile, confrontation with modern empirical knowledge should lead to a regrounding of Christian thinking so that it could deal with God's Creation from the standpoint of Christian revealed truths. Stated more positively:

1. The Einsteinian view (speaking loosely) gives us a universe which plausibly can have the properties of a world as I define it: unity, coherence, and completeness. Just as importantly, modern physics and mathematics give us the possibility of defining this universe explicitly as a phase of something greater, all of Creation, which might have another phase which we could call Heaven.
2. Cosmological physics, evolutionary biology, history, literary and linguistic exegesis, and other fields give us the possibility of seeing this universe as a world which is a well-ordered moral narrative, where the highest level of order is determined by God's purposes which we know only through revelation. As I see matters, a world, unified and coherent and complete, without being this sort of a living story.

We need to understand the historical importance of Spinoza, a distinctly non-liberal thinker, who taught liberals how to divide reality into realms of knowledge which weren't even contiguous let alone overlapping or even, the Deity forbid, parts of one unified realm of truths. We have an opportunity to undo this particularly damaging aspect of modern thought while keeping those many truer aspects of modern thought and also keeping all those piles of partially digested modern knowledge which can become true knowledge. We can do this by adhering to a consistent Thomistic existentialism, updated in its view of Creation to consider modern empirical knowledge.

Against Pseudo-Dionysius's books, I'd propose the intellectual biography of St. Augustine, a man whose early writings, even as a Christian, were in the same vein as Pseudo-Dionysius. By the end of *The City of God* [104], he'd become so strong a physicalist that he wasn't so much concerned with angelic hierarchies as he was with such questions as: what happens to all our nail parings and hair clippings from our mortal existence when we participate in the bodily resurrection? He was also so concerned with bodily control, not control of an evil body but control of our very selves, that he

made a rather vulgar joke about a man who could fart out a musical tune. Most readers seem not to notice such disturbing trends in the thought of the great bishop of Hippo. St. Augustine of Hippo led us away from the types of thought we read in the books of Pseudo-Dionysius. Strange it was that Pseudo-Dionysius didn't learn the lesson since he followed Augustine by a century or so.

Etienne Gilson didn't think highly of Augustine as a philosopher though admitting freely that great bishop was likely the greatest of all Christian theologians, but I think Gilson didn't give enough credit to Augustine for a very difficult journey not by way of ascension but rather by coming to a better understanding of empirical reality including his own human nature and also his immediate environment and even his historical context. Gilson does note that Augustine was a brilliant psychologist as well as a genius at theology. In that vein, a little meditation on Augustine's main insight into the psyche of man will bear fruit: God is more deeply inside of us than we can ourselves reach. As the Creator and sustainer of the stuff and entities of His story, the Almighty is also so deeply inside those genes and the nasty events of evolution, that we can't see Him without a serious effort to understand the empirical levels of that story.

We don't approach God so much as we become more aware of His immediate presence. We develop that awareness by listening with God as He speaks so that we can speak and talk along with Him as well. We don't ascend to Him by ladders built of human dream-stuff. When Einstein tried to impose his own preconceptions upon Creation: "God doesn't play dice with the universe," Bohr responded (perhaps): "Don't you tell God what to do." See Chapter 13, *Einstein and Bohr: Don't tell God what to do!* for a very short discussion.

We are soaked no longer in Christ in the conventional way but we are soaked in poorly digested knowledge of Christ's Creation. This tells us what we need to do to preach the Good News of Christ to our neighbors and our children and to most modern Asians. Anyone who wants more details or further arguments can explore the writings in my weblog, *Acts of Being* [38] or join the few, the silent, the readers of my first published book: *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41].

## 24 Extraterrestrial Life

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, <http://loydfueston.com/?p=154>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/05/20.]

An astronomer at the Vatican Observatory has said, in a very confused way so far as I can tell, that the question of extraterrestrial life is an empirical question. (See *Could ET be Our Brother?* found at the website <http://fatherroderick.sqpn.com/>).

This is old news. In 1277, in what seems to have been a confused encyclopedia of condemnations, Etienne Tempier—Archbishop of Paris, did seem to make the point that we can't override God's freedom as a Creator by human dogmas, even if those are derived from the works of the greatest and most authoritative of philosophers.

Some historians think that some, or many, of Tempier's condemnations were aimed at Aquinas. (There is apparently some evidence that Tempier had prepared a specific set of condemnations of the work of Aquinas and was told to bury it by the Curia.) I would support the major thrust of Tempier's condemnations while also arguing that Aquinas, with some inconsistencies that greatly upset Pierre Duhem and others, was one of the best empirical thinkers we know of. For a Christian to be an empirical thinker is the same as for a Christian to recognize God's freedom as a Creator.

The problem is: when we try to understand natural revelations, those found in God's Creation, we can see not the transcendental God but rather a 'Zeus', a Demiurge, a mask, implied by the specific, free-will acts of that true God who lies beyond our perception and even beyond all possible human thought in some sense. (See Chapter 574.) To see the transcendental God, even dimly, we must see Him in Jesus Christ and by way of rising above the immediately empirical to see this world, the story God is telling, in the context of the Son's incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. What

I've seen is humbling. Creation isn't about us but rather about an act of self-sacrificing love made by the Son in submission to His Father.

And that leads to the real problem in the discussions about this interview with that Vatican astronomer. Some commentators seem to think the issue comes down to: if there are intelligent forms of life out there, will they share our redemption? There's an assumption here that a creature advanced to a certain stage 'deserves' to be redeemed and resurrected into life without end.

A little clear thought based on the Gospels should tell us we were offered redemption because the Son of God chose to take up a human nature to His divine Person. We don't deserve to be redeemed nor do we, as finite and mortal creatures, 'need' to be redeemed. Redemption came to us as a totally free gift as a result of a drama, involving mostly the Father and the Son, in which we played a supporting role. At the same time, Christ loved us because He had chosen to become one of us and had first loved His holy mother and then others around Him as He lived His 35 or so years as a mortal man.

Redemption isn't a prize given at some rung on the ladder of evolution. It's a matter of Christ taking us up to His Father along with His own human nature. Modern empirical knowledge seen in light of the Good News of Jesus Christ leaves open the possibility that we might one day meet a race more advanced than us in many ways and yet not redeemed by Christ. We might meet a race of god-like beings whose existence ends absolutely at the death of their mortal beings.

## 25 Broadening the Horizons of Reason

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, <http://loydfueston.com/?p=159>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/06/09.]

I've included the entirety of an article from the Vatican Information Service. Pope Benedict XVI has spoken publicly about an important issue he addressed in some of his earlier books: Christian philosophy must respond to modernity and theology must also respond, though he apparently believes—plausibly enough—that theology will respond first to an updated philosophy.

Pope Benedict tells us, “Modernity is not simply a historically-datable cultural phenomenon; in reality it requires a new focus, a more exact understanding of the nature of man.” This is a good start though I would say that an understanding of man, a creature of this universe whatever our fate might be beyond the grave, requires some substantial understanding of the universe. Christian philosophers need first to deal with the work of Einstein, Gödel, and their successors. Then they need to deal with Darwin and his successors, especially the current generation of brain-scientists. General relativity and quantum mechanics and, likely, string theory, and many fields of mathematics, tell us much about the nature of the being that God shaped into this universe and also some speculatively much about the underlying being which was the raw material God created from nothing. History and other fields of empirical knowledge also have much to say but we have to start with the basics of the pesky stuff we're made from before we can more fully understand the story God is telling with this stuff.

Like it or not, geometries of space-time and the facts of electrons and electromagnetic fields provide the most certain knowledge we have of created

being. A whole variety of empirical fields, from history to transfinite set theory, provide us with a more complete view of this universe, one which could then be disciplined to a Christian understanding of this universe as a world—which I define as a universe seen in light of God’s purposes. A world is much like a morally ordered narrative. But it will require a lot of work to build a philosophy founded upon being rather than “myth” or the “gods of religion”. And we have to realize it will be not only a great effort but also a disorienting effort. See Chapter 69 for a discussion of this issue. Note I say Hellenistic metaphysics is too small, not that it’s wrong.

If anyone wishes to see a first shot at just such a system of thought as Pope Benedict would desire, they can check into my first published book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41]. I’ve also completed a book on the nature of human knowledge which can be downloaded for free, *Four Kinds of Knowledge* [43]. And I’ve gone beyond the thoughts in those books in the short essays posted on my weblog, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/>.

#### POPE HIGHLIGHTS THE VITAL ROLE OF PHILOSOPHY

VATICAN CITY, 7 JUN 2008 (VIS) - This morning in the Vatican, the Holy Father received participants in the sixth European Symposium of University Professors, which is being held in Rome from 4 to 7 June on the theme: “Broadening the Horizons of Reason. Prospects for Philosophy”.

The symposium has been promoted by university professors in Rome and organised by the Office for Pastoral Care in Universities of the Vicariate of Rome, in collaboration with regional and provincial institutions and the local city authorities.

In opening his address to them the Pope mentioned the fact that this year marks the tenth anniversary of John Paul II’s Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, and he recalled how when that document was published “fifty professors of philosophy in Roman universities expressed their gratitude to the Pope with a declaration underlining the importance of re-launching the study of philosophy in universities and schools”.

“The events of the years that have passed since the publication of the Encyclical have”, said the Holy Father, “delineated more clearly the historical and cultural stage onto which

philosophical research is called to enter. Indeed, the crisis of modernity is not a symptom of the decline of philosophy; on the contrary, philosophy must embark upon new lines of research in order to understand the true nature of that crisis”.

“Modernity is not simply a historically-datable cultural phenomenon; in reality it requires a new focus, a more exact understanding of the nature of man”.

Benedict XVI indicated that since the beginning of his pontificate he had received various suggestions “from men and women of our time”, and that “in the light of these I have decided to offer a research proposal which I feel may arouse interest in a relaunch of philosophy and of its unique role within the modern academic and cultural world”.

Quoting his own book, *Introduction to Christianity*, he said: “The Christian faith has made a clear choice: against the gods of religion for the God of the philosophers, in other words against the myth of custom and for the truth of being”. And he went on: “This affirmation . . . is still fully relevant in the historical-cultural context in which we now live. Indeed, only on the basis of this premise - which is historical and theological at one and the same time - is it possible to respond to the new expectations of philosophy. The risk that religion, even the Christian religion, be surreptitiously manipulated, is very real even today.”

“The proposal to ‘Broaden the Horizons of Reason’ should” he proceeded, “be understood as a request for a new openness towards the reality to which human beings in their uni-totality are called, overcoming old prejudices and reductive viewpoints in order to open the way to a new understanding of modernity”.

“The new dialogue between faith and reason which is needed today cannot come about in the terms and the ways it did in the past”, said the Pope. “If it does not want to see itself reduced to the status of sterile intellectual exercise, it must start from the current real situation of mankind, and upon that build a reflection that embraces man’s ontological and metaphysical truth”.

In closing, Benedict XVI referred to the need to “promote high-profile academic centres in which philosophy can enter into dialogue with other disciplines, in particular with theol-

ogy, to favour new cultural syntheses capable of guiding society". In this context, he expressed the hope that "Catholic academic institutions may be ready to create true cultural laboratories" and he invited the professors to encourage young people "to commit themselves to philosophical studies by facilitating appropriate initiatives" to guide them in that direction. AC/.../UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS VIS 080609 (620)

## 26 Let's Engage the World, Not Attack Errors

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, <http://loydfueston.com/?p=177>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/08/21.]

Today, August 21, is the feast-day of St. Pius X who was Pope from 1903-1914. A saintly man for sure, he was born into poverty and lived an ascetic and morally disciplined life, being greatly concerned about pastoral issues. He gave high priority to the needs of ordinary Catholics and was also greatly concerned with the poor and the confused of all faiths.

Yet, as was true of most Catholic leaders and Catholic thinkers over the previous four centuries, and remains true of most today, he failed to deal in a positive, open-minded, and open-hearted way to modern knowledge even when it was straightforward knowledge about the physical things of God's world. He attacked errors and did it in such a way that outsiders couldn't see the positive content of traditional Catholic thought. Then again, part of the problem was the inability of Catholic thinkers to even see they'd locked themselves in a ghetto of sorts.

There were various reasons for the estrangement of Catholic thought from the mainstream of human thought since at least the 1600s and it wasn't just the truly or falsely perceived errors in that mainstream. Catholic thinkers failed to notice a truth discussed by John Henry Newman, an older contemporary of Pius X: even the most absolute of truths must be restated in each age of man as human language inevitably changes. Truths stated in the words and concepts of an earlier age can become errors. Sometimes, Catholics have participated in those language changes unconscious of the effects upon statements of Christian belief. For example, Catholic pro-lifers join other pro-lifers in claiming that we're human persons at conception,

confusing the traditional distinction between 'person' and 'nature'. Was Jesus Christ a human person at conception? If not, He was different from us, not a true man. If He was a human person at birth, then He couldn't have been a divine Person, the Son of God, unless we use a confused understanding of 'person'. In fact, we're particular manifestations of human nature at birth and become human persons to the extent we become Christ-like and take on attributes analogous to those of the only three true Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And this points to a major problem: it isn't those outside Christianity who are distorting the meaning of a word, 'person', necessary to express Christian beliefs. In this case, Christians who try to achieve one good, helping to protect the defenseless, are damaging their own capacity to clearly express their beliefs or teach those beliefs to others. The more general problem is the one noted by Cardinal Newman. Words and concepts change over time as we move forward in God's story. If we're unwise in either trying to continue speaking old truths in old words, or in adjusting our words without paying attention to their effect on old truths, we'll turn those old truths into lies.

The underlying problem, which even Newman seemed not to understand clearly, has to do with empirical knowledge, knowledge of this phase of God's Creation—our universe. This is knowledge which I claim to have expanded to include increasingly plausible speculations about other phases of Creation, even plausible speculations about some very fundamental aspects of Creation. We have huge piles of empirical knowledge, much of which has not been properly organized from any perspective and very little has been organized from any Christian perspective, a strange situation since St. Thomas Aquinas seems to be exactly the hardheaded empirical thinker who can give us ways of dealing with modern knowledge of history and biology and physical matter at a fundamental level, even our disquieting knowledge of the history of Christianity and Judaism, including the sometimes strange history of the Bible. To his credit, St. Pius X had an instinct that Aquinas is that sort of important thinker but seemed to have a poor understanding of the Thomistic method which would lead a modern follower of Thomas to a respectful encounter with modern empirical knowledge as one way of enriching our understanding of Christian beliefs.

As one example of the refusal of Catholic thinkers to deal with modern empirical knowledge: they'll claim to accept some version of evolutionary biology and then speak to their children and others as if there were a special creation of Adam and Eve. Many of the individuals who do that may

not believe in that special creation and some may even realize there is a contradiction that makes their teachings sound like gibberish to children and adults who live in a world where television regularly broadcasts specials about all those bones dug out of the sands in Africa. There are still deeper problems in understanding the nature of being in Creation but those are more complex and require more explanation. The interested reader can explore this blog, starting with the category *Christian in the Universe of Einstein* found at <http://loydfueston.com/?cat=29>.

Pius X was aware that something was seriously wrong, aware that the world was not truly hearing what the Catholic Church had to say—not that I’m claiming that a fair hearing would necessarily lead to mass conversions. While Pius X was still a young man, John Henry Cardinal Newman was finishing up a productive life in which he’d helped to make possible a respectful self-critique of Catholic teachings and Catholic ways of speaking.

We’re in far better shape now. Pope John Paul II was open to modern empirical knowledge though I really don’t know if he had any serious knowledge of the specialized fields. Pope Benedict XVI is also open to modern empirical knowledge and has serious knowledge of at least medical biology. He’s also aware of the problems in a Catholic understanding of being that is not ‘broad’ enough given what we now know of the observable aspects of being in this universe—see Chapter 25, *Broadening the Scope of Human Reason*. I’ve also made a respectful criticism of his speech at Regensburg—see Chapter 69, *Hellenistic Metaphysics is Too Small*. In retrospect, I may have been a little unfair because he might have been simply noting the truth of Hellenistic metaphysics and not claiming that truth to be nearly rich enough to describe being as implied by modern empirical knowledge, gravitational theory and particle physics and quantum mechanics and transfinite set theory and random number theory and so forth.

Pius X saw some of the errors which had taken root outside of the Catholic ghetto, errors which were naturally enough seeding themselves inside the ghetto as well. The Fathers of Vatican II threw open many of the gates and doors of the ghetto, knowing that God doesn’t want us to protect our faith by isolating ourselves from the greater part of the human world. Catholics responded with the joy of children being released from a dreary school but remained inside, taking advantage of their freedom more often than not by developing unattractive forms of worship and by destroying many of their valuable institutions. Others left the ghettos as a first step in leaving the Catholic Church or even Christianity of any sort. Pope

John Paul II told Catholics, and others who listened: “Do not be afraid.” Engage the world with open hearts and open minds. Pope Benedict XVI has developed a reputation as a reactionary in some circles, partly because he wants to stop some of the silly celebrations of those who’ve not yet found the faith or courage to leave the ghetto, but he’s also trying to nurture that faith and courage in at least Catholic intellectuals that they might leave the ghetto to engage the outside world in a respectful give-and-take.

Better times are on the way for Catholic thinkers but I don’t expect to see them arrive during my mortal years.

## 27 Preliminary Thoughts on Causation

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, <http://loydfueston.com/?p=182>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/09/23.]

I've defended the legitimacy of philosophy in this age of empirical thought and will continue to do so but I admit to being less than impressed with the state of philosophical thought about causation. It strikes me as being localized in the way of pre-modern physics and pre-modern geometry. Localized physics (such as special relativity) and localized geometry (such as Euclidean geometry) has its valid applications in human thought, including analysis of our universe, but most events and states of being in the universe can't be understood by billiard ball physics. And that's the comparison which is appropriate for the first stages of my efforts to understand causation from a more 'modern' viewpoint.

We are ourselves organisms and are not some sort of immaterial point-like entity, mind or soul or free-will or whatever, which is imprisoned in a body. Nor are we even controlled in any direct way by a highly focused region of the human brain. Many philosophical thoughts and literary images of human nature seem to fall under the illusion that our true selves are autonomous agents which exist in extension-free points, perhaps in our brains. In fact, our selves are distributed over our entire body and over our immediate environments through our relationships with other human beings, non-human beings, things, weather, and so forth. Certainly, the prefrontal lobes are more 'us' in some real sense than our little toe is but I'm advocating a model similar to a field in physics in which that little toe has a certain 'intensity of us-ness' but the prefrontal lobe has a greater intensity. Neuroscientists often speak this way but typically as if this 'us-ness' is

purely a mental construction rather than being reflective of relationships to an objective external world.

Since I'm currently trying to take on causation, I'm viewing the human being in his role as a moral agent but one that is an organism extended through space. Admittedly, the space occupied by even an NFL defensive tackle is pretty small in the greater scheme of things, but the point is that neither that tackle nor I are concentrated at one point of 'moral agency', call it soul or mind if you will. The non-locality of an organ, the spread of being through flesh and bone, liver and brain, is different from the non-local aspects of modern physics, but physics describes the stuff of our physical beings and our properties as complex beings depend upon the possibilities of our basic stuff. We become aliens when we inhabit a world of electromagnetic fields, quantum waves, and gravity which is a shaping of spacetime and then pretend ourselves to be describable in terms drawn from much simpler physics and mathematics than that used for classical fields or quantum mechanics or modern gravitational theory. As I've discussed in earlier writings, it might even be that the ethereal feel of our minds might tell us that those minds reside in electromagnetic fields generated by our brains. (Other more exotic possibilities are far more speculative.) Yet, mostly would I propose that our minds are the relationships our physical organisms form with other part of our own organisms or with external entities including our environments or greater realms of Creation. For now, various speculative models of the mind are possible but the evidence would indicate that only non-local models are plausible.

If a human mind can encapsulate the world—as I've claimed in my writings, then that man with a mind will begin to see causation in the context of that more complex world. Those relationships and strange entities found by modern physics in the realm of the very small and the very large are far richer than pre-modern empirical knowledge would indicate. Modern empirical knowledge hints of possibilities which seem the stuff of dreams to some and of nightmares to others.

Are these larger-scale and smaller-scale realms of being relevant to a man qua man? Do strange forms of physical interaction and strange relationships between strange entities mean anything to us in making sense of our lives? Do they mean anything in our moral lives? Or should we stick to forms of reasoning which correspond roughly to physics and mathematics as understood at the time of Aristotle? And that's the problem. Metaphysical reasoning, including the analysis of causation, concerns understanding

of being in its totality. The aspects of being described by physics and mathematics are but part of that totality but there must be a coherence. Modern physics and modern mathematics don't fit well inside a totality which was originally constructed with thoughts which included pre-modern physics and pre-modern mathematics.

The strangeness of quantum mechanics isn't just grist for our mental mills, it's the foundation of stability in physical being. The modern gravitational theories and the cosmological theories they spawned are also not just grist for our mental mills, they indicate a surprising sort of unity of physical being in this universe. The modern expansion of the very concept of what mathematics is also isn't just grist for our mental mills, but rather hints of the ever broader horizons of reason which are found in Creation when human thinkers allow themselves to respond wholeheartedly to such hints.

We need new languages and new concepts for our understanding of causation in Creation and for the moral discourse which can flow from an enriched understanding of causation. We need words and phrases and images which speak of man as a being spread out over time and space, a morally coherent agent but not one tightly focused and able to make free-will decisions independent of his environment, including the causative factors which work upon his being or even the effects which will come from his acts.

We need to see ourselves, as causative agents and objects, in terms analogical to interfaces over manifolds. We need to think in terms of many to one or many to many or even one to many. This doesn't mean we should replace a failed moral calculus with a moral tensor calculus. It does mean that we should recognize that as creatures born into this universe, creatures who develop in this universe, creatures with minds which can—at least in principle—encapsulate this world, our properties and our relationships with other creatures will be amongst the richer and more complex possibilities of this universe. So it is that we can learn much from the expansion from Newtonian calculus to the tensor calculus used by Einstein to develop the general theory of relativity. A similar abstraction is necessary for us to gain an understanding of the more complex human being who lives in the context of a densely populated world of complex and abstract relationships, economic and political and social.

Creative thinkers, novelists as well as philosophers and scientists, need to soak themselves in the new views of physical reality that new words and concepts might emerge in strange images and metaphors which will be

stumbling blocks to all those with rigid ways of thought. I'm trying to do this myself, though my middle-aged brain is responding somewhat slowly to relearning the knowledge I'd learned poorly as an unmotivated math major in college and to learning from scratch what was not covered before I'd dropped out of the 'higher' track in math and out of physics entirely. Yet, it's having some effect upon my thoughts.

Understanding the world comes not when we use some sort of preformed entity, material or immaterial, to process data gathered from the sands of Africa or the realms of deep-space. Understanding the world comes when we shape our minds in response to that data, making it ours in the deepest sense. That is, we begin to encapsulate those parts of our world which we perceive or can speculatively perceive.

## 28 The Practical Consequences of Inattention to God's World

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, <http://loydfueston.com/?p=519>. It was finished and uploaded on 2009/06/09.]

Americans, perhaps most human beings of the Modern Age, don't perceive what's inconvenient to their desired worldview. This is hardly a new observation—Tocqueville was puzzled by this trait back in the 1830s and others since, including Hawthorne and Melville and Solzhenitsyn and Ray Bradbury have at least spoken of this problem. Perhaps Tocqueville in *Democracy in America*, a book mostly complimentary to Americans, and Solzhenitsyn in his critiques of the West including the forward to the abridged edition of *The Gulag Archipelago*, were the most direct in their observations. Solzhenitsyn was forced into a renunciation of his almost unqualified high opinion of Americans by one specific spree of systematic criminal behavior committed by the U.S. Army according to agreements involving Roosevelt, Churchill, Truman, and Stalin—see *Operation Keelhaul* found at [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Operation\\_Keelhaul](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Operation_Keelhaul) for a summary discussion of the brutal betrayal of many Soviet refugees and even some descendants of refugees from prior generations. All the betrayed human beings were tricked or forced back to the Soviet Union where they were sometimes sent into slave labor camps and sometimes executed right in front of the Allied soldiers. Solzhenitsyn was forced to realize that Americans had been able to walk away from their crimes and to even wash their own memories of the horrors they'd participated in. We walked away with an unchanged view of our moral purity as a people—strangely enough, this is true even of those who have a good sense of their own nature as personal sinners.

Maybe, we should be careful in condemning the young soldiers who were probably confused about what was going on, but we have to place full responsibility upon the older and more experienced American and British participants in this crime, including chaplains and medical personnel and senior officers and State Department officials, who would have known pretty well what was happening. They kept their mouths shut in the same cowardly manner as the nice middle-class Germans who served Hitler rather than risking punishment or loss of respectability. Yet, we still have to ask even of those young soldiers: how many of them were paying enough attention to be suspicious at least when they saw the brutal executions of ex-POWs whose crime had been to be captured when Stalin had ordered them to fight to the death? Did they remember what they'd helped to do or had at least witnessed?

What frightens me about talking to those just older than me, Vietnam veterans, is the small percentage who were observant enough to notice, for example, the almost total lack of Viet Cong or North Vietnamese soldiers in the villages invaded by American troops. Some were deeply disturbed to find themselves fighting teenagers and old men who were fighting in front of their family homes and others either didn't notice the suspicious demographics, if that's a proper word for the age and sex distribution of corpses. Still others just echoed the government line that these people defending their villages were commies who didn't place any value on human life. They deserved to be shot down because they were trying to kill Americans who were only there to help the Vietnamese. Those who wish to read an account from a Washington perspective of an awakening awareness of the criminal nature of the war against the Vietnamese people can get hold of a copy of *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* by Robert S. McNamara and Brian VanDeMark. This book speaks about some of the policies set in Washington which led to American soldiers waging war upon Vietnamese civilians and also speaks of the willful ignorance of those managing the war when McNamara was able to confirm by his early access to the libraries of Kennedy and Johnson that the facts of a criminal war were sitting right in front of them during their many meetings where government officials crossed items off their to-do lists and worked towards their career goals before heading home in their nice cars to their nice homes with their nice families.

The sheep can't be deemed totally innocent but the primary blame belongs to the shepherds. Our moral and spiritual leaders, our so-called

thinkers, clergymen and philosophers, theologians and poets, political and business and civil-servant leaders have refused to pay attention to the world around us. Empirical reality has created problems to our established moral views to be sure and it's just when empirical knowledge threatens to be inconvenient that we human beings are strongly tempted to misperceive or ignore even the most obvious of facts. We need to pay attention most intensely just when empirical reality is most bothersome or most painful.

In fact, empirical knowledge seems to always come into conflict eventually with any set of ideas, political or economic, scientific or philosophical, technological or domestic. The Creator's thoughts lie always above and beyond us and those thoughts are best seen by way of human thoughts and human behaviors which are active responses to Creation and which prove to be appropriate responses. Even those few doctrines which we Christians claim to be revealed truths have had to be re-understood under the pressure of changing knowledge of empirical reality. For example, we believe God has promised a resurrection into life without end for those who belong to His Son, Jesus Christ. He didn't give us detailed instructions and we should pay more attention to modern biology, including evolutionary theories, as part of the process of understanding those promises of resurrection. After all, our inherited understandings of those promises were partly drawn from (often misunderstood) doctrines of pagan philosophers attempting to understand man's nature and his situation in the Cosmos. For example, the idea of the immortal soul held by the Christian Fathers came largely from Plato though there's no reason to believe that Plato's 'immortal soul' had anything to do with individual human beings.

To see truth, we first must pay attention to the things around us, to reliable histories of the West and of our own particular parts of it, to the best knowledge gathered by physicists and chemists and engineers, to the needs and desires of those around us, and to other aspects of empirical reality. In these early years of the 21st century, our environments include the abstract domains of modern mathematics as well as our best views of the space-time regions when the universe first expanded out from an extremely dense state. The environments of anyone who reads regularly or even watches decent documentaries on television also extend to ancient Egypt and to the highlands of Kenya.

Pay attention and think if you would ascend towards some plausible view of the nature and meaning of Creation and all the individual creatures it includes.

Right now, we Americans are paying a price for not paying attention because our economy has been gutted by the various criminal activities, domestic and foreign, of our government and big-business leaders. This isn't the place to discuss those details and there are others far better informed about the details than I am. I'm merely pointing out that we could have stopped this disaster years ago as it was developing but we didn't pay attention. As for me...I haven't voted for a major party candidate for President of the U.S. since 1988 and few other major party candidates for any political office in these past two decades. I even turned in a blank ballot once when there were no acceptable alternative candidates. For what it's worth, I also gave up any hope of ever receiving significant Social Security or Medicare benefits back in the late 1980s. These problems with our political and economic systems were not so hidden except to those who were willfully blind.

In any case, a morally well-ordered society, and all the attendant practical advantages, comes into being by actions that can only be proper if they are in response to a properly perceived world, a world to which we pay attention.

## 29 “Values Can’t be Drawn from Facts” and Other Old Philosophers’ Tales

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, <http://loydfueston.com/?p=676>. It was finished and uploaded on 2010/08/13.]

We’re told that David Hume proved that values can’t be drawn from facts. Most recently, I read of this alleged proof in an interesting and mostly unobjectionable book about the relationship between Protestant ways of reading texts and the origins of science, Peter Harrison’s *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science* [69]. I’ll pass over the issues of defining ‘facts’ or ‘values’ or ‘proof’ and go directly to an rough explanation of how it is that we do, in fact, draw values from a factual world. In Chapter 110 , *Intentionality as the Guide to Philosophical Thinking*, I discuss a quote of Sir Isaac Newton, perhaps reading into it too much, but I think not. He said:

I keep the subject of my inquiry constantly before me, and wait till the first dawning opens gradually, by little and little, into a full and clear light. [Sir Isaac Newton]

I understood him to say that truth is found, and a ‘true’ mind is formed, as an honestly and constantly lived response to reality as we can best know it. Such an intensely lived response will reshape our thoughts and minds. It will form our moral characters.

In my writings, I’ve been developing an understanding of created being, a subject to which I’ve recently returned as I’m trying to develop an understanding of moral and social and political aspects of human life. For now,

I'll just refer the reader to Chapter 596, *The Never-ending Project* where I summarized some aspects of my current understanding of created being. My understanding of created being can perhaps be more readily understood by some readers if they approach through my parallel understanding of the human mind and how it works. Part III, *The Human Mind as a Re-creation of God's Creation* Contains a number of chapters which develop my view of the human mind.

The process of shaping the mind in response to Creation ensures that we gain values which are found in Creation in its entirety, including the world of the resurrected as well as this world. Creation is the totality of created being and includes not only created being but also various levels of abstract being going right back to the thoughts God manifested as the basic, or raw, stuff of this Creation. The concrete values proper for men, flesh-and-blood creatures that we are, can be drawn from the narrative which is this concrete world in its movement towards an unknown future, but we can rise to higher moral levels by proper formation and use of our minds. This doesn't mean we transcend Creation but rather that we can begin to understand the purposes, let us even say the values God intends for His created works.

Movement. Evolution of species or classes. Development of individual entities.

Our moral instincts aren't a direct vision of some transcendental realm of truths. They come first from behaviors and attitudes which evolved in the human genetic line over millions of years. In fact, that process of evolution of moral nature started in pre-human lines of social mammals and, to some extent, in still earlier lines of living creatures.

At some time, the moral characters of our ancestors seemed to come into a tighter and more conscious state, partly because of a useful error in human thought. Once our ancestors had ascended, or descended as Darwin would have said, to a greater self-awareness, they concluded that our moral behavior is under direct, immediate control of those aware selves. In fact, we are creatures of moral action and it's been shown that, at least for certain easily measured actions, we start to act before the more conscious, higher regions of our brain show any sign of activity. I've written of this issue before and written a little about its practical effects, though arguably R.L. Stevenson spoke more graphically in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* about the dangers of the illusion that we can directly control our 'inner selves'. In fact, true values are useful as guides to human animals in strengthening

their moral characters but, for the most part, self-aware thinking plays a role by shaping our selves so that we act properly in the future, not by turning us into some sort of creature which can transcend by a heroic exercise of the will, for example, the powerful urges caused by a genetic problem. Values, moral abstractions in general, are necessary for the conscious shaping of our selves or our children, but our moral character is in that behavior, it is realized in our embodied selves and our actions. It's not just our 'good' feelings.

In my effort to communicate a view at odds with most views of human moral nature. I've spoken in past years of two sets of processes which have formed the human mind, including its moral aspects. In 2011, I realized that the communal aspects of our moral natures have to be considered separately, and so the list becomes:

1. We are born with certain tendencies toward behaviors and attitudes which are our 'moral instincts'. These are the results of selection processes working over many thousands of years upon particular genetic lines of highly social creatures with other characteristics such as an opportunistic attitude.
2. We are shaped as individuals as we respond actively to our environments. If there's a harsh side to my views on human nature, it's the implication that passive human animals never develop towards the state of human personhood.
3. We live in communities which teach us moral behaviors and values and those communities go through processes which I think to be similar to those of the evolution of biological species and also some processes similar to those of the development of the individual.<sup>1</sup>

These three processes exist at the concrete level of created being and the events which occur in the narrative which is this world. The second process, formation of the human mind, also exists at more abstract levels of created being. The third process involves communities of various types and sizes and abstract relationships are certainly involved. The entire process of understanding our own moral natures starts from awareness of the factual

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<sup>1</sup>There is some insight to be gained by contemplating the claim of the historian Carroll Quigley: Truth emerges in time through a communal process.

aspects of our own physical nature and continues when we begin to deal with those factual aspects through our intellectual faculties, that is, when we begin to draw abstractions from our concrete moral natures.

We place a high value on human life because we evolved as human beings in human societies, even though those societies might have been often no more than families. We have instincts against killing other human beings and most men even have great trouble killing another man, face-to-face, when it seems morally allowable. A humbling fact, which emphasizes the animal foundations of human moral nature, is that wolves seem to have stronger instincts than human beings against killing other members of their own species. A wolf will place higher value upon the life of another wolf than a man will place upon the life of another man. Human beings have developed higher moral principles, absolute principles, despite starting from a lower moral level of concrete behavior than wolves, in some respects.

In this brief survey, I'll also mention a problem which arises in the Gospels of Christianity. Jesus of Nazareth imposed some very difficult demands upon us, particularly His demands in the *Sermon on the Mount*. It's not clear why creatures in a world of Darwinian processes should love their enemies and not clear how to actually shape ourselves or our children to the higher demands of Christ, but we could—in principle—understand these matters. Some would say we should simply obey Christ but He called us to imitate Him, even to be perfect as God is, and didn't call us to simple, mindless obedience.

As St. Thomas Aquinas told us:

[J]ust as a disciple reaches an understanding of the teacher's wisdom by the words he hears from him, so man can reach an understanding of God's wisdom by examining the creatures He made. . . (Page 17 of St. Thomas Aquinas' commentary on *1 Corinthians* [3].)

By understanding how the Creator worked, we come to understand the thoughts He manifested in Creation. Within those divine thoughts, are what we call values, and we can make those thoughts our own by proper exploration of empirical reality and proper active response to it. Values can come from facts because the Creator chose the facts which surround us, like the abstractions, manifestations of God's thoughts. Even those

sometimes nasty facts which deal with the evolution of moral species and the development of moral individuals are part of the story God is telling.



## 30 A More Open Metaphysics and Political Philosophy

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, <http://loydfueston.com/?p=679>. It was finished and uploaded on 2010/08/25.]

We have to learn to move forward in our thought by trying to honestly perceive reality and to openheartedly respond to it while becoming aware of the distortions of the preconceptions we always bring to such tasks. This is a logical development of the insight we have inherited from Aquinas and a few of his truer disciples, an insight discovered independently by modern brain-scientists, that the human mind is formed by active responses to its environments. It can even be formed in response to some serious knowledge of a vast array of environments, of the universe, or of Creation in its entirety.

I've said this often but I wish to emphasize an aspect of this claim I'm just starting to explore as I wander through the streets of my town and also through the pages of biographies of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, tales of the American Constitutional Convention of 1789, political discussions by W.E.H. Lecky and Albert Jay Nock, and various works on particle physics and the history of thought in geometry. I should be, and soon will be, concentrating on matters of physical science, mathematics, and ontology as I prepare to get back to work on an enhanced summary of the worldview I've developed over the past 20 years or so. I hope that my thoughts on these political and social and moral aspects of created being will start maturing in the back of my mind so that I'll be able to move smoothly into these aspects after writing the summary of my views on the nature of the fundamental aspects of created being, largely concentrating on what we label as 'physics' and 'mathematics'.

So it is that I'll not provide for now even so much as a serious sketch

of how we can move forward in understanding our own political and social and moral natures—as they evolve under the environments we are ourselves changing rapidly though not in ways we can anticipate with any great accuracy. That is, we can understand what has happened and somewhat what is happening but we can't understand what the opportunities and problems will be for our grandchildren because we can't understand how they'll be living as individuals and as members of families, what technologies will be available to them, how they will understand their relationship to Creation and Creator, and so forth. True it is that we have to act in ways that will respond properly to our own circumstances without unduly constraining future generations, but I'm not yet ready to even speculate on real-world actions until I can better understand where we stand.

When trying to understand the vast changes in human life and human possibilities over the past few centuries, I find it hard to believe that so many think that our political possibilities are limited to a small catalog of political systems which can be readily controlled by perhaps a king or a small body of wealthy men, by a group of intellectuals gathered to write a constitution for the ages or by cigar-smoking big-cogs in political machines. I can well believe that men gather to conspire to some goal in their selfish interests but I can't believe they can do so effectively—though I agree with the conspiracy theorists to the extent of recognizing immense damage done by bankers who would control governments and or intelligence agencies murdering leaders in their own countries or around the world.

The CIA, or a cabal within it acting with perhaps the support of Texas oilmen and weapons manufacturers as well as key senators, might well have murdered President John Kennedy.

The Council for Foreign Relations and similar gatherings of bankers and intellectuals and politicians might well have played a major role in shaping American policy. In general, they've exercised some large degree of influence over the past 50 years, a period in which a country, the United States, blessed with every bit of historical luck and natural resources a patriot could dream of, has been driven through a very short age of immense power and wealth to near collapse. In the end, the United States might well have been the most powerful country in the world for not much longer than tiny, low-population and low-resource, Portugal back in the 15th and 16th centuries. Yet, on its own, the American government seems not more competent than these bloody-handed professors with their theories about controlling the world by controlling central Asia—an idea actually tracing

back to the brilliant lunatic Brooks Adams, brother of Henry Adams and great-grandson of John Adams.

Without going into details, without being able to go into details, I'll say for now only that I think we have to move towards a political system analogous to a self-organizing society, more weakly analogous to a free-marketplace. More accurately if less specifically, we should think in terms of organisms, of the evolution of family-lines and the development of specific organisms.

The errors of traditional political thought, from Plato to Madison and beyond, come at their most fundamental level from their wrongful understanding of metaphysics or—equivalently—their wrongful understanding of how the human mind forms. The political philosopher isn't born with a knowledge of absolute truths of human political and social natures any more than a physicist is born with a knowledge of absolute truths of time and space and matter. We are born with certain brain responses that assume adults will help us when we whimper in need or distress and we are born with certain brain responses which assume objects continue in existence. Neither set of brain responses correspond to more than highly qualified truths, though there are usually ways in which such qualified truths can be understood in terms of more abstract forms of being which are reflective of less qualified truths, but that's not my main line of argument for now.

What are the basic forms of political organization? Are those forms truly limited to republic, monarchy, oligarchy, and democracy? Is democracy little more than disorder waiting to happen? Are we forced to go with hierarchical systems which are designed by men? Is there really an ideal catalog of such forms any more than there is such a catalog for forms of life?

In terms of computers, our modern political systems, and most of our social systems, are rigidly hard-wired computers with a central processing unit which does all the thinking for the entire system, at least all the important thinking. Certainly, we can note that the types of men who are attracted to being part of that central unit are rarely those who could be trusted holding power, but I'm not writing with an intention of attacking any specific governments or individuals. Rather am I writing to speak of the strange and perverse results of building a governmental machine and attaching it to a social organism with the intention of having the machine control that organism. It's particularly strange when that organism is changing rapidly.

In the United States, we have a constitution written by men who were definitely above average at least in moral courage and intellectual talent. After all, they had risked all, life and property, in the interests of something akin to a deep love of political freedom. They applied deep and broad knowledge of the history of political thought and of the practice of law and legislation to the task of forming a new government. Why, then, did they think that political freedom could be served by a set of rules and overarching legal principles which formed a sort of machine? Some, such as Jefferson, apparently didn't think that, though Jefferson couldn't do much but express a vaguer view of politics which is at least more consistent with the view I'm advocating. The others? They were taught to analyze political systems as machines by the traditions of political thought in the West. The organic analogies of Plato and Hobbes strike me as machine-like, non-evolving, and non-developing. Plato's republic doesn't grow from the actions of its members but rather fits its members into tightly defined roles. True it is that the Founding Fathers of the United States had England's example before them, but they seemed to think that the evolutionary and developmental processes of English history had worked to produce something like a machine, which they rejected in the interests of forming a similar but different sort of machine.

(In fact, as I've written before, the efforts to shape a part of an organism into a well-structured machine has resulted in something more akin to a cancer or a parasitical organism, but I'm arguing against mainstream political ways of thought and only incidentally discussing the counter-intuitive, and mostly destructive, results of the implementations of their schemes. Political activists and theorists build political machines in their acts or their minds and don't set out to deliberately design parasites to suck the life out of the body public.)

It is clear that we have passed through a period in which we achieved extraordinary progress in understanding the universe by way of science and yet there was no planning. Individuals began to respond to Creation, forming their minds to be able to grasp what was concretely perceivable that abstractions might be derived. Early on, monasteries and eventually various other sorts of corporate bodies organized to tackle problems which had arisen, such as the need for some sort of time-keeping as the choir monks separated themselves from work in the natural environment or the construction of more elaborate buildings or the cultivation of very large fields. I'm not advocating a minimalist or non-existent government but rather a gov-

ernment which is part of the organism and develops to serve certain needs and responds to the rest of the organism in such a way as to change with it. In fact, there is reason to believe that science has perhaps been going off-track since it began shaping itself to the needs of funds-granting governments and corporations of various sorts rather than shaping itself in response to the world. Yes, I'm claiming human science is no more and no less than the human mind applied to exploring Creation in certain ways. Science as a body of knowledge and techniques isn't separate from the minds and acts of its practitioners, a specific example of a great truth about the human mind in general. Similarly, we would do well to consider political thought and political action in analogy to scientific thought and scientific action, even scientific experimentation.

We don't know even what the true human political and social possibilities are at our current state of dense populations, advanced technological development, somewhat retarded intellectual development in the humanities and philosophy and theology, and so forth. We aren't even thinking on those lines, instead seeming to believe that our new wine can be put in old wineskins. No, the problem is worse than that because we're squeezing growing and developing organisms, from lines of evolving organisms, into hides from more primitive ancestors. We might as well squeeze our individual selves into the hide of an ancient ancestor of apes and monkeys. This is exactly what our governments do, trying to force individual human beings and human societies into a shape convenient to the needs of that particular government but not much appropriate for any other entity in the known universe. The result isn't generally pretty and becomes downright ugly under rapidly changing conditions even for a government that evolved before rigidifying into a machine, such as that of England, or for a government which was formed by a group of men of greater than normal moral character and intelligence, such as the American constitutional government.

I don't know where to go with this entire line of thought for now. I'm going to contemplate the issue, in the back of my mind and sometimes in the front, sometimes even writing about small pieces of the problem. I'm going to try to shape my political and social thoughts in response to the best knowledge available on these topics, or at least an eclectic sampling of such knowledge. I'll be under no illusion that I can anticipate what the answer will be but my real goal is to try to define processes we should be nurturing in order that we might develop political systems appropriate for our modern selves and our modern societies. I have faith and hope that we

can help along the formation of the Body of Christ by doing so.

## 31 Stephen Hawking and His Critics

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog/site, *Acts of Being*, <http://loydfueston.com/?p=692>. It was finished and uploaded on 2010/09/17.]

I haven't read Stephen Hawking's most recent book where he's said to argue that a Creator-God is unnecessary nor have I read more than summaries of the efforts of certain Christian theologians to shoot down those arguments. I've read that Hawking argues gravity fills the need for such a God, but that's irrelevant to the points I'll raise in this article. When I speak of 'being' in this article, I'll actually mean 'created being', which is a result of the contingent or freely-willed acts of God, those He takes as Creator and Sustainer of this world and the remainder of Creation. I will argue that both sides misunderstand what metaphysics is and can be.

Metaphysics is the science of being and, by necessity, has to start with those forms and levels of being which can be directly observed, explored, and analyzed. St. Thomas Aquinas told us this in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* and other writings:

Metaphysics uses the specific sciences.

Physics and biology are certainly among the specific sciences, but I would add mathematics to that list of specific sciences rather than considering it some sort of body of truths which can be accessed directly by some immaterial entity labeled as 'mind', but I'll not have to deal further with that issue in this article. In general, I would replace the term 'specific sciences' with 'empirical sciences' and include all efforts to deal in a disciplined and systematic way with some realm of this world. History and

linguistics would be empirical sciences. Yet, physics has a special role to play in metaphysics, as one might guess.

Hawking is right in starting an analysis of being by looking at our knowledge of physical being and the ways it interacts with itself. Some of his critics, at least from the ranks of Christian thinkers, would be right if they can be understood as saying that metaphysics is more than just the results of those specific sciences. I fear that some, maybe most, of those critics are actually saying that metaphysics is something completely independent of those specific sciences, but I'll give them the benefit of the doubt. It would be particularly sad, a greater sign of the intellectual and moral decay of the modern age, if it proved the case that Catholic thinkers are truly doing what they seem to be doing—doing meta-physics by starting with the conclusions, the end-results, from the complex meta-physical analyses of the Medieval and ancient thinkers. Those traditional analyses were based upon the empirical knowledge of those earlier eras. The closest the the Catholic Church has come to making an 'infallible' statement about how to do philosophy is the claim in the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* that Aquinas knew how to properly do philosophy. The Thomistic way of doing philosophy starts off by responding to empirical reality. St. Thomas did make mistakes and didn't always stick to his own rules, but he was no worse than human in his failures.

My worldview is based on an open response to modern empirical knowledge in light of my Christian faith. In this worldview, being is being is being. The various forms of being are found on a spectrum ranging from concrete thing-like being 'down' to abstract truths. We can observe directly the things on the concrete end of that spectrum but even naively observed concrete things have behaviors and form relationships that tell us something about more abstract levels of being. We are even born with some defective but truth-containing instincts such as the belief of infants that things have continuous and non-stop existence. (Some experiments have shown infants to be surprised by stage-magician tricks where objects seem to disappear when passing behind some sort of barrier.)

Metaphysics is the art and science of making sense of the full-spectrum of being by starting with empirical knowledge, that is – knowledge of exploratory and testable realms of being. Metaphysics moves toward completion by ascending from knowledge of the empirical realm through ever more abstract realms. To explain a little more, you can't understand the nature of metaphysical entities such as 'time' and 'space' and 'matter' unless you

work from empirical knowledge of those entities as they are manifested in the concrete world we inhabit. You can't understand 'infinity' unless you understand what physicists know of time and space and what mathematicians know of randomness/factuality and of various levels of infinity. You can't engage in responsible metaphysics unless you work from the best available knowledge of concrete being, being that we can know more or less directly. If you don't understand time and space and matter, how can you say anything intelligible or trustworthy about the realms of being which must be explored by speculative analysis? How can you speak responsibly of resurrected human beings unless you start from the best possible knowledge about man the physical and mortal animal?

Hawking is wrong that knowledge of directly observable being is the totality of knowledge of being. His critics, some at least, are wrong in not seeing what seems obvious to me—our traditional metaphysics is radically incomplete and we need to rebuild our systems of metaphysical thought honestly and courageously upon a new foundation that includes modern empirical knowledge. As I've noted elsewhere, this means that we need philosophers and theologians who have some substantial knowledge of modern mathematics and physics and biology and history and so forth.

I've written of these issues in my first published book—*To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], in a freely downloadable book—*Four Kinds of Knowledge* [43], and in various articles published on my main website—<http://loydfueston.com/> and included in this book. You can explore my views on these issues in these chapters of this book:

- Chapter 156, where I discuss Einstein's claim, "God Doesn't play dice with the universe," a claim based on a particular form of the mistake made by some of Hawking's critics,
- Chapter 69, where I argue that we need to open up our metaphysical systems of thought that they might be at least as large, and also as rich, as modern empirical ways of thought, and
- Chapter 73, where I begin a somewhat more systematic effort to update Thomistic theories of the mind.



## 32 Reason Comes from Our Interaction with Empirical Reality

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, <http://loydfueston.com/?p=755>. It was finished and uploaded on 2010/12/28.]

All reason is from God and of God. There is no immaterial reasoning agency part of or attached to the human creature. There is no mind or soul as many imagine, nor can we directly access even the manifested truths underlying Creation, let alone any transcendental truths which exist beyond this particular Creation. All reason is from God and of God and the more abstract forms of reason are part of the abstract being from which the matter of this world was shaped. When the mathematical laws of physics operate, or the narrative laws of biological evolution or those of human history, we see reason at work and we shape our brain's operations to correspond to this reason. Even perception of our environments requires us to actively engage the objects and deal with the relationships in those environments. This active engagement is part of the shaping of what we call our minds.

We can state one of the 'laws' of biological evolution in this rough way: "Those lines of creatures better succeed in reproduction which can better adapt their bodies and actions to what lies around them." Human beings have moved to a higher level of adaptation—that of mind-formation, though still remaining creatures in all senses, having more refined skills of abstract reasoning than found in chimpanzees and other creatures, but not different sorts of skills than those elicited from chimpanzees under laboratory conditions and sometimes found in chimpanzees in the wild. Chimpanzees have

some of the brain structures for forming a mind but I'd be reluctant to say that mind-formation rises above a hint in our apish cousins.

We can generalize from the physical bodies and the actions of living and non-living creatures to the more abstract sorts of mental events. I'm not speaking only of academic philosophers or even mostly of them. I'm speaking of German and Japanese farmers who carry their habits and general knowledge about soil and weather to new lands and take just a few years to become better farmers than the natives. I'm speaking of poets responding to new things or new regions of earth or new experiences. I'm speaking of hackers on a computer trying to find new ways to solve problems and sometimes working by writing code which doesn't correspond directly to preplanned or even known methods. I'm speaking of inventors trying to build internal combustion engines where the entire engine is basically one piston-chamber or other inventors working towards some goal they can't even state.

We trap ourselves when we try to limit our activities to those which can be planned or to any foreseeable activities because those, by definition, can only correspond to known forms of reason. We can learn new forms of reason if we're willing to explore our world courageously and without too many preconceptions, even when we tinker with things or ideas in a seemingly arbitrary way. If our tinkering produces something worthwhile, then we should sit back and contemplate our actions and their results, whether we're dealing with a new way of picking a banjo or a new way to sort records on a computer. From these contemplations we might derive new and richer understandings of Creation. We can even be said at times to have entered into more abstract realms of being.

In fact, it seems quite possible to read the history of human thought in a manner quite consistent with this. We have to try to temporarily set aside our modern viewpoint formed during centuries when a certain type of rationality allowed for extraordinary progress in understanding many aspects of Creation, gathering mountains of knowledge of this concrete world and abstracting from that knowledge to derive various sorts of physical laws and theories as well as less rigid ways to understand history and to understand living creatures in general. Seen in proper historical context, the earlier form of reasoning developed by the Greeks, 'rationalistic' or 'Euclidean' but not tied tightly enough to empirical reality, also had a good run of allowing progress in understanding Creation in its concrete and abstract realms. Similar statements can be made of the mythical reasoning devel-

oped in the centuries before the early Greek scientists and poets prepared the ground for the philosophers.

Will we move on from here? Is the reason of the modern world the end-all of human thought? I doubt it. Our children will not only know things about reality which would amaze us—they will reason with power that might frighten us.

We could ask, “What form of reasoning might someone discover?” I can’t even make a guess though I think there are hints in my writings and in the writings of other modern thinkers, especially mathematical physicists, mathematicians, brain-scientists, and theorists in evolutionary biology. Undoubtedly, there are historians, novelists, poets, musicians, visual artists, and some of those tinkerers in mechanical matters who are also developing new forms of thinking about Creation by active exploration of that same Creation. They are learning how to think about Creation from Creation.

Even as creative thinkers, at least truly creative thinkers, we don’t always know what we’re thinking until we’re thinking it. We don’t always know where the story is going until it gets there. A good tinkerer doesn’t always know what the danged thing is until he builds it.

We can’t respond with a pure freedom to Creation because of our creaturely natures. Even the wildest and most open of creative efforts needs to work within some forms, some disciplined structures, but those called to work at the frontiers of human thought or art or technological innovation should be willing to step outside of the forms of reasoning or acting which they inherited. In some periods of history, the call to this sort of creative work is a beckoning to step outside of their own minds formed to established ways of reasoning.

Speculating, telling stories, or tinkering, we respond to God’s Creation, thereby sharing in God’s own thinking and acting—though the two aren’t really separable for God. We share also in God’s freedom, the freedom He exercises as Creator and Narrator. In these ways of sharing, we mold our minds, souls if you prefer, to the shape God wishes for us, the shape He wished when He manifested a certain body of thoughts as the stuff of a story, this world, and then brought into being a race of creatures capable of responding to Creation in this general way.

The human mind is an entity which can, in a strong sense, be all created being. It isn’t just an entity which can understand created being in the traditional way where he who would understand brings with him tools which are independent of created being. We do create such tools by shap-

ing our minds to deal with, even encapsulate, parts of created being, but those tools should be seen as that—images of parts of created being rather than truly independent tools for analyzing or explaining from outside. You could even say that one generation's mental tools will melt into the lower levels of understanding of the next generation where I speak of intellectual generations, such as pre-Socratics and classical Greeks and so forth up to the broader spectrum of modern thinkers.

## 33 The Mind of a Modern Scientist

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=785>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/03/15.]

I've just finished reading Thomas S. Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* [83]. He's quite aware of the objective nature of reality but he speaks of major changes in understanding of the world leaving scientists (or others in different conversations) as if in a new world. Elsewhere he speaks a bit more reasonably of the scientist seeing the world with new eyes, but he's short of the mark. What's new when we gain deeper understanding of what lies about us is our mind. I think Kuhn is blocked from gaining this deeper insight by one of the paradigms he holds—using his own terminology. He holds a fairly standard modern understanding that I've often criticized: the mind is something existing with some significant independence of its experience, its responses to its environment, and the knowledge thus generated. In fact, knowledge seems to be assumed as something which is somehow loaded into this mental entity.

I think the sort of analysis he performed, while insightful, would be much improved by adopting a Thomistic framework in which the mind forms by active responses to its environments. The mind and its knowledge aren't ultimately separable, both being aspects of an intentional encapsulation of the environments of the organism having a 'mind'. We, the human race, have become aware of wider regions of the earth, the universe, even the world in the sense of the universe seen in light of God's purposes. Our minds have grown accordingly.

I've covered these issues before and won't repeat my discussions here. The interested reader can read Chapter 83, *Is Christian Morality a Natural*

*Morality?*, for my review of *How Brains Make Up Their Minds* by the brain-scientist and philosopher Walter J. Freeman who is an advocate of Thomism as a framework for understanding modern science. In Chapter 90, *Shaping Our Minds to Reality*, I give a short overview of my understanding of what the mind is and how it forms in light of our difficulties in understanding the apparent strangeness of quantum mechanics. In Chapter 102, *Active Responses are Necessary for Shaping the Human Mind*, I give the background for a claim I'll now make:

The positive sciences work so well not only because of the empirical knowledge gained by disciplined observations of empirical reality and experiments within reality but also because the workers in those fields are forced to respond actively to do their jobs. However limited or biased some of the individual minds might be, the communal mind—in a loose way of speaking—of physics and mathematics and biology and other such fields is shaped to our best current knowledge of empirical reality. Many of those in the humanities and social sciences and certainly in theology and philosophy live inside worlds created by the active responses to reality made by men who died many years ago.

It's not that positive sciences encompass the only sorts of knowledge which are 'true' or 'verifiable' but rather that what might be called the positive sciences demand from their practitioners, during this age of man, some significant degree of active response to empirical reality. In too many other fields, only the self-motivated bother to respond actively to much of anything but their own dreams and illusions or—still worse—to the dreams and illusions pushed into their heads as they sat passively in many a classroom or sat passively in their parents' living-room in front of a video screen of some sort.

The best thinkers in those other fields, such as the historian Jacques Barzun or the theologian Joseph Ratzinger or the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, have responded actively to empirical reality and have minds which are the equal in power and insight to those of the best scientists.

## 34 Can a Language Form as Human Minds Shape Themselves to an Unfolding Reality?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=791>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/03/29.]

I've finished reading Thomas S. Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* [83] but I continue to think about the issues he raised. Some of his attempts to make sense of these "scientific revolutions" involve efforts to make sense of the language used by various groups of scientists.

When talking about the need to use a assumption-loaded (my term) language when doing even the most 'objective' of scientific work, Professor Kuhn tells us:

As for a pure observation-language, perhaps one will yet be devised. But three centuries after Descartes our hope for such an eventuality still depends exclusively upon a theory of perception and of the mind.

...

No language restricted to reporting a world fully known in advance can produce mere neutral and objective reports on "the given." Philosophical investigation has not yet provided even a hint of what a language able to do that would be like.

This idea of a language which can provide "mere neutral and objective reports on 'the given'" assumes that there is a mind which is independent of the world to be explored and understood. Against this, St. Thomas

Aquinas had stated a theory of the mind shaped by active response to the environments of that human being. Modern neurobiology has independently confirmed this Thomistic understanding of man as an organism which develops by intention, that is, by growing and moving in a purposeful direction though that man might well not know what he might become.

Moreover, this idea of a language which provides "mere neutral and objective reports on 'the given'" assumes that what is out there are things and relationships between things which come to us in the form of objective data, or potentially objective in the sense of being 'free' of what might be roughly called organizing preconceptions. It assumes perceptions are to be had by the simple opening of our eyes or the lifting of our noses to the wind. In fact, perception is proving to be an intense and purposeful ordering by a creature of its environments to its own needs and desires, to its purposes. Even reason is to be had in increments by the properly active exploration of our environments. Reason is not something we have and bring to the task of making sense of a chaos in which we're embedded.

Many creatures have somewhat limited purposes to pursue as they move about and grow, but man seems to be the sort of creature who functions best, in various ways, when he has a good understanding of all that is visible or imaginable to him, even a good understanding of all which might be speculated to exist by a St. Augustine or an Albert Einstein. That's where my problem lies with modern scientists. For example, some of the best of modern neurobiologists tend to be pragmatists along the lines of William James and don't recognize that we, and even aardvarks, grow into a world, a universe which is, in a manner of speaking, overloaded with value and meaning by the purposes of its Creator. Yet, most of the points I raise in the rest of this article remain valid for either a Jamesian pragmatist or a Christian, Thomistic existentialist.

I'll make summary comments on four points and provide references to earlier articles on this weblog. I'll also make a short concluding statement.

1. We often need to speak in vaguer ways, such as those of traditional wisdom-literature, before learning enough to speak in the way of a truer knowledge.

Wisdom is the fumbling substitute for perfect knowledge. [*The American Story* [59] by Garet Garret.]

See Chapter 588, *What is Wisdom?* for my comments upon this quote.

I speak to one aspect of the evolution of languages towards a greater capacity for true knowledge, truth, in Chapter 72, *Why Do We Need to Speak As-if?*

More powerful languages would emerge, and have emerged, naturally as the human mind develops toward a richer and more complete encapsulation of Creation, yet, even ideas once expressible in clear ways can be obscured by changes in words and concepts—see Chapter 564, *Christian Misuse of the Concept of ‘Person’* and Chapter 586, *If We Can’t Understand What We Shall Be, We Can’t Be It* for discussions in a Christian context.

Progress will come if we’re careful to be facing in the right direction as we walk along and so long as we continue walking, but the path can curve away from us as Dante’s pilgrim realized in the first verses of the *Inferno*.

2. We shouldn’t mix epistemological (biological) issues with metaphysical issues but metaphysics and the empirical sciences should be in a respectful dialog.

See my freely downloadable book, *Four Kinds of Knowledge* [43], for a discussion of my view of these issues and my reasons for arguing against the modern feat of turning practical divisions in human knowledge-gathering and knowledge into divisions between realms of being.

3. As the American historian Carroll Quigley told us: The truth unfolds in time through a communal process.

Knowledge has a social dimension, as Kuhn discusses in various ways without saying so directly. I would even say that this social dimension is dominant in the more abstract forms of knowledge, including most of the specific sciences—physics and biology and chemistry and so forth. For a discussion of the general problem of a people, the citizens of the United States, with a poorly integrated knowledge of certain important aspects of reality, see Chapter 405, *Ways of Thought in the Modern West*, and Chapter 601, *The False Promises of the American Dream*.

4. Perceiving what lies around us is an active and not passive process.

This is to say that perceptions are themselves ‘taken in’ by way of processes not so different from cognition. The neurobiologist Semir Zeki discusses the complexity of the processes by which we see the world of color in his book, *A Vision of the Brain*. I discuss the discovery of the neurobiologist and philosopher Walter J. Freeman along with his students that “the brain response generated by the same stimulus is not always the same” in Chapter 87, *Perceptions and Context*.

Freeman tells us that even when we’ve actively perceived our environments, we make them our own, we come to understand and know them, by our active involvement. We learn to manipulate natural objects and to make artificial objects for our needs and pleasures. We run and dance and sing. We begin to move under the seas and to enter space. We build bridges and university laboratories.

Any useful language will, in fact, be structured to help the active man to direct his efforts to obtain and organize observations in terms of a plausible understanding of at least his immediate environments. That understanding can lead to power plants and productive farms, whether Amish farms or petrochemical complexes. If we have to speak of biases, then we should simply say we should be aiming at languages with better biases rather than no biases. Biases can be encodings of the best and most plausible knowledge we have at any particular time. Even when our inherited biases are wrong, they are necessary as a starting point. This is the reason historians of science now take alchemists seriously as pioneers in exploring the nature of matter and astrologists as exploring the movements of planets and stars.

Our biggest problem in physics right now would seem to me to be unaffected by any possible language which can provide "mere neutral and objective reports on ‘the given,’" but perhaps solvable if we could develop concepts and a related language capable of allowing us to speak of a reality in which both quantum theory and the general theory of relativity are true. Both of those theories are highly specific and have been verified in many ways by way of finely targeted experiments, that is, experiments biased to seek very specific information. Those experiments were the results of theoretical physicists interacting with experimental physicists, sometimes one man or woman being

both. Those physicists, theoreticians or experimentalists or both, had minds well-shaped to one or more of the quantum theory and general theory of relativity. They thought not only in terms of the theories and their real-world implications but also of the measurable and observable effects of those theories. Now we need to learn how to think and speak of the universe as if both quantum theory and the general theory of relativity were true. I suspect the mathematics would fall into place if we could do so. As it is, we see a lot of confusion coming about as physicists tackle the mathematics when the concepts and language provide no unified way of speaking of both theories at one time.

5. In summation, we need biases to function as human thinkers and doers.

The main conclusion I'd draw is that, at least to the understanding of a Thomistic existentialist, the very nature of created being and of mind tell us that it doesn't even make sense to talk about a language which can provide "mere neutral and objective reports on 'the given,'" and yet there may be some good which will come from the efforts to develop such a language on the part of those with different beliefs as some good came from alchemy and astrology.



## 35 Until We Know What Truth and Freedom Are, We Should Be More Modest In Our Claims

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=869>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/05/26.]

There is an argument of sorts being conducted in the Catholic Church between those who think the Fathers of the Vatican Council II erred in claiming God grants religious freedom to human beings and those who think Truth must always be served by... well, by serving some established view of the Truth. See the article, *Religious Freedom. Was the Church Also Right When It Condemned It?*, at <http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/1348041?eng=y> for an overview by a theologian who wants to critique both camps of thought. I don't have a high opinion of those in either camp because they're trying to answer a complex question in terms of pre-modern human thought when that question, at least in its present form, arose in the Modern Age based upon discoveries in modern centuries. The critical theologian in this piece, Basile Valuet, does no better so far as I can tell. I didn't bother to study the article after reading it quickly. This third camp of thought on this issue of religious freedom seems to deal with some alternate universe, as do the other two camps. I'll explain.

Etienne Gilson said somewhere that Catholic thinkers withdrew into a ghetto around 1800 when they couldn't come up with good answers to the modern questions. So far as I can tell, this current debate in taking place in that ghetto between thinkers who are—at best—slowly recognizing their untenable positions and those who are doing their best not to recognize their untenable positions.

In other words, the underlying problem is the ongoing refusal of nearly all Catholic intellectuals, Christian thinkers in general, to make peace with God's Creation as we now understand it—though I've pointed out often that they feel quite free to extend their own lives and to make themselves more comfortable by using working technology based upon a radically different view of Creation than any which could be compatible with these Christian ways of thought, 'traditional' or 'modern'. Both terms are wrongly used because pre-modern thinkers (other than the oh-so insightful Aquinas) had reasons to think of the mind as an immaterial organ of the human being, which organ had some sort of direct access to transcendental truths binding even upon God and modern thinkers recognize that insight of Aquinas (though typically learned by way of modern neurobiological research) which tells us the mind is more of a set of relationships with our world and those relationships are formed by active response to that world. To be truly 'modern', you have to respond to the strong point of modern thought—modern exploration and analysis of empirical reality. This means that you must have some serious understanding of modern mathematics, physics, biology, history, and so forth.

I'll now repeat my plea to my fellow-Christians, and others, to join me in re-examining our most basic ideas of what being is, what thought is, what a creature is, and what Creation is. I'll start by repeating the claim of the American historian Carroll Quigley:

The truth unfolds in time through a communal process.

Before moving on, I'll note that Professor Quigley was a non-practicing Catholic who was quite faithful to the Christian system of metaphysics labeled 'moderate realism'—take the above claim as a rough definition of moderate realism and look above for a Thomistic understanding of mind and take that as the first step towards a more powerful form of moderate realism. I'll also note that Quigley's course on how to think in historical terms was taken by most State Department employees and other government employees (apparently including many CIA analysts) studying at the Georgetown University's *Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service* during the period from the late 1930s to the late 1970s. (I believe it was required for some programs of study sponsored by the State Department.)

Freedom, including the freedom to stray from the truth, would be necessary for such a process. We can even see this process at work in the

sorting out of the vast output of St. Augustine of Hippo, the most important founder of Western Civilization and the greatest of theologians in Western Christianity. As Jaroslav Pelikan, and probably others, pointed out: Augustine was the father of nearly all existing schools of Christian theology in the West—orthodox and heretical. It took centuries to derive something of a plausible view of human sin from Augustinian views of the Bible set in the context of history as Augustine knew it. This process would have resulted in a more than human mess if the participants hadn't tried hard to keep in mind some serious understanding of truth and freedom.

Truth should be served.

Yet, I think Pilate has been underrated as a philosophical critic:

What is truth?

Part of my effort has been to examine this question, largely resulting in claims that:

1. God is the creator of all truths that we creatures can know. This means at least that God has to manifest a truth in Creation before we creatures can know it. We have no direct access to transcendental truths, whatever they might be, but only the access granted by God in specific ways.
2. Things are true—as St. Thomas Aquinas pointed out.
3. Truths are thing-like—as I've pointed out based upon modern science especially modern sciences of the brain and mind, of mathematics and physics.

My questions and tentative answers don't arise from some sort of arbitrary creativity or efforts to think 'freely' but rather the result of an effort to be free in the sense of responding to God's Creation, an effort to share in my limited way in the freedom God exercised in bringing into existence this particular Creation. In freely choosing to be the Creator of such a particular Creation, God also freely accepted constraints upon His treatment of all that He had created.

I try to summarize this aspect of my thought by writing that I respond freely to Creation, to the thoughts God has manifested, as best I can, in order to be shaped to a better image of God. I freely try to accept the

discipline God offers us by shaping us into the sorts of beings who can then share the life of God as Creator acting with constrained freedom.

This is all complicated further by those of us who think that there are some revealed truths given by God, mostly in the Bible, which could not have been discovered, even in principle, by human beings responding to God in His role as a self-constrained Creator. Even those revelations of transcendental truths are given to us in physical form and using words and analogical images derived from concrete being. Is it surprising we think to understand Father and Son better than we understand the Holy Spirit?. That lack of understanding of the Holy Spirit might be corrected as we move to an understanding of the primacy of relationships over concrete things, as taught to us by modern physics—especially quantum theory—and also hinted at by the writings of the disciples of St. John the Apostle.

The main point is that the modern world doesn't demand just a more exact understanding of human nature, as Pope Benedict has claimed, but also a more exact and far richer understanding of human nature – including human ways of thought, of Creation, and even of the nature of truth which is accessible to a creature.

# 36 Good News: Astronomers Are Having Serious Problems Estimating the Masses of Large Objects

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=917>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/07/04.]

See the article *Astronomers Reveal a Cosmic 'Axis of Evil'* at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/06/110630073417.htm> to learn:

Astronomers are puzzled by the announcement that the masses of the largest objects in the universe appear to depend on which method is used to weigh them.

...

Clusters of galaxies are the largest gravitationally bound objects in the universe containing thousands of galaxies like the Milky Way and their weight is an important probe of their dark matter content and evolution through cosmic time. Measurements used to weigh these systems carried out in three different regions of the electromagnetic spectrum: X-ray, optical and millimetre wavelengths, give rise to significantly different results.

To those not well-read in cosmological physics, this weighing of clusters of galaxies is a part of the project of determining the fate of our universe—eventual contraction or unending expansion, itself an important part of the greater project of understanding created being.

This weight-measurement problem raises a variety of possibilities, including a radical incompleteness in our understanding of fundamental properties of matter-energy. Serious problems of this sort are often a sign of the potential for someone to do some good, creative thinking, maybe even discovering what might be called “new physics.” Reality might be different from what we currently think and we can maybe better shape our minds by shaping them to a better approximation to the truth.

Whatever our beliefs, Christian or Jewish or pagan or atheistic, we can explore and analyze this dynamic universe only if we have courage and also a faith that the effort will prove rewarding—a faith that the universe is coherent and that we can reach an understanding of that coherence. I’m not sure if physicists and other scientists are continuing at the level of creativity shown by Einstein and Feynman. There have been some serious thinkers who have claimed to see signs that, over the past century or so, the deeper forms of creativity have faded a bit even in the physical sciences. Some of those thinkers have been scientists themselves, such as Michael Polanyi who also saw moral problems developing in the conduct of science; others have been respectful observers of science, such as Jacques Barzun who saw signs that all fields of Western endeavors have been living off the creative explosions of the decades around 1900. Maybe science has seemed a bit more creative than, say, political philosophy in the 20th century because the second-tier of scientists simply had more to work on because of the efforts of Einstein and Planck and those who followed soon after.

I’ll return to an upbeat note of sorts by repeating my words from above:

Whatever our beliefs, Christian or Jewish or pagan or atheistic, we can explore and analyze this dynamic universe only if we have courage and also a faith that the effort will prove rewarding—a faith that the universe is coherent and that we can reach an understanding of that coherence.

If we truly have any sort of freedom, we have the freedom to shape our minds to the vast mountains of partially processed empirical knowledge piled up in recent centuries. History would indicate that no civilization can continue without a coherent understanding of the world and without a creative response to that world. A good number of thinkers and doers in the West need to respond to a dynamic world, not to our inherited and no longer plausible understandings of the world. If this is done, if that

good number show faith and courage, business entrepreneurs as well as philosophers, political activists as well as physicists, novelists as well as civil engineers, we have a chance to reform the West or even to found a radically different phase of civilization for some part of the human race which might correspond to what's called the West or it might be a larger part or a smaller part.



## 37 Abstractions and Concreteness in Our Social Relationships

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=953>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/07/28.]

A recent article, *Female Minorities Are More Affected by Racism Than Sexism, Research Suggests* at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/07/110711144948.htm>, speaks of a study showing that Oriental women who are members of immigrant communities in the United States are upset in a deep and emotional way by racial prejudice but are dispassionate about prejudice against them as women, taking that as an intellectual error.

Despite the fact that there is an objectively defined group of “women”, despite the fact that there were roles assigned to members of that group, it’s not likely to have been a natural group in early human communities. It’s likely that women in most historical and prehistorical periods would have been more likely to worry about their sons’ breeding success than about any fair treatment of the wives of those sons. They likely would have even been more worried that their daughters have lots of children than being concerned that their daughters be educated and have respected roles in the tribe or village.

Race, even if only defined as “those who have similar features to me” is quite suggestive of kinship communities, of breeding communities in a manner of speaking. In gene-centric ways of viewing life, such a community is a proxy, a visible sign, of true genetic relatedness. We act as if, for example, we share a lot of genes with those who look like us and live near us. Those gene-centric ways of thought are exaggerated but not entirely

wrong. Kinship communities, tribes, are more than just a population of those who share a common and fairly small pool of genes, but they are founded upon such a relationship. Evolution occurs in the context of kinship communities, family lines, or whatever you wish to call them. Wouldn't we expect human beings to be more viscerally affected by relationships with a bodily foundation?

I'm certainly not saying that it's bad to form more abstract or even "artificial" relationships. As a Christian, I believe the main theme of history is the formation of the Body of Christ which is quite abstract in many ways. By 'abstract', I mean not illusory nor do I refer to a manner of speaking. I'm referring to an entity defined by relationships which, in some sense, draw or attempt to draw upon realms of created being from which this concrete realm was shaped. Many of our most important relationships in the modern world fall into this category, such as those of our professions or trades, our hobbies or religious affiliations, our politics, and so forth.

I suspect that concern about "women's rights" is part of a movement towards more rational and more highly moral forms of relationship between human beings, that is, that we should be looking at a candidate for a job in terms of qualifications and not considering either race or sex either to exclude or affirmatively include. We're a long way from that and the final result of such a change might well be a society in which some traditional differences between men and women and between ethnic groups are confirmed. Things are what they are and will be what they will be, so why should we pretend otherwise, as Bishop Butler pointed out several centuries ago.

We should be careful not to exaggerate the importance of the man-woman divide and careful not to see any prejudice against women as more deeply embedded than the various class prejudices which are more closely tied to genetic relatedness. One of the undeniable advances in the West in recent centuries has been the greater respect paid to men holding humble but important jobs—men of the lower classes. The higher respect paid to these men has shown up in monetary forms of payment as well. The split between haves and have-nots has historically been more concrete and more important than that between men and women. After all, a woman has a lot of reasons to be more concerned about the success of her husband than the success of some women she's never even met. We'll never reach a perfect state of fair-treatment of all human beings in this world and we may see a lot of backsliding, but we've made more progress, some of which seems

likely to be lost for some decades.

Yet, I'm reasonably confident that this issue of fair treatment of all human beings will be a situation where the truth will emerge over time through communal processes and not by political activism preferred by our current batch of visionaries who are no more likely to be right about the future than were Marx or lesser seers going well back in time. We shouldn't be unduly pessimistic about seeing into the future because we can likely see some aspects of emerging truths, but emerging social structures are not likely to be foreseeable. They are too complex and will reflect too many empirical and contingent elements. We don't even know what problems and opportunities future generations will face. How can we tell them how to organize their lives and communities?

In any case, the deeply rooted relationships, the ones rooted directly in our flesh, will always be strong and will be the foundations of all other relationships. Love of mother and father might expand to love of those who are like mother and father and then might even expand beyond that. Over time, other relationships, the abstract relationships developing as civilization becomes more complex, may prove to be also very strong. But those newer relationships, such as the ones enjoyed recently by working-class men, are based upon the abstract foundations of a civilization and may decay rapidly if civilization weakens—and Western Civilization is weakening fast. Any civilization is more a manifestation of our deepest moral beliefs than a collection of economic processes and engineering feats, and the loss of Western Civilization will mean certain noble moral beliefs will no longer be concretely manifested. They will return to being noble dreams, for those who remember them.

Those Oriental women have reasonable feelings and thoughts. They feel tied most closely, at a gut level, to those in their ethnic group and their ties to “women” in general will be more abstract—that is, intellectual. Prejudice against women will be perceived at that level – as an intellectual mistake, a mistake in dealing with abstractions. Prejudice against a “gene-based” kinship group, though that group itself be large and somewhat abstract, will be felt in the gut.

I'll move on to a few short and related comments about other studies discussed in another article, *Humans 'Predisposed' to Believe in Gods and the Afterlife* at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/07/110714103828.htm>.

Those who conducted the studies deny making theological claims. They

only claim human beings are inclined to believe in supernatural entities and are also inclined to have a dualistic view of their own human nature, believing something of their own selves survive their deaths.

We should take the general claim seriously while discounting, as the authors seemed to do, the specific beliefs. We're inclined to believe in divinity and in an afterlife. This is similar to our 'predispositions' to empirical thought. We try to think in ways that agree with reality, mostly, but that doesn't mean the average caveman was thinking in ways acceptable to a modern chemist or medical doctor. It doesn't mean a tribal shaman was thinking in terms that would allow him to understand Jeremiah or Augustine of Hippo or Martin Luther, though he might detect a deep concern for spiritual matters in a general sense. It does mean that tribal shaman and his followers were thinking in terms which allow the long and slow development of more sophisticated understandings of the possibilities of divinity and of life after death.

Our gut-level belief in "more than we see" is very primitive and very real. Once we humans advance in understanding various realms of being, by way of physics and music and biology and literature, we can start refining those gut-level beliefs. We have 'predispositions' which allow us to move towards thinking of created being along that spectrum of concrete to abstract. Right now, we're in the odd position of holding some abstract beliefs and engaging in quite abstract relationships but trying to treat them as being fully a part of the domain of concrete being.

## 38 Better Explanation of Scientific Issues Isn't Enough

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1020>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/09/13.]

This article, *Rebalancing the Nuclear Debate Through Education* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/09/110909111444.htm>, tells us:

Better physics teaching with a particular emphasis on radioactivity and radiation science could improve public awareness through education of the environmental benefits and relative safety of nuclear power generation, according to leading Brazilian scientist Heldio Villar. He suggests that it might then be possible to have a less emotional debate about the future of the industry that will ultimately reduce our reliance on fossil fuels.

This is true enough but I think there is a more fundamental failure of our modern educational systems. Before we can reason effectively using any sort of knowledge, before we can even take in any sort of knowledge as knowledge, we need to shape our minds so that we have the proper respect for what lies outside of us.

As I noted recently, Thomas Jefferson thought—rightly in my opinion – that a “perverse literacy” would lead to an “invincible ignorance.” This is to say that knowledge, even blunt and undeniable facts, will be either ignored or squeezed into a weird shape to protect our preferred view of reality. I’ve noted before how Christians can read St. Augustine’s *City of God* and miss his jokes about farting—they expect holiness and purity and light

in a book by a saint, not hard-headed attitudes about embodied human nature. I could add that I've read even popular histories and found hints, but strong hints, that American leaders have committed major war-crimes or have purposefully squandered the lives of American soldiers, perhaps even preferring many American deaths to upset the American public and sucker them into stronger support for wars just or unjust. In a more scientific vein, we could point to the almost deliberate misreading by many wannabe Christians of, say, the writings of evolutionary biologists. Those practitioners of "perverse reading" miss the dynamic nature of this field of science and take questioning, qualifications, and expressed uncertainties of many sorts as being evidence that biological evolution is a false theory.

It is hard to read difficult works in an intelligent way. How many can read *Moby Dick* and realize that Melville is presenting Captain Ahab as being a more self-aware and courageous American, that is, as a morally insane human being who is in rebellion against God, upset that God has put constraints upon us?

We need reading and thinking skills to be able to read or hear even the best of knowledge and to make it our knowledge, that is, knowledge to which we have responded and have made our own, made a part of our thinking processes.

I'd like to go even further, to point towards what might be called my overarching goal: We need to be able to see all humanly-accessible knowledge, including that of our own technology, as being part of a unified body of knowledge of God's Creation. In my freely downloadable book, *Four Kinds of Knowledge* found at <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/know.pdf>, I write about humanly accessible knowledge being of four kinds for practical reasons but being of only two kinds ultimately: knowledge of God acting freely as a Creator of a particular world and knowledge of God in His transcendence. We know God in His transcendence only so far as He reveals Himself.

Knowledge of Creation, physics as well as evolutionary biology and human history and literature and all other fields of knowledge, is knowledge of thoughts God manifested. By struggling to understand, as St. Thomas Aquinas pointed out more than 700 years ago, we begin to shape ourselves as better images of God. We become children picking up sticks and pretending to do what our Father does as He goes about His work of creating and sustaining and telling the story which is this world.

Western Christians once had a story of this sort and then we learned

much that told us that story had always been no better than plausible speculations, no more and no less than an attempt to explain each level of created being by way of a narrative which held all of those levels and each entity in those levels in place. We learned a lot of reasons why that narrative was defective and we learned the wrong lesson that such narratives aren't possible. Such a narrative is possible and creating that narrative, however implausible it will prove to be to our descendants, is perhaps the most important part of building, or rebuilding, a civilization.

Somewhere, Wendell Berry, the poet and farmer, told us that if we find moral ways to make our livings, we'll more or less automatically solve our ecological problems. That claim can be enlarged to cover many more sets of problems, but—as he knew well—we can't find moral ways to make our livings, including moral ways to generate power, until we recover an understanding of Creation as such. And that will require a far greater effort than pushing a few technical words and diagrams into the heads of our children.



## 39 There Might be a Better Form of Nuclear Power Generation

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1023>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/09/14.]

Our current nuclear power technology is at least dirty, that is, it generates lots of dangerous waste. That is part of the attraction to the leaders of the United States since Truman. That waste includes weapons-grade uranium and plutonium. Yet, we have a need for large power-plants or—better—lots of smaller plants to produce electricity if we are to maintain a high standard of living.

The real problem with the waste is that there's a need for facilities that must be guarded and maintained for thousands of years and our political system isn't capable of such long-range commitments. From a technological point of view, there are good ways to store the waste for those thousands of years, but our governments are the problem.

Suppose we could have nuclear power plants without so serious a problem with nuclear waste? It turns out that the nuclear scientists and engineers working for the U.S. government had built a different sort of reactor in the late 1940s, something called "liquid fluoride thorium reactor", with an acronym of 'LFTR' often pronounced lifter. One of the nuclear physicists involved in that early effort, Alvin Weinberg, later headed up the Atomic Energy Commission and tried to restart the LFTR program but failed to obtain the support of American government leaders. I'll not give details here but other military research projects also produced good results but were killed because it wasn't a good technology for the use intended in that project.

What's so good about this alternative nuclear power generation? First of

all, it produces very small amounts of weapons-grade uranium or plutonium, none at all if tricks are played that cost only a little bit of efficiency. It can also be used to burn up dangerous materials, including weapons-grade uranium or plutonium or the waste from our existing sorts of reactors. A liquid fluoride thorium reactor can be designed so that the fuel drains out if electric power for auxiliary purposes is shut off or if the reactor overheats for any other reasons. There are many claimed advantages and there is a record of early prototypes which existed and worked as well as such things can be expected to work.

At this point, I'll recommend that those interested in power production technology should check the site, *EnergyFromThorium* found at <http://energyfromthorium.com/>. There are a lot of links to good documentation including videos of very good presentations on the history and present and possible future of this type of technology. This looks to be truly promising and looks to be a technology which can be implemented on a fairly small-scale under local control. Spread the word even if you have some doubts.

# 40 All an American Needs to Know, He learned in Kindergarten

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1047>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/09/27.]

We need some creative solutions to our problems, so long as those solutions are the right kind of creative solutions. You know which solutions I mean, the ones we already know about but we just need to try again and do it better this time. Yeah, we need creative solutions, like the ones we already have but different. They should be creative, but not too, you know, not too far out. They should be creative, but we already know a lot about things in this world and any creative solutions should stick to those truths.

After all, we already learned all we need to know in kindergarten and we're now free from any dreary study. Those guys on TV news shows tell us all we need to know and it all makes sense if we just remember that stuff we learned in kindergarten.

History is working to advance the American cause which Washington and Lincoln and that guy at Walden Pond wrote about in the *Declaration of Independence* when they created the United States and warned the other countries in the world to behave and live up to American ideals or we'll put them in their place before they harm us or our way of life or take away our freedoms they hate so much. But they aren't really bad. If they really want to try hard, those guys in the deserts of Afghanistan could have good lives just like Americans in the nice new developments around Atlanta. Those guys could give up their robes and the funny stuff they wear on their heads and then they'd be ready to have freedoms and nice houses with central

air-conditioning and cable-television hook-ups. They could even start little leagues for their kids and someday some of their sons, or their daughters, could have a chance to play in the American big leagues.

We have problems and those poor people in Iraq and Afghanistan and Libya have even more problems. We only have to turn on the television to see what a mess Gaddafi made of Libya. Their cities are in ruins and a lot of their roads and other infrastructure look like something out of a war-zone. Don't they have back-hoes and excavators and Departments of Public Works over there? And there are stories about Libyans having trouble getting food and electricity and stuff. They need all that stuff if they're going to straighten up and live good lives with freedoms and nice houses with central air-conditioning and cable-television hook-ups and even more stuff than that. We'll help them pull themselves up by their bootstraps. First we have to teach them how to wear boots. Then we can teach them all the other stuff we learned in kindergarten and they can start taking better care of their sewage systems and roads and bridges.

Yeah, we have problems and we need some creative thought and some creative action but it's not so hard to figure it all out if only we remember what we learned in kindergarten. And we have to teach all that good stuff to all the people in the world who don't know how to live good lives and behave like decent folk.

Isn't it too bad about those Red Sox falling apart in September? Thought they might pull it off this year and a good exciting World Series would have really helped those Iraqis and Afghans and Libyans to pull together and settle down and then we could have taught them everything we learned in kindergarten. We have lots of politicians and generals who seem to know they can do a lot of good things in the world with what they learned in kindergarten. Only they got powerful stuff like those bunker-buster bombs and those drone bombers and all the other stuff we got for enforcing peace and order on those evil people who are trying to take away our freedoms and our way of life.

It's kind of upsetting to read about scientists who don't think like real Americans. This article, *Why We Crave Creativity but Reject Creative Ideas* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/09/110903142411.htm>, makes me and other Americans really uncomfortable. Well, a good night's sleep and I'll forget it and just remember that good stuff I learned in kindergarten.

Oh yeah. I never went to kindergarten. And I was taught how to

read when I was three by my Great-aunt Minnie. And I learned how to appreciate good books from relatives like my Great-aunt Mary, feisty feminist and radical labor-union leader that she was. She had only a sixth-grade education—in Scotland—but devoured serious historical works and demanding works of literature. And when I went to school at the late age of six, I slept more often than I listened to the blah-blah of teachers and that's maybe why I had such bad work-habits when I went to a real college with relatively demanding standards.

I wonder what it is that all my fellow-Americans learn in that year of kindergarten. It must be some pretty good stuff.



## 41 The Importance of Brain-folds

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1066>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/10/10.]

The talents and skills of accurate perception and memory formation are very much higher-level properties of the human being, giving the appearance in past ages that ‘soul-stuff’ or ‘mind-stuff’ is necessary for such acts tied so tightly even to what we would label as virtues, such as honesty. In more recent years, dualists with the tint of reductionistic materialism have proposed software-stuff and purer dualists have proposed processes of consciousness.

Oddly enough, human abstract thought—including those realms of thought necessary for even basic exploration of empirical reality – seems to have bootstrapped itself by conjecturing these abstract or immaterial entities which exist alongside of the physical stuff of this world. As the story goes:

Souls animated all creatures with man having a special sort of soul, sometimes in addition to a more ‘ordinary’ human animal soul. Mind has access to truths only partly reflected in the physical stuff of mere things and organisms, that is, truths are somehow apart from, transcendental to, created being and yet accessible by a creature with a created brain and—according to some—a created mind as well. Of course, you can assume mind is not created, or at least some sort of transcendental Mind which belongs to some sort of transcendental Man. It becomes reasonable that the Realities of man and mind would be fully as transcendental as the truths that the flesh-and-blood creatures can somehow know.

How very disturbing it must be to some, how very interesting it is to me, to learn from this article, *Keeping Track of Reality: Why Some People Are Better at It* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/10/111004180108.htm>, that our ability to form accurate memories of the world around us seems to be related to the existence of a particular fold in our brains. There is even reason to believe that those without this fold in a region “at the front of the brain called the paracingulate sulcus” might live in a dream-world of sorts which they believe to be the real world outside of them. That itself is reason to believe there might be some connection between a lack of this fold and schizophrenia.

We know that some of us are better at leadership, some at nurturing, some at making useful and beautiful things, some at various types of thinking, and so forth. Now we know that some of us are also better at remembering what really happened. This isn't so surprising, at least to a Christian who has been told that we each have a role in the Body of Christ, but it does raise some difficult questions about recognizing and properly utilizing those with different abilities.

How will this process happen? I don't know. If I did, I could apply for a position in the top-levels of a hierarchy, arguing I could plan a community by way of slotting individuals in their proper role. If I, or anyone else, could describe this process, we'd be able to plan for the best for all who are under our power. Modern history has shown us, is showing us now, that this is a fool's game to try to predict and control the future of human societies or any of their substantial parts.

What we have to do is to try our best to pay attention to reality and to learn from reality. We do our best by going with the flow, not in a fatalistic way, but in the way of a talented and experienced surfer who certainly knows he doesn't have the strength or agility to do as he will, rather does he have the strength and agility to use the wave's movement to his own advantage.

Still, it's somewhat surprising that some of us, probably many of us, are congenitally incapable of remembering with accuracy the things and events of our own immediate regions of spacetime. Is that simply a factual result of an ongoing evolutionary process? Is it a factual result of a stable aspect of human beings?

Is it maybe even a good thing? Are there advantages to having some, or even many, in a human community somewhat detached from reality in all its strict details? It's a question worth contemplating.

## 42 Is It Science or is It Murky Water?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1122>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/12/13.]

Near the end of this amusing article, *In Physics, Telling Cranks from Experts Ain't Easy* found at <http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/cross-check/2011/12/11/in-physics-telling-crank-from-experts-aint-easy/>, John Horgan raises an interesting point about theories of physics:

Great scientists are great because they discern patterns in the flux of nature that elude us ordinary mortals; we should not be surprised when some patterns turn out to be illusory. Indeed, whole fields can descend into crankiness. Wertheim serves up her philosophical punch line toward the end of her book, when she turns her attention to mainstream physics and cosmology. She shares my sense that some popular suppositions—notably the notion that reality consists of extremely tiny strings wriggling in hyperspaces of a dozen or more dimensions, or that our universe is just one of an infinite number of universes—verge on pseudoscience, because they are even less experimentally testable than Jim Carter's circlon theory. [The circlon theory is a 'crank' theory by an apparently well-intentioned and competent man, a self-educated amateur scientist, Jim Carter, who has become a friend of Ms. Wertheim, a science-writer who is a friend, in turn, of John Horgan.]

It comes out earlier in that article that Newton wrote much that

would have been considered ‘cranky’ by hard-headed advocates of science. Amongst Newton’s voluminous writings can be found much about alchemy, the ridiculous idea that lead can be transmuted into gold while everyone knows that gold is better made by transmuting hydrogen in gigantic nuclear fusion systems called stars, very large stars of the sort which might have been more common in the early years of this expansionary phase of the universe. It’s hard to distinguish between crank science and legitimate speculative work that might guide a more disciplined exploration of the question at issue. If there’s an alternative universe where the possibilities motivating alchemy were strongly despised, it might have taken more time to understand the basic processes of this universe.

It can be hard to distinguish between a mainstream prejudice of a given age, or ages, and a speculation based upon a different understanding of matter or time or whatever which might be closer to the mark even though the specific speculation might seem, or might even be, the stuff of hard and dense Christmas cakes. During his own lifetime, the main objection to Newton’s work in alchemy was the prejudice that lead was lead and gold was gold. That was close to the prejudice held by many that biological species were what they were and couldn’t become something else except in the minds of the superstitious peasants and would-be magicians.

When you realize that much of creative philosophy, of the sort found in Plato or St. Albert the Great (speculated, wildly at times, on the transmutation of species), is distinguishable from the work of cranks only to those who know enough of that particular age to realize how speculative creative philosophy or theology or poetry really was but how it was a legitimate expansion of that age’s understanding of being. They didn’t have particle accelerators or excavation sites in the Great Rift of Africa but they had minds and tried to use them.

We have to be careful, especially in dealing with the likes of Newton or Einstein, Plato or St. Albert, not to forget that there are multiple ways to deal with truth or speculative possibilities. We did well in the past century in developing the creative ideas of Einstein and Planck and Heisenberg and that expansion was typically done by way of what might be called hard-headed science. This wasn’t just due to the power of that way of exploring empirical reality. It was made possible by the fact that Western Civilization had an understanding of Creation, yes—the Christian Creation, which was large enough and apparently ‘true’ enough to handle quantum mechanics and evolutionary biology and modern mathematics and modern

ways of exploring and narrating history and so forth. It's certainly true that many who thought of themselves as good, orthodox Christians proved to be enemies of modern science, which might prove to have been the final stage of development and expansion for the Western mind. Ultimately, at least in my understanding of the human mind, this means that modern men of the West continue to shape their minds in response to a general understanding of Creation which was more plausible in the 17th century, though it stretched well enough for the early stages of the development of modern physics and biology. Our modern minds are full and also often brittle and we don't know how to do better, though I have proposed some ways to head in a better direction and to better shape our minds to deal with a Creation which has proven to be far richer and more complex than the greatest of pre-modern thinkers could have guessed.

My suggestions include a change in attitude and belief about human knowledge which will undoubtedly upset many of the advocates of modern science: we should recognize the unity of knowledge and stop pretending we live in a single Creation in which there are separate realms of knowledge. Separate realms of knowledge imply separate realms of being which sort of interact but can't really come together, a chaos of sorts which has been brought about at least partly because of understandable reactions against illegitimate claims to authority and power by kings or popes or academicians who held to limited versions of Christian understandings of Creation. I advocate a return to Creation, or at least to a universe united in its being.

After I started writing this essay, I found Michael Gordin's review, *Everyman's Physics* at <http://www.americanscientist.org/bookshelf/pub/everymans-physics>, of Margaret Wertheim's book. Professor Gordin finds her argument interesting and presents it in terms respectable to that crowd of advocates of hard-headed science, but he comes down pretty solidly on the side of those who would exclude fringe science, which arguably once included some of Einstein's work before he had a reputation and also included some of the early work in quantum physics. Professor Gordin concludes, "Wertheim shows us just how muddy the waters are on the border between what is classed as 'legitimate' and what as 'fringe.' However, a murky boundary does not imply that one might just as well drink from any part of the river."

I would say that, to switch my metaphor slightly, we've reached the edge of territory we're were prepared to explore by our inherited understandings of Creation—of created being if you will. We might have to cross those

murky waters, perhaps swallowing some dangerous stuff in the process. In other words, string theory isn't a failure because it's too radical but because such efforts need a richer and more complex—a more radical—understanding of Creation or of created being.

## 43 Quantum Mechanics and the Limits of the Human Imagination

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1147>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/01/02.]

I've advocated the view that our imaginations can encompass what God has created, what the Almighty has manifested in this Creation, but we need examples and stimuli—in a manner of speaking. We need to be courageous and open-minded in our responses to Creation if we are to learn from God, who has a far more powerful imagination than we can ever... imagine. So to speak.

In Chapter 90, *Shaping Our Minds to Reality*, I quoted the physicist and Anglican priest J.C. Polkinghorne [117]:

The wavefunction is the vehicle of our understanding of the quantum world. Judged by the robust standards of classical physics it may seem a rather wraith-like entity. But it is certainly the object of quantum mechanical discourse and, for all the peculiarity of its collapse, its subtle essence may be the form that reality has to take on the atomic scale and below. Anyone who has had to teach a mathematically based subject will know the difficulties which students encounter in negotiating a new level of abstraction. They have met the idea of a vector as a crude arrow. You now explain to them that it is better thought of as an object with certain transformation properties under rotation. 'But what is it *really*?' they say. You implore them to believe that it is an object with certain transformation properties under rotation. They do not believe you; they think that you are holding back some secret clue that would make it

all plain. Time and experience are great educators. A year later the student cannot conceive why he had such difficulty and suspicion about the nature of vectors. Perhaps we are in the midst of a similar, if much longer drawn out, process of education about the nature of quantum mechanical reality. If we are indeed in such a digestive, living-with-it, period, it would explain something which is otherwise puzzling. A great many theoretical physicists would be prepared to express some unease about the conceptual foundations of quantum mechanics—in particular, about Copenhagen orthodoxy—but only a tiny fraction of them ever direct serious attention to such questions. Perhaps the majority are right to submit themselves to a period of subliminal absorption. [page 82]

I went on in that earlier chapter in this book – Chapter 90, *Shaping Our Minds to Reality*—to claim that we aren't born with brains which have much in the way of mind-like characteristics. Rather are our brains shaped, and our minds as well, as we respond to what lies around us.

Until fairly recently, I was myself confused about Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, thinking of position—in terms of a Cartesian x-y chart—as existing along with momentum. The fact that you couldn't measure both at the same time with unlimited accuracy was a problem no different from that we would have if we tried to find a billiards ball in a black-box by shooting at it with probes, such as marbles, comparable in size to the ball. You find the ball by disturbing it in such a way that momentum is changed. You measure momentum in such a way that you disturb its position. That's incomplete rather than wrong and is probably the right way to think about this issue when learning about quantum physics, but it's at least an excessively limited way to view matters.

A position measurement is quite simply a result of what might be called a position-oriented interaction with a more general sort of entity. Similarly, a momentum measurement is quite simply a result of what might be called a momentum-oriented interaction with a more general sort of entity. In more official words [12]:

[W]hen an electron interacts with a device that measures its momentum, its wave-like aspects (definite wavelength) are

emphasized at the expense of its particle-like aspects (definite position). [page 130]

So we might say that this situation is due to a wave-particle duality. Momentum is a wave attribute and position is a particle attribute. There are other such pairs including energy (wave attribute) and time (particle attribute). I've not yet read Bohm's later writings where he restated quantum physics in terms of what is apparently a strange potential in an effort to make it all more rational, but I'll make my own suggestion here.

We should imagine and speak of that electron as an entity more abstract than the concrete forms it might take after establishing a relationship with a more concrete entity. Until it forms a particular relationship with concrete entities, that electron is a form of being which is one step closer to the raw stuff of Creation, the thoughts or truths God manifested as created being, a specific set of truths for a particular Creation. Within that particular Creation many highly peculiar concrete worlds might be shaped.

Some physicists and philosophers might be inclined to speak in similar ways, including—I think—Bohm and his co-workers in his later efforts to make sense of quantum physics. The problem I see with any discussions I've yet read of Bohm's later work or the less detailed but suggestive comments of other thinkers is that they propose more or less radical re-thinkings of our ideas about the concrete being of this universe but, overall, they only patch up what might well be rather questionable concepts of being in a more general sense. I've proposed a more substantial, ground-up re-understanding of created being in a complex process which can be followed in my first published book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*—described at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=17>. I've also commented extensively in the web-published essays included in this book. My weblog, *Acts of Being* at <http://loydfueston.com/>, is still active though the material discussed is currently (as of 2012/04) driven by my thoughts as I work on other books, fiction and nonfiction.

Many of the essays in this book don't really belong in just one category. Thus it is that my sorting into chapters is sometimes a little arbitrary, but I think this structure makes it a little easier to figure out what I'm up to, a matter that often leaves my own half-reshaped mind in a state of confusion.

For now, let me finish by stating first three general principles of my metaphysical thought as it currently exists and then three aphoristic statements of important aspects of the underlying worldview:

1. The act of existence or act-of-being precedes and, so to speak, dominates substance.
2. Only God can perform an act-of-being which brings contingent being into existence where there was nothing, but even electrons interacting with each other can perform an act-of-being of a secondary sort, shaping a more abstract form of being into a concrete thing, such as an electron as a point-like entity with a specific location or an electron as a wave-like entity with a specific momentum.
3. Created being lies on a spectrum from the abstract to the concrete but abstract forms of being remain present in the most mundane things.

In a somewhat aphoristic style, I claim:

- Things are true.
- Truths are thing-like.
- Relationships bring things into being.

## 44 A Right-handed Insult

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1195>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/03/01.]

I hope that William James was his usual good-natured and tolerant self when he wrote:

[T]he scholastic philosophy . . . is only common sense grown pedantic. [78]

He's right, in general, but it's sad that Catholic neo-scholastics in recent centuries seem to be pedantic without having all the common sense. In particular, so-called natural law theory seems often to be laws derived from nature as understood in ancient or Medieval times and raised to the level of some sort of pseudo-metaphysics now frozen into granite hardness so that even the facts of God's Creation can't so much as etch a prophetic warning.

Scholastic thought, including the Thomistic branch, was an outgrowth of what I would call the worldview of St. Augustine of Hippo, as is nearly all Western Christian thought since 500AD—at least until Descartes and Kant idealized and dogmatized views of empirical reality. This basic form of Western Christian thought is given a label such as 'methodical realism' and could be said to have been completed, to the extent possible in his historical period, by St. Thomas Aquinas. I'm working on an update of Thomistic thought, assuming that methodical realism is common sense conditioned to Christian understandings of God's self-revelations and to His ways of speaking to us regarding more contingent matters and His ways of dealing with us on a variety of matters.

As is true of some modern philosophies, such as Jamesian pragmatism, methodical realism—most especially in its Thomistic form or in the form I'm developing—starts with responses to what lies around us. We start with

an active form of common sense, broadening that sense to cover more and more of our local environments and then maybe extending to some coverage of the earth and then on to the universe and maybe on to Creation where I consider Creation to include the truths of mathematics and metaphysics as accessible to human beings. All the while, we Christians use our beliefs to discipline our ways of responding and our ways of understanding what results.

I'm going to give some sound-bites to give a general impression of my way of thought—this entry can be considered an introduction for those who haven't been following the development of my worldview or an overview for those who have.

Things are true. [St. Thomas Aquinas]

Things are true and truths are thing-like. [Loyd Fueston]

Even transcendental truths pass through those things which are human sensory organs and brains leading those absolute truths to be deformed and truncated to a thing-like form, leading to an ongoing need to restate those transcendental truths to accord with the latest understandings of things and contingent truths. [Loyd Fueston's update of an insight of John Henry Newman]

The truth emerges in time through a communal process. [Carroll Quigley]

Things and actions are what they are, and the consequences of them will be what they will be; why, then, should we desire to be deceived. [Bishop Joseph Butler]

Take the above quotes as starting points for lines of thought or even dreamy contemplations. And always remember what Newton once said:

I keep the subject of my inquiry constantly before me, and wait till the first dawning opens gradually, by little and little, into a full and clear light. [Sir Isaac Newton, from an Internet collection of quotations.]

And don't let your mind rigidify around any understanding you develop, that is, don't let your common sense become pedantry.

## 45 We Would Not Know a Truth if It Didn't Happen

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1221>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/03/26.]

William James made a claim which should be very disturbing to those who hold mainstream views of the nature of truth:

The truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth *happens* to an idea. It *becomes* true, is *made* true by events. Its verity *is* in fact an event, a process, the process namely of its verifying itself, its *verification*. Its validity is the process of its verification. [78] [page vi]

I'm strongly endorsing the idea that truth comes to us by a dynamic process and doesn't enter us as a set of dogmas. "The truth unfolds in time through a communal process," but we should remember that each of us, perhaps some more than others, plays a role in that process. Moreover, truth remains true only by way of a dynamic process. While I'd say there are many timeless truths, they aren't such to human beings, as noted by some of the modern historians of human thought, such as John Henry Newman, who've studied the difficulties of holding on to even the most absolute of truths as the human context changed, culture in general but especially language and concepts. Truth can be held in a dogmatic form only if that form is really a set of notes holding us steady as our language, our concepts, our surroundings change—sometimes in radical ways. The greatest of saints and philosophers and scientists can't hold their place when a powerful river is moving against them.

As is his wont, William James writes, and leads his followers to write, in terms of what I call bottom-up environments. My question is: “What are these environments, really?” Are they what they seem to be to the explorer maturing into the naive philosopher? I would say, “Yes,” with the strong qualification that truths are dynamic entities in dynamic environments which are ultimately part of a morally ordered whole, the world which is our universe seen in light of God’s purposes.

In general, our environments aren’t freestanding as most Jamesian pragmatists assume. Those environments are themselves part of a context which might constrain human thought in some limited ways but mostly add richness and complexity not seen if we take in only what we perceive and can otherwise directly experience. If we wish to understand what lies around us, in us, under us, over us, we must subject our most concrete experiences to contemplative reviews in which we ascend to more abstract regions by various routes and descend to concrete regions. This process helps us to unfold the truth, not by some sort of magic or supernatural events but by the processes explored by philosophers and some of the saner mystics over the ages and sharpened by the Medieval Scholastics only to be sharpened still more by the likes of Einstein, despite his failure to deal properly with quantum physics—which I’ll discuss below.

Philosophers and theologians, and mystics, have a long distance to travel to catch up with modern scientists when it comes to understanding empirical reality, this important realm of Creation. But, of course, the human tendency is to stay in our comfort zones and that leads to any contemplative exercises being ever in danger of decaying into dreams of wisdom as if truth is some rabbit to be pulled out of a hat, not by a highly-skilled entertainer but by a god-like magician calling upon supra-rational forces. Wisdom is deformed from its nature as a stepping-stone to the perfect knowledge of God and becomes itself a set of strange rites which allow us to avoid the hard work which imitates by understanding the work God did and continues to do in His self-chosen and self-constrained role as Creator.

I’ll step back and take part of this line of thought a little more slowly.

Our environments can be first seen as particular settings in the greater entity we call the ‘universe’ which is spacetime but is also an entity in its own right. When that universe is seen as a world, a morally ordered narrative, unified and coherent and complete, then the environments and the entities which are part of those environments and all else with which they have relationships can be seen as part of that moral narrative, the

world.

William James remained in those environments and never ascended to the level of the world, even in the most tentative way. Without moving into the more abstract regions which allow us to see this universe as a world, a thinker or a doer can't descend back with a wider and deeper perspective. Think of it as Moses ascending the mountain to speak to God and then descending to speak of what he learned. In this current context, I'm saying Moses and his disciples should have begun a sustained, multi-generational process of ascending and descending, by way of a variety of paths.

There are certainly differences when we speak of an ascent and descent within the spectrum of created being rather than an ascent to receive revealed truths and then a descent. (I suspect the experiences of Moses were actually quite like the ones I describe, that he was learning how to speak and think **along** with God but was constrained by language and tradition in telling his story. In order to communicate what happened, Moses or his redactor working from perhaps sparse clues had to put his experiences in terms of paganistic meetings with a God as if he were one of the gods in the *Iliad*.)

In a sense, Moses had to speak to those who are fully entrapped in their environments, had to speak of an experience of ascent to a more abstract realm of Creation which remains in this concrete realm but – I'll speak in a terse manner—can be seen only by acts of reason which are imitations of God's acts-of-being. Entry into that sort of abstract region allows certain forms of communion with the Creator which are different from the more concrete sacramental experiences of this world, as if we could experience the 'spiritual' aspects of Holy Communion without the consecrated bread and wine, the Body and Blood of Christ. This is a problematic way to view matters though it might explain why these sorts of highly spiritual states, enjoyed and suffered by the likes of Moses and St. Francis of Assisi, are unsustainable for a creature of flesh-and-blood. That spiritual level, or abstract level of created being, is with us always, in us always, ever united to our biceps and our white blood-cells but we enjoy and suffer such experiences more clearly and more explicitly in the form of consecrated bread and consecrated wine being digested in our bodies of flesh and blood. Bread and wine become saturated with true life and then enter our bodies to bring us that true life. Christian sacraments run parallel to the intellectual processes I describe with the human mind ascending to abstract regions to understand what is really present in the human being's own physical body

as well as the physical entities which surrounds him.

William James perceived clearly, removed his blinders as much as is possible or desirable for a man, and understood much of what he perceived but seems to have refused to move forward by taking created being in full seriousness. It's not that James was guilty of reductionistic thinking, let alone an outright dismissal of the evidence of the universe being not merely this nor merely that. James remained in a suspended state of acceptance and disbelief, a skepticism of sort, perhaps the best stance for one who has trouble accepting faith in either created being or its Creator.

I take my Christian, sacramental beliefs in a spectrum of created being as seriously as I take my Christian, Sacramental beliefs in baptism and the Eucharist. This is just another way of stating my belief that we should be willing to at least conjecture that our environments develop within and up into a greater whole, a true universe which becomes a world when seen as the story God is telling.

Let's return to James' claims that knowledge is an act of sorts. This is hardly difficult for me to accept since I believe being, including the most thing-like stuff, to be truly acts-of-being—the being is one with God's acts of creating and shaping. Some acts-of-being are the bringing into existence from nothingness and possible only to God, some acts-of-being are the shaping of being and possible to God or the various entities of Creation. If being is itself dynamic, acts-of-being, relationships bringing entities into existence or shaping entities, then it would be reasonable to consider knowledge, even knowledge of absolute truths, to be just as dynamic as the entities and relationships of which we have knowledge. How can we, as mere creatures, know being which is not yet in a particular shape or maybe not even in existence in any meaningful sense? How can we know the truths carried by that being which is still coming into a particular form or is maybe changing to a different form as the sinful man changes to a Christ-centered man. Our knowledge is itself a participation—that is, active—in the unfolding of not just that knowledge but of the being and the story which is the concern of that knowledge.

Most Christians, especially those impressed by Einstein's side of the famous debate with Bohr about the meaning of reality, would rebel against such a way of viewing Creation, thinking—for example – that there is a human essence which makes for an easy argument for the absolute value of human life. That debate between Einstein and Bohr was interesting in itself, see Chapter 156, *Einstein and Bohr's debate on the meaning of reality*, but

becomes fascinating under the insightful guidance of the philosopher Kurt Hubner:

Einstein was claiming that reality consists of substances which remain unaltered by their relationships with other substances while Bohr was claiming that it is the relationships which are primary and those relationships bring substances into existence. [75]

I've made various claims about this issue, especially regarding the close relationship between Bohr's supposedly radical views and the theology of St. John the Evangelist who taught us that everything that exists came to be because God loves it, because the Almighty chose to establish an active relationship of love with that thing.

Empirical reality, if Bohr be right in even the most general way, agrees with Christian beliefs about the relationships between God and all forms of created being and also the relationships between many of those forms of created being. It is that empirical reality in which we were conceived, in which we live, in which we shape our minds and learn even about God—as St. Thomas Aquinas tried to teach us in our hardness of hearts and our laziness of mind and body.

The strangeness of quantum physics shouldn't seem so strange to a Christian nor should evolutionary biology seem so strange to a reader of the Bible. Created being first exists only potentially so far as particular, thing-like being is concerned. A primitive band of Semitic nomads can even be shaped into the chosen people, the people of God, the people into which the Son of God became incarnate.

The vaguer sort of being becomes better defined when it forms proper relationships with things which lie around it. This is true of an electron which shows a particular location when a 'location-relationship' is formed with a proton whether a conscious creature observes it or not. This is also true of a baby which has lots of potential traits constrained in various ways and begins to shape himself by responding to his mother's breast or to the cuddly blanket she puts over him when he shows signs of sleepiness. The more particular the thing, living or not, the more its relationships are part of a narrative. Particular forms of being don't exist as pure or ideal entities but only as participants in some narrative, an active flow of events, a context. And so we can see the importance of evolutionary biology which

describes the struggle of living creatures to form proper relationships, those which allow survival and successful reproduction, at the concrete level of life on earth.

The historian Carroll Quigley told us: “Truth unfolds in time through a communal process.” I quote him often but though he went a bit further than William James toward an understanding of created being, he still didn’t go far enough. I’d say: “Being is shaped from truths in time through a variety of relational processes, letting rational observers see and, perhaps, understand those underlying truths.”

## 46 What Can Be Experienced?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1230>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/04/09.]

In *The Meaning of Truth* [78], William James makes the claim:

The pragmatist view . . . of the truth-relation is that it has a definite content and that everything in it is experienceable. Its whole nature can be told in positive terms. The ‘workableness’ which ideas must have, in order to be true means particular workings, physical or intellectual, actual or possible, which they may set up from next to next inside of concrete experience.  
[page xiv]

I think that William James and his followers would not have ever claimed that purely formal truth-relations aren’t valid, nor would they have more than weakened the idea that our sense of an ordered flow of events is a true part of experience. They tend to acknowledge that truth comes to us and is confirmed by way of our experiences as flesh-and-blood human beings. William James is justifiably famous for his somewhat bewildered acceptance of spiritual experiences. If we Christians are to take seriously the concept of ‘Creation’, we also must consider our spiritual experiences and our intellectual grasp of Christian truths to be also true experiences, those of our flesh-and-blood selves. Properly considered, the claim of William James is a slightly—but importantly—incomplete version of the claim of St. Thomas Aquinas [3]:

[J]ust as a disciple reaches an understanding of the teacher’s wisdom by the words he hears from him, so man can reach an

understanding of God's wisdom by examining the creatures He made. . .

Contrasting these two quotes, seeing what is similar in the two and then seeing what Aquinas adds will allow a thinker with a properly flexible mind to gain a great insight. Even the physical universe, without considering its relationship to larger realms of created being, is "more than it contains" as I discussed in Chapter 193, *A Universe is More than it Contains*. Even the universe in which we live can't be constructed from its pieces. The world, the universe seen in light of God's moral purposes, is still more than what it contains. It can be experienced as a universe only if we detect and somehow try to understand that which is more than stars and gas clouds and electromagnetic fields.

To see a world, and to see a Creation in its still more complete existence, requires us to hypothesize that the world and Creation do in fact exist. We may form wrongful hypotheses, no, we will form wrongful hypotheses, incomplete and defective. Over time, as we come to learn more about what God actually did as Creator and as we spend time and effort thinking about it, we will form better hypotheses. We can do so only if we start out assuming a universe, a world, a Creation. We do the best we can; even a half-hearted effort works better than a serious effort to understand our environments without assuming they are part of a greater whole.

So, what can be experienced? A world can be experienced, even a still greater Creation, including the world of the Resurrected, can be experienced, every time we breath in the fresh air of a Spring breeze, every time we read an article about a new discovery regarding the human animal and its evolutionary history, every time we pray: "Our Father Who art in Heaven. . ."

The problem lies not with Darwinism or other scientific ideas, though they become true problems when they develop into ideologies but that happens also when parts of the Christian body of truths are pulled out of context or exaggerated so as to cast shadows upon the greater body of truths. Problems most certainly arise for religious and moral belief when patriotism becomes some sort of ideological nationalism. The experiences of ideologists, religious and educational and cultural, are necessarily limited in ways that severely distort and constrain any possible understanding, that is, the ideologist hypothesizes a world but a perverse world and then ex-

periences all, mundane and spiritual and intellectual, within that perverse world.

We experience not only events and thoughts and feelings but also an entire world every time we smell a flower, watch a sunset, or have a thought. William James and his followers see this but they refuse to hypothesize that world which will allow their experiences to be as rich and complex as they should be. Those followers and allies of James, including many scientists, are relatively immune to the corruptions of ideologies but at the great cost of not seeing the truth in a greater and more possible fullness. There are many morally well-ordered skeptics or non-believers in our time who have this Jamesian attitude, even if they don't formally accept Jamesian pragmatism. This insight allows us to understand both the limitations of the thought of some modern intellectuals and scientists and also their fundamental sanity. When doing their research or writing about their speculations, when experiencing other aspects of the world, they don't experience all they could but they also don't participate in the false experiences of so many ideologically corrupted men, including many Christians infected with a variety of nationalism or some other ideological cult.



## 47 Empirical Knowledge and the Existence of God

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1263>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/05/15.]

Respect for empirical knowledge doesn't determine if one believes or disbelieves in God, though it has generally forced any believers, pagan and pantheist and Christians and others, to see a God of reason. After all, the very term 'empirical knowledge' is meaningful only if it refers to something, some realm of being subject to perception and analysis, which is rational.

To Einstein and perhaps Aristotle, the terms 'God' or 'the Old One' or the like, refer to a seemingly impersonal principle of reason which can be seen in the consistent properties of things and the order and partial predictability of events in this universe or cosmos or whatever. To some such as William Paley, see [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/William\\_Paley](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/William_Paley), and many more recent thinkers, reason necessarily implies the existence of a God with at least some of the characteristics of personhood and some, maybe complete, transcendence to this universe which is His Creation or maybe part of a greater Creation. I feel some sympathy for Paley's belief that examination of the order found in the natural world is a sign of a Creator but I wouldn't go so far as to say it's nearly a proof in the modern sense, though it might be a proof in the older sense of being a test of coherence, perhaps a test of whether the human mind can make sense of the existence of a God like the God of Jesus Christ. Now, there is a trend for more some more serious scientists, such as Stephen Hawking and some young physicists who blog on the Internet, to make more explicit the belief of Einstein and – maybe—Aristotle that being is self-sustaining and divinity is a name for the order or rationality to be found in that being. Divinity is

what brings stuff into some rational order but it's part of the same realm of being as stuff rather than being transcendent to it.

While we can't really prove in the modern sense that a Creator exists by examining contingent forms of being such as the stuff of our bodies and the stars of our universe, we can prove it in that older sense, that is, we can test the hypothesis that we can view this universe as a Creation and do so in a way that's coherent, reasonable, and perhaps convincing in a way that considers the forms of reason which we include as emotions and feelings. Unfortunately to those who wish to score quick victories for God in their debates, that sort of proof is meaningless in the context of a discussion between those holding radically different sorts of beliefs or disbeliefs.

I've mentioned "emotions and feelings" not to toss them aside but rather to bring them into our forms of discussion about beliefs as being truly parts of our reasoning processes, part of our rationality. Most human thinkers tend to downgrade emotions and feelings, thinking them to be non-rational when it would appear likely they are part of a greater rationality. In *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* [25] and *Looking for Spinoza* [26] and other works, Antonio Damasio has explored the true nature of human thought, emotions, and feelings and some reasons why emotions and feelings are part of a greater form of human thinking in which reason often plays the dominant role but not always. (See [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Antonio\\_Damasio](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Antonio_Damasio) for background information on this important brain-scientist.) You can also check out *Adaptive Thinking: Rationality in the Real World* [61] by Gerd Gigerenzer who has shown that we sometimes see irrationality in human thought and behavior because we don't properly understand the contexts in which human thinking evolved and is still quite effective. For example, the idea that human beings can't handle probabilistic reasoning is based on tests using the abstractions of percentages when human reasoning evolved to handle frequencies, not 30% but 3 out of 10. I think this implies, consistent with the speculations of Professor Damasio, that emotions and feelings are, at least in part, efficient encodings of the empirical experience of the racial experience of human beings and human ancestors. This isn't to reduce emotions and feelings to being defective forms of rationality but rather to see them as some sort of deep, racial intellect: a capitalized and communal form of intelligence shaped over millions of years of experience. For background information on this insightful thinker, see [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Gerd\\_Gigerenzer](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Gerd_Gigerenzer).

This makes for a perfect mess, implying that what we call 'reason' is

probably a mutilated and amputated form of a more total form of reasoning which considers vast amounts of empirical experience which has fed into our simple common-sense and also our fanciest theories of mathematics and physics. In fact, Professor Damasio considers these sorts of issues, including their impact on our theological beliefs, in *Looking for Spinoza* [26].

Let me confuse matters a little more—I would hope this is a useful and fruitful sort of confusion. I'll mention another claim regarding our beliefs or disbeliefs about God and their relationship to empirical knowledge. In *The Perfectibility of Man* [108], John Passmore made the quite plausible claim that an all-powerful God can be invoked to explain any possible world—see [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/John\\_Passmore](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/John_Passmore) for some background on this highly regarded philosopher. I think this to be true at the level of physics but not at the level of narrative, a distinction of being which I've used often but I haven't been able to find a truly clear way to speak of that distinction succinctly or perhaps even clearly. Please bear with me while I try to pull some strands of thoughts together in a quite preliminary way that is very interesting to me.

I don't think we can prove God exists by assuming that the order we find in our universe must be a result of design in the way of a human engineer or architect or administrator. I also don't think it makes much sense when those modern scientists argue that the self-ordering nature of certain physical processes tell us a Creator isn't necessary.

We can return to the older understanding of prove, to test for coherence. In particular, I would suggest the proper test for a theology or an atheology is: does that system of belief or disbelief combine with empirical knowledge in such a way that the result is a coherent understanding of our experience of our environments as understood by fairly basic understandings. In other words, there is a bootstrapping of sorts which can be seen as necessary by the historical fact that our body of concepts and our other cognitive and narrative tools has increased greatly, at an especially rapid rate in recent centuries. I'll quickly mention that there might be forms of belief in which there is a radical separation between God and Creation but those lie outside of the mainstream of thought of Western Civilization and largely outside of the stream of any thought human beings could see as rational.

Think about the very concept and term 'order'. Paley was right in his day for the same reason that theologians and others were right in conjecturing the existence of a soul to bring mere flesh to life. To my knowledge, no pre-modern thinker, certainly no one who had a major public impact,

had proposed a more general understanding of 'order' which would allow for order forming because of the interactions of simple things or mere blobs of matters which engage in well-defined relationships. Darwin accomplished much because he, self-confessed as a man lacking in a talent for abstract thought, honestly confronted evidence that indicated that life had evolved by way of processes which are not 'random' as some would say but rather self-directed or self-ordered if we speak in terms of a 'self' which is the totality of an environment and a family line of organisms. Our understanding of such processes and the order which results have to be much broader and even much looser than Platonic or Aristotelian ideas would have it. Even St. Thomas Aquinas, properly acknowledged by some modern thinkers to be a great empirical thinker, knew only what he could in the 13th century and had a quite restricted idea of order and how it can come about. To be sure, the general principles he advocated would have forced any true Thomists to very openly and honestly examine the empirically-founded claims of Galileo and Darwin and Einstein and Heisenberg and Watson. Then they would have gotten to work developing proper concepts and words and maybe even revising grammatical structures.

It would have then been the job of an entire community of thinkers to develop what we can call a moral narrative, the foundational work of a civilization, an understanding of what-is, perhaps as a self-contained something divine in its own right or perhaps as a Creation. One of the causes of the decay of the West is the emptiness at the heart of the West, a lack of a purposeful and morally well-ordered understanding of the world, however 'world' is defined. There are some of us who would argue that Western Civilization was its dynamic and forward-moving self just because the traditional Christian understanding of Creation is a narrative centered around the incarnation of the Son of God. In my current understanding, this story is one of an evolving and developing world dedicated to the purpose of forming the Body of Christ. My understanding of this Body and the ways in which it is forming are richer and more complex than the traditional Christian views just because I've responded to modern empirical knowledge with its richer and more complex understanding of God's Creation.

By a somewhat torturous route, I've come to the claim that our belief or disbelief in God is the result of our understanding of our world, though in practice most will inherit a greater or lesser understanding from parents or teachers or clergymen rather than developing it on their own. Moreover, I've claimed this understanding has to be a story because we are ourselves

participants in streams of events, some of which are recorded in books or family stories. The failure, conscious or unconscious, to form a narrative of our lives and the surrounding world will likely result in either disbelief or perhaps a radical and desperate spiritual conversion of a sort which might not result in a rational form of belief.

Now I can return to alleged proofs of the existence or non-existence of God. They aren't set, and couldn't possibly be set, in the context of some raw experience of reality. Those proofs are set in a developing or developed understanding of the world, perhaps as a self-sustaining entity or perhaps as a Creation. Most discussions or debates involving mixtures of disbelief and belief will be incoherent because everyone will bring his or her own understanding of the world and then make points from inside of that world. It would make sense if those discussions or debates involved respectful efforts to explore the various understandings rather than engaging in logical analysis, from a stance inside one world, of a dogma existing inside another world. If such discussions or debates could be held more often, then the various sides could not only learn about each other's understandings of what-is but perhaps learn from each other. I'm constantly amazed by discoveries of the sheer richness and complexity of this world, and though myself a Christian, I've found my understanding of the world as part of a Creation to be enriched regularly by insights from non-believers or those struggling with their partial loss of belief.

Empirical knowledge as such, or a proper appreciation of its importance, doesn't force us to belief or disbelief in any divinity, let alone the God of Jesus Christ. However, any sane human being has to use his empirical knowledge to understand what-is and that understanding will be intertwined with any belief or disbelief. Each will support the other. In a time of rapid change in empirical knowledge, it will be a dynamic dance of sorts rather than a static relationship.

The problem we currently have is we modern men of the West haven't yet properly integrated empirical knowledge into our various systems of thought. Our discussions have decayed into incoherence. We talk past each other or yell at each other rather than sharing insights and trying to understand each other.



## 48 Why Does Time Move Only Forward?: Once Upon a Time...

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1411>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/10/03.]

In Chapter 282, *Do We Need Heart and Hands as Well as Mind to Understand Reality?*, I wrote:

Reduce reality to its various components and aspects but stop reducing when you reach components or aspects which cannot be used to fully explain or to ‘reconstruct’ each other. At that point in the process of analysis, it’s time to look for explanations which include all those seemingly fundamental components and aspects. You might be wrong and the next few generations might busy themselves taking your fundamental components and aspects apart to find still smaller particles. First, we searched for atoms, a search which had lasted for centuries and went through such strange paths as alchemy, but did result in the deep knowledge summarized in modern periodic tables of the elements. Then, we explored subatomic particles and discovered electrons and protons and neutrons and then strange hints of particles which didn’t fit into the simple scheme of things. Then we found out that there is a large zoo of particles out there and they seem to be broken pieces of more symmetric entities.

I used that to address the issue of mind, heart, and hands as being proper and adequate ‘elements’ for describing human nature. What if we wish to discuss this concrete universe, reality as it presents itself to our

senses? Usually, we speak of reducing the world to its basic components in terms of matter and its directly measurable, physical relationships. I'm not about to suggest that there is something supernatural that gets added in to everyday lives in the way of, say, a spirit infusing life into our bodies or Satan putting a temptation into our brains or an angel acting to warn us. Rather am I going to claim that we and our relationships, things and their relationships, lie within the influence of larger-scale forces which shape the way in which our individual and communal lives play out, in the short-term and even over the millenia. I'll quote Hans Reichenbach out of context, from his interesting book, *The Direction of Time* [122]:

Time direction is a property of the causal net as a whole, and is transferred from the net to the individual processes. [page 108]

First, I'll note that Reichenbach's book is interesting and raised some serious questions in my mind but I'll be doing little with it because I don't think his way of explaining, or even describing, the direction of time works well within my way of thinking.

The real issue is what's implied by Reichenbach's comment. The forward movement in time of ordinary events is due to some sort of higher-level structure. I'd claim that structure, which he labels a 'causal net', is really a narrative.

To me, a 'world' is a universe which had more demanding aspects: unity and coherence and completeness. You might even say that a world is person-like, reversing my usual order for developing these ideas. At an abstract level, a person or a world is a story.

What is the relationship between a world and a person as I understand them? A creature such as a human being is born a particular sort of physical animal and is more or less invited implicitly by his surroundings (and perhaps explicitly by his Creator) to start shaping himself by response to those surroundings. Human communities play an important role as the centuries go by, developing broader and deeper understandings of those surroundings, perhaps even coming to view that physical entity which we call the 'universe'.

I'll repeat the short quotation from Professor Reichenbach:

Time direction is a property of the causal net as a whole, and is transferred from the net to the individual processes. [page 108]

I'm not convinced we can set up a 'causal net', that is, it's not clear all the important relations, let me describe them as 'co-causative', can be captured in Reichenbach's causal net. Something is coming into being in the work of those exploring complex systems and chaotic (usually unpredictable but law-abiding) systems, A number of very intelligent and knowledgeable men and women are doing work on these systems, studying them and developing some powerful tools to understand them or at least to describe them. I'm going about it a different way. I'm exploring the structure of narratives but but I study their ways and look for some sort of higher-level synthesis. I think, based upon my understanding of being and also of God's purposes for Creation, that narratives are a more abstract, higher-level concept covering not only morally well-ordered stories but also the closely-related movements of physical entities through time.

The overall narrative by which this concrete realm, this universe, moves forward is what makes it a world, unified and coherent and complete. The overall narrative by which we concrete human beings move forward can make us persons, unified and coherent and complete.

The narrative, which is the movement into the future in our world, is as fundamental as the entities and relationships studied by physicists and other physical scientists. It cannot be reduced out of our understanding of this world. It cannot be explained by way of the field equation of general relativity or by Schrodinger's equation in quantum mechanics. In fact, I would suggest that many physical laws, many physical entities, are what they are because of their role as the 'stuff' of a particular narrative.

Find the story of our universe, or at least a plausible story given our current knowledge. That is the world. At least to a Christian who intends to be a member of the Body of Christ and perhaps to a Jew intending to be a member of Israel, that story is also him, her, us and—expanded properly—that story is the story of all of Creation.



## 49 Can Modern Science Tell Us If We're Free?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1472>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/12/22.]

Something strange happens in the minds of many men as they go about their work, whether that of research in particle physics or removing cancerous tumors or running a machine milling a component of a jet-engine or, maybe especially, in those who've studied the evolution of human beings, individuals and species and cultures. Having established mastery over some material entities or their relationships, at least by creating structured knowledge from messy data, some begin to see life, the universe, and everything as being too well-determined. Knowing some explicit, sometimes algorithmic, rules, they would see the world as rule-centered. Our tools, including our conceptual tools, can allow us to perform prodigies in exploring and analyzing reality, but there is this odd tendency to use our new knowledge to constrain reality to certain schematic ways of thought.

A logician thinks there is something called thoughts which are like the components of a child's erector set. A workman handles iron and steel and make marvelous products with those and other materials. A psychiatrist or a market-researcher contemplates deeply those feelings centered on things or associated with glands or brain regions.

Obviously, I exaggerate, but there are some who do talk as if the above reductions are truth and there have always been such back to at least the dawn of philosophical thought and probably back to the dawn of human contemplation of the most general sort. Some who are caught up in these exaggerations have had a disproportionate influence on modern thought. But the problem is with our attitudes even more than with our thoughts.

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It's also a problem with our actions more than with our thoughts. Some have trouble acting the roles of engineering or genetic research without the proper 9-to-5 materialistic ways of behaving entering into feelings and thoughts. Skeptical feelings and reductionistic acts lead naturally to non-believing thoughts. Draw out the relationships between feeling (heart), behavior (hands), and thoughts (mind), and you can see a small circle which can be a bi-directional flow of infection.

Suddenly, the best of skilled scientists or workmen, those who are loving fathers or dedicated mothers, those who pray, those who give generously even to those in need who are unlikable, begin to stand apart and to view things and men alike as being isolated entities which behave as stimuli would have it. Some react against this sort of a view, still having trouble giving up their god-like heights, and begin to raise other men to their mountaintop, seeing freedom inside of our human selves. Few there are who can truly see freedom as much a property of created being as is determinism.

This is strange to me just because the very effort that scientists and others took on to become highly-skilled experts and the effort they exert to do their work on an ongoing basis isn't forced, at least not fully. Their freedom, limited as it typically is for creatures of our sort, precedes the facts and knowledge and worldviews which lead them to claim the world is deterministic. At a gut-level, we're free before we're in chains. That breast and the mother who offers it are chosen in a way that need forces in a sense, but we choose in a way more free than not, even when we're a day-old and clueless about our real situation. We choose to suck and bite and struggle to make those things attached to us reach out to help us in that early choice.

I'll quote a prominent brain-scientist, Walter J. Freeman, from his book *How Brains Make Up Their Minds* [35]; in these words, he's advocating a scientific approach to studying human beings which is at odds with the reductionistic approach:

Instead of postulating a universal law of causality and then having to deny the possibility of choice, we start with the premise that freedom of choice exists, and then we seek to explain causality as a property of brains. [page 5]

It's not freedom according to the theories of political philosophers or quantum physicists, certainly not determinism according to reductionistic

materialists or excited computer theorists, but rather a vague freedom to choose which is one of our first and primary experiences. It matters not if this reality meets the standards of political philosophers seeking to avoid the bad choices which led to religious wars nor does it matter if it fits into the mathematical and logical misunderstandings of men who gave Vienna a bad name in some circles. What matters is that choice precedes any particular understanding of freedom and any particular fears of shackles. We choose and therefore we reach out for our mother's breast or our loved one's breast. We choose and therefore we walk by choice into the obscurity of the future. We choose and therefore we are moral creatures. Wolves and bears and elephants also choose within the context of a world perceived and understood in much simpler ways and they are simpler moral creatures but moral creatures nonetheless.

We can make choices. We can move left or right, we can plan to divide available resources between educating children and caring for the sick or elderly in such and such a proportion.

We lose our freedom when we don't consciously make choices or when we act in such a way as to take away our choices tomorrow.

We can see that freedom mostly as one in which we set the goal of being a certain sort of morally well-ordered person, we who are now human animals. To advance toward that goal, we begin to anticipate the forks in the road, to eliminate those which would lead us away from that goal even if they seem headed in the right direction. We might even be able to create our own choices, as individuals. We do play roles in creating choices as members of communities. To make it more explicit: as communities, we lay out those paths ahead of us and form the moral characters which would choose and choose properly by some—perhaps evil—understanding of the world and indeed of all that exists.

We know we can choose. This knowledge is primary. Scientific knowledge as well as political and economic speculation, even regarding the most fundamental matters, comes after a number of generations of men make decisions of a certain sort, following the general intention of understanding the world, of building an understanding of this world in its most interesting and dynamic form: a narrative. We enter that narrative consciously and by our choice. We choose to become certain sorts of human beings, persons in imitation of our Creator, We take on a role and are free when we successfully and gratefully enter into our roles with our hands and hearts and minds.

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We choose to explore our world and from what we find, we notice that certain events lead to other certain events. As Professor Freeman wrote, "Instead of postulating a universal law of causality and then having to deny the possibility of choice, we start with the premise that freedom of choice exists, and then we seek to explain causality as a property of brains." A property of brains but more so of the minds which come as brains and hands and emotions engage the world, the minds which are in a real sense the entirety of us, our individual embodied selves and our communal selves and our selves which are part of Creation.

The enterprise of science itself is an exercise of freedom, of constant choosing. It can tell us that we are free, in some significant sense. Moreover, what it discovers about human beings and about this world can refine our understandings of our freedom, letting us see our freedom to be larger or smaller than we might have thought, maybe even significantly different from what we might have thought. Even this must be set in the context of some greater understanding of what this world is, what created being is, what Creation is in its entirety and in what it contains. That greater understanding must include specific scientific understandings but can't be limited to such understandings.

Human freedom just as much as the human mind can only be understood if we understand created being in a deep way for human freedom and the human mind are closely linked reflections of created being, reflections of some large part of the thoughts God manifested as Creation. He chose with absolute freedom; we choose in imitation of our Maker, with far less but significant freedom. We shape our minds in response to what is in our own bodies and in response to what lies outside of us and so also do we learn to be free.

# 50 Old DNA and Old Science and Old Bones

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1613>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/05/15.]

Most scientists, many supporters of science, don't seem to believe that past works, outmoded works—even some with serious and avoidable errors, are worth the effort of study. This is probably at least partly due to the fact that science has been so important a part of the modern cultural mainstream that scientists have naturally come to move along with the general herd, frantic scurriers, hamsters on the exercise wheel. There seems to be no contemplative time of the sort available to the gentleman naturalists of the 19th century. A 21st century Darwin couldn't be in retreat for years as he slowly formulates a grand theory. Nowadays, scientists are supposed to be busy, taking perhaps more time to get grant money for their students than to do research or perhaps themselves junior enough or anti-establishment enough to be in the research lab or seated at their desk working on the next great hurdle to understanding the occurrence patterns of prime numbers, themselves without pattern. At the worst, scientists and many other knowledge gatherers or analysts can become parasitical intellects which chew up and otherwise dispose of the knowledge they were given, their traditions, as they seek to move on to something new. Many scientists, even those who are believing Jews or Christians and part of great traditions, are oblivious to the nature of traditions, containing not just 'old' knowledge but also the socially disciplined emotions and behaviors as well as intellects, communal minds, which form successful and complex human communities, including those of science. (See Chapter 127, *Intelligence vs. Intellect* and Chapter 282, *Do We Need Heart and Hands as Well as Mind to Understand*

*Reality?* for the relevant discussions.)

Let me state the point I'm making about an understanding of science itself, and the scientific aspects of the human mind, by analogy to the way in which evolutionary biologists, including some medical clinicians, understand the human organism and its 'defective design'. If we take a human being, for example—my own self, as a creature designed to be what he is in the current context of his family-line, we'd have to wonder why sinuses (mine for sure) are angled to drain properly if he were a crouching animal and why his sciatic nerve passes out of the backbone and through the hip/buttocks region at an angle more appropriate for a crouching animal. Our very backbones give us so much trouble as they are partial adaptations shaped from the backbones of crouching animals.

Clearly, the human body is the result of some selection processes acting upon a crouching animal. In a meaningful sense, at least for the purpose of understanding some of our problems and trying to deal with them, we are still partly crouching creatures standing upright. This is also true of science: in some meaningful sense, modern biology is still partly Medieval and even partly Hellenistic. Similar statements can be made, with greater clarity in fact, of modern physics and mathematics and engineering. This is not a bad thing. If the human mind could be passed into a robotic thing which was engineered to rigid specifications, if that thing had only a past ending in science and engineering textbooks taken out of context, that thing would be a horror beyond even Frankenstein's monster, the poor creature which was living and had a human past though he was alone among other human each a part of communities and members of some sort of people. Having no past, that robotic man would be timeless, without a future. A similar thing could be said about a science without a proper past, a proper context. This might be the reason why some farsighted scientists of philosophical bent, Michael Polanyi and David Ruelle among others, have expressed fears about the decay of moral standards in science—and those two men wrote of experiences from decades ago when science seemed still a Victorian Age gentleman in many ways. As I have noted in the past, modern scientists are not so much different from modern politicians and modern bankers and modern bureaucrats as they might imagine.

Choices made in the past still are present and the effects of any regrettable choices (even if they were plausibly unavoidable) have to be worked out over time by sometimes slow processes of evolution and development. Even more generally, our best thoughts still have contingent aspects which

are the result of choices made by Plato or Archimedes or Galen or Newton or Cauchy or many others. In speaking of choices and contingency, I speak of those we make for our endeavors on a conscious basis and also those made by human communities and those made by the impersonal forces of history and biological evolution and so on.

I came to this line of thought while contemplating this article, *Brain Development Is Guided by Junk DNA That Isn't Really Junk* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/04/130415172010.htm>. I first thought of my amused response to learning, circa 1995, that much of our DNA is inactive and probably just junk. For an example of what is truly junk, I remember that we still carry non-functioning (this is good) DNA for forms of hemoglobin of some of our ancestral species. From remembering that amused response, I passed on to the idea that harmful elements can remain with any and all entities which are the result of evolutionary and developmental processes. Unless there is some sort of truth to a dualistic understanding of mind vs. thing-like being, our minds are also part of this world of such processes; we fool ourselves in potentially dangerous ways when we think the evolutionary biologist studying the human brain can overcome all the problems and compromises in that brain he's aware of. Let alone all he doesn't know about. In fact, one of the reasons for the true conservative core to the thoughts of E.O. Wilson and other sociobiologists is their awareness that we are still part of these processes they study.

If anything, sociobiologists and scientists influenced by their insights have the typical tendency of the sort of conservatives we call 'reactionaries', tending to be a bit pessimistic about the entire situation, to not see that while we cannot escape this world's evolutionary and development processes, we can mitigate and often overcome many, perhaps most specific problems which we can define well—in principle; we have not the time nor the energy to overcome all and we work at cross purposes when we take on too many problems. A lot of qualifiers are in the previous complex statement, and those qualifiers along with the sociobiological insights tell us that science itself is 'trapped' in this world of evolutionary and developmental processes, having to deal with inherited inadequacies and outright problems which are deeply embedded in the very nature of science as it has developed. In addition, as theorists and precursor thinkers in the field of algorithmic complexity theory have told us: we can't foresee the future well enough to avoid making our own mistakes and leaving them to future generations. Even some of our greatest successes will turn out to be problems for future

generations.

To eliminate one possible objection: any path of escape from this world's nature for science itself would depend upon a dualistic view of reality. A mind, or at least the knowledge jammed into the brain, would have to somehow float free of the stuff of this world and the evolutionary and developmental processes which shape that stuff.

The situation is even more interesting than we might have thought. The above article, *Brain Development Is Guided by Junk DNA That Isn't Really Junk* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/04/130415172010.htm>, tells us that much of that junk in our DNA isn't junk. The particular studies dealt with in this article involve "mysterious RNA molecules" and the 'junk' DNA which are their templates. These particular bits of RNA and DNA are involved in brain development and in some diseases of the brain. They found one particular RNA molecule which is linked to the devastating Huntington's disease—Woody Guthrie died from this.

Junk DNA isn't always junk and neither are the inheritances from past manifestations of science which are often labeled in terms not much different from 'junk!!'. For example, the ways of thought of Darwin himself about the ways of biological inheritance were a bit wrong and far from complete and yet the defective and incomplete theory of evolution which he developed is still studied by biologists and still inspires and shapes the thoughts of many of those scientists who might well come to read *The Origin of Species* already having technical knowledge superior to that which can be found in that book.

If scientists wish to understand human ways of thought, they need to understand how we got to a better, richer and more complex and more true, understanding of biological inheritance, they would need to understand the ways in which past generations of scientists came to their less rich and less complex and less true ideas. More than that, those ideas are with us yet and few if any evolutionary biologists would say we should stop students from studying the great works of Darwin and Huxley and other old-timers, to concentrate fully on learning some purified and more complete understanding of evolutionary biology as related in a schematic manner in a textbook.

The positivistic view of science, and the related view of individual and communal minds of scientists as being able to stand apart from the world in judgment—as it were, runs parallel to intelligent design theories they

so hate. What cannot be the result of intelligent design, our universe, is to be understood, encapsulated, in a great project of reverse-engineering which is managed by way of intelligent design as biology or physics. The great intellectual sin of 'intelligent design' is the common man's version of the positivism held by many modern thinkers, scientists as well as philosophers and by some of the intellectually ambitious or pretentious among the common folk.

Against the intelligent design view and also the similar if more intellectually respectable positivistic view of mind and empirical reality, I have argued that the human mind is so powerful because it is the result of the human being, individual and communal, responding to his own body, his environments, even all of Creation, in such a way as to encapsulate all of that in his heart and mind and hands, his thoughts and feelings and behaviors. We shape our minds to be maps, in a manner of speaking, of all that we can grasp.



# 51 Mathematics and Other Neglected Parts of Western Civilization

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1616>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/05/24.]

Though most of what I write in this essay is applicable to most populations and nations of the West, I don't pretend to write in a truly general way. It might not be possible to write in such a way without engaging in needless abstractions. Thus it is that I write of the problems of the West from a distinctly American perspective.

We modern men of the West have badly damaged our civilization in part because we're not really strongly inclined toward civilization, certainly not strongly inclined toward Christian civilization; recent events indicate strongly and sadly that Christianity didn't really take in Europe or the Americas and we'll soon be—at most—baptized pagans. I'll be concerned with matters of civilization in general and leave the specific Christian aspects of Western Civilization to the side though it is arguable that Western Civilization naturally began to decay when we of the West tried to radically secularize most aspects of that Civilization.

The arts and sciences of civilization are what we confront in school and mostly leave behind us when we leave, though some who learn to hate 'school subjects' might retain or acquire in a fresh form a liking for, say, astronomy or even astrophysics at least in the form of better-quality documentaries. If we were less inclined toward equality, this general process of teaching even students of some talent to hate 'academic' learning might end in a class system where aristocrats, or at least surrounding scholars

and artists, would cultivate a taste for the finer sorts of music and visual art and knowledge, literary and scientific. As it is, we are inclined toward equality and also inclined to believe that any passing notion which resembles an idea is as good as the ideas of any man, though we do acknowledge the superior technical knowledge of those who design and build airplanes and bridges and skyscrapers and nuclear bombs, if not those who strive to write the deeper sorts of poetry or novels or history books. Einstein pointed out once that we need to generate 99 questionable ideas to produce one of good quality; one way to understand the thinking of Americans is to realize that any one of those 100 ideas, good or questionable, is considered to be the real thing so that we stop thinking and we solidify our opinions as soon as we have any brain activity corresponding roughly to an idea. Americans were perhaps leaders in this process but others in the West have followed us.

We Americans all demand a recognition that our tastes are as good as any who make an effort to cultivate a taste for more demanding sorts of music, not just Beethoven but also, for example, Celtic folk music as found in the hill communities of North Carolina. Anyone who formulates an opinion about Iraq which would be plausible in some possible world thinks that opinion as good as the opinions of those who learn a little about the histories and cultures of the peoples of Iraq and maybe even the histories and cultures of archaic peoples who left some traces in present times. Though accepting of the gifts of modern technology as we find it in hospitals and at the airport and in the mobile phone stores, we don't much like the foundational knowledge which can only be gained by disciplined effort and cannot be faked as can knowledge about the motives of Islamic terrorists or the long-standing goals of the Russian rulers from 18th century Tsars through Soviet bureaucrats and on to their semi-capitalistic and authoritarian successors. This is to say it can be at least embarrassing to express some irrational opinion about the meaning of quantum mechanics when a nearby teenager might well have some elementary but solid understanding from documentaries and from books available at many public libraries. Modern Americans feel no such embarrassments when speaking about, say, the irrationality of Iranian leaders who are, in fact, said to be more rational than American leaders by various knowledgeable observers who aren't inclined to general admiration of those Iranian leaders, to put it mildly.

Largely because we desire a specific sort of failure, consistent with worldly success on scales shorter than our collapse time, and think it to be a

sign of our native superiority, our modern educational systems have failed. It's hardly surprising that these systems have failed utterly to teach even the most basic skills of literacy and numeracy to those who don't wish to learn and to those who have serious problems learning; after all, the systems are run by bureaucrats who show truly modern sensibilities by ignoring all inconvenient facts such as those related to the inability of many adolescent males to sit still in classrooms for five hours or more in a day. Our school systems reached a point by at least the mid-1970s where they couldn't even provide basic learning skills to those who came to school capable of concentrating for more than the length of a television commercial or—more or less equivalently—a skit on *Sesame Street*. In fact, the school systems teach not the ability to concentrate on a task but rather the cow-like habits of responding to bells and of shaping habits to the needs of bureaucratic managers. (Teachers, including those who desire to do their job, are also subjected to the same conditioning.) The sad thing is that many of those who most readily acquire such habits are exactly the children who come to school with the behaviors which would allow true learning.

Nearly all human beings like colorful images, live or captured on the pages of a book—verified by psychologists and somewhat explained by evolutionary theorists as being one possible response to the opportunities and dangers of our environments. One way to disrupt the thinking processes of young students is to show them a lot of videos and to use textbooks with a lot of glossy pictures. While the improper use of images, especially very colorful, has been shown to be disruptive of thinking and learning by modern scientists, we should remember that it also reverses the traditional pathway to literacy which begins with big pictures and a few words on each page and moves toward pages with text and only occasional pictures, if any.

This is part of a general problem which has been developing in the West since at least the century of decay (14th) which followed the High Middle Ages. The radical Franciscan theologians and philosophers of Oxford in that period (roughly, the school of Duns Scotus and William of Occam) provide a focus for this view of that general problem—though they weren't villains in any moral sense. Those thinkers began the process of demoting mind to being subservient to some ghostly entity called 'will'. Even the process of intellectual education, of disciplining the individual aspects of mind so that it can take up the greater communal aspects of mind, becomes a matter of will. If we will to be educated, then we can acquire education if we are placed in a building with books and teachers and maybe computers for a sufficient

number of hours a day. In fact, those students from communities, Jewish and Chinese and a few others, which intelligently recognize the importance of intelligence in forming a strong and disciplined intelligence are those who can take advantage of even such incompetent educational systems as we have in the United States. Those from other communities are raised with a disrespect for intellect, communal and capitalized intelligence, and are expected to exercise their will and to take something called 'knowledge' into their poorly formed minds so long as they find themselves in one of those buildings with books and teachers and computers. The process is apparently magical, invoked by that strange and mythical entity typically labeled not only 'will' but 'free-will'.

I'm mostly concerned about mathematics in this essay, our schools' inability and unwillingness to teach even an esthetic appreciation for mathematics to either those with some level of talent or those who don't have such talent but should be educated for their roles, as musicians or carpenters or homemakers, in an advanced civilization in which mathematics is a deep part of our efforts to understand our world, even the entirety of Creation from a Christian or Jewish viewpoint. In fact, there are almost certainly ways to teach at least some serious mathematics to non-mathematicians.

As matters currently stand, some dislike learning mathematics or other demanding subjects and the rest can mostly be trained to dislike learning mathematics. I was in the second category though I was in college before I learned that my liking was for mathematics of a type and at a level which was easy to learn and was tested by way of trivial problems. Even when I learned how to study well enough to get good grades for my junior and senior years of college, I most certainly had not learned how to truly learn mathematics, how to immerse myself in a demanding subject of study and to respond to it in such a way that my mind would be shaped to that subject. In a sense, I'd been Americanized, had learned how to exert some energy by an effort labeled 'will' and had targeted some textbook summaries of mathematics as the region I'd conquer by this will. In fact, the process of becoming a true mathematician, or a true cabinet-maker or pianist, is that of willingly letting oneself be conquered by a specific region of Creation, not a process of conquest but a process of being conquered and shaped to be a true resident of that region.

Difficult subjects in most American educational systems are dumbed-down, emotionally as much as intellectually, in an effort to engage the minds of the students by entertaining them. Literature becomes a series of elec-

tives including vampire-stories or romances at the same time that the study of calculus becomes not only the viewing of glossy images but also efforts by under-educated and mostly bored teachers to answer the sorts of questions which can be answered only after many years of intense study—in mathematics, "Why?" can be answered sometime in graduate school or perhaps in the mature adulthood of someone with good skills of literacy. At the high school level and mostly at the undergraduate level—prepare for a zig, mathematics is a game. At a young age, even a mathematical genius isn't ready to learn the deeper truths which lie underneath the sorts of games which a reasonably talented child, one capable of becoming a serious scientist or engineer or technically-oriented philosopher, can learn at 12 or younger. Entering this game involves desire, not some sort of higher 'will' independent of an organism. See my recent and freely downloadable book, *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53] for an overview of human nature which considers desires and other emotional aspects of human being as subject to the sort of discipline which forms us into better sorts of social or communal beings.

Those with mathematical talents have also their developmental patterns which aren't necessarily compatible with the standard curriculum, which was Algebra I to Plane Geometry to Algebra II to Trig/Calculus or something of the sort 40 years ago. Human being, the human organism in a particular manifestation, is not so easily overruled by a willed submission to the plans of bureaucrats or others. I knew some young men back in the 1970s who learned basic Group Theory on their own, yes!!, because of a book which taught methods for solving Rubik's Cube. I was never much attracted to games of that sort, not even liking chess much and liking card games for the social aspects. I'm what you could call a metaphysically oriented mathematical thinker. I would have been more inclined, even at a young age, to make a major effort to solve problems asking for the sorts of abstract reasoning that can prove: if a group has property X, then each member of the group has a square root also in the group. Take the prior statement in a naive way if you've not learned the basics of group theory, forgive my liberties if you have learned group theory perhaps far more deeply than I have.

Let me up the ante. Mathematics is such an important part of a proper human mind, individual and communal, as defined by the true traditions of the West, equivalently—such an important part of the nature of Creation, that the West can't survive if it doesn't appreciate mathematics well enough

to recognize its central importance to the Western intellect, the communal and capitalized living intelligence of the West. This is to say that the West came into existence in the work of Augustine of Hippo, Gregory the Great, Benedict of Nursia, and a host of following thinkers who were scientists and artists and politicians as well as theologians and philosophers. For much of the history of Western Civilization, theologians and artists and literary men were educated in the best of mathematical thought as it existed, much of it being inherited from the ancients, the Egyptian designers of pyramids through Ptolemy—at which point most mathematics was frozen for centuries. The West has gone far beyond that as part of an ongoing effort to explore God’s Creation, far distant shores such as the Americas and planets circling other stars as well as mathematical entities such as groups or physical entities such as protons, and to properly respond to Creation as we can best understand it, the working of wood and the management of factories and farms as well as the construction of hydroelectric power plants and the composition of musical works proper to current sensibilities of a higher and more disciplined sort.

From a different perspective, that of a professional mathematician, Edward Frenkel—Professor of Mathematics at University of California, Berkeley—writes of a great mathematician who is off the radar of Western Civilization, such as it is. In this article, *An Unheralded Breakthrough: The Rosetta Stone of Mathematics* found at <http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/guest-blog/2013/05/21/an-unheralded-breakthrough-the-rosetta-stone-of-mathematics/>, Professor Frenkel concludes:

The Weil conjectures did for mathematics what quantum theory and Einstein’s relativity did for physics, and what the discovery of DNA did for biology. Alas, we don’t hear much about this story or about the fascinating drama of ideas unfolding in modern math. Mathematics remains, in the words of poet Hans Magnus Enzensberger, “a blind spot in our culture—alien territory, in which only the elite, the initiated few have managed to entrench themselves.” And this despite the fact that math is so deeply woven in the fabric of our lives and is becoming, more and more, the engine of our power, wealth, and technological progress.

Mathematical formulas and equations represent objective and necessary truths, which describe the world around us at the deepest level. And what's also amazing is that we own all of them. No one can have a monopoly on mathematical knowledge; no one can claim a mathematical idea as his or her invention; no one can patent a formula. There is nothing in this world that is so deep and exquisite and yet so readily available to all. Today, our celebration of the work of a great mathematician serves as a reminder that everyone should be given equal access to this timeless and profound knowledge.

The Weil conjectures, developed first and partially proved by André Weil (brother of the philosopher Simone Weil) while in prison for refusing to serve in the French military under the Vichy government, provide very deep and ultimately simple relationships between numbers and shapes. Professor Frenkel's article begins by noting those proofs were completed by Pierre Deligne, professor emeritus at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, N.J. Professor Deligne, the "great mathematician" in the article, has recently been awarded the Abel Prize in mathematics, a prize intended to make up for the odd lack of a Nobel Prize in mathematics. Of course, André Weil was also a great mathematician, perhaps one of the greatest of recent centuries.

I do object to Professor Frenkel's claim that modern men, at least those with some years of schooling, have some understanding of the meaning of "quantum theory and Einstein's relativity" and of DNA. In fact, even modern physicists have not been able to gain an understanding of quantum theory which places it the context of some greater whole, Creation to a Christian such as myself, and most non-scientists, even highly literate thinkers, have an understanding of many parts of modern science better labeled as "superstitions" than as "understanding". See Chapter 90, *Shaping Our Minds to Reality*, for my very short discussion of an insight of John Polkinghorne, theoretical physicist and then Anglican clergyman. After talking about the experience of teaching new mathematical truths and attitudes (What is a vector? "But what is it *really*?" they say.") to young scientists, he speaks also of the difficulty physicists have in thinking in terms of quantum phenomena: "Perhaps we are in the midst of a similar, if much longer drawn out, process of education about the nature of quantum mechanical reality."

The particular difficulties in truly understanding modern empirical sciences, history or quantum theory or mathematics or genetics, vary but each can be overcome only by a major effort along with a willingness to allow our minds to be reshaped to the knowledge of reality, to be reshaped to reality through the proxy of human knowledge and human understandings of a particular age and civilization.

By 1930 or so, José Ortega y Gasset labeled men of the modern West as “barbarian children”. While he was making a brutal assessment of the state of the common folk, he wasn’t criticizing them in a moral sense so much as he was criticizing the leaders. Under his quite plausible interpretation of the recent history of Western Civilization, masses of human beings had been released in the 19th century from parochial lives by modern political and technological developments. The ‘clerics’ or teachers and leaders of the West were the ones who failed to raise those peasants and other peoples of limited experience to an appreciation of Western Civilization; in fact, those irresponsible teachers and leaders willingly and even joyfully at times fell to the level of those who left behind the social and political order, the moral order, the culture, the generally pietistic forms of religious beliefs of rural areas and villages, to enter a vacuum of sorts where they should have entered the cosmopolis. The novelist Walker Percy should have titled his collection of essays about modern men as *Lost in the Cosmopolis* rather than *Lost in the Cosmos*. The Cosmopolis is the human manifestation of the current understanding of the Cosmos. We are lost in the Cosmos, not because we are inherently alien to this world nor because the world is defective in a way meaningful to us in our mortal lives, but because our understanding of that Cosmos, our Cosmopolis, is defective.

Most men and women of the West remain in that vacuum in which they can exist and sometimes even prosper in ways of individual mental development as well as prospering in ways of material standard of living. The failing of modern men is largely in the ways of the intellect, the “communal and capitalized form of live intelligence” as Jacques Barzun called it—see Chapter 127, *Intelligence vs. Intellect*. For a more complete overview of individual and communal human being, download my book, *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53]. The intellect of a Western man is, or should be, the mind of the Western Cosmopolis as incarnate in Western thinkers and Western libraries and Western techniques of building and manufacturing and growing food and so forth.

Despite the isolation which is often a necessary part of intense mental

efforts in such fields as mathematics, theoretical physics, philosophy, poetry, novels, musical composition, and so forth, these fields are as much a part of human communal effort as, for example, the design and construction of great buildings. Even the occasional child genius has a tremendous amount of that “communal and capitalized form of live intelligence.” Mathematics, as Professor Frenkel tells us, “is so deeply woven in the fabric of our lives and is becoming, more and more, the engine of our power, wealth, and technological progress.” I think the point can be made in a still better way by speaking of the deep relationships between mathematics and all aspects of our civilization, not just those aspects which can be labeled ‘materialistic’ when isolated, but it seems clear that Professor Frenkel does hold the wider and deeper view. It’s not just coincidence that artists were typically engineers or mathematicians during the early Modern period when the West was progressing so rapidly in so many ways. Those artists developed some of their techniques, such as perspective, by way of mathematical insights but their entire understanding of reality and of what it meant to be an artist was shaped by their entire individual and communal human beings, including those aspects of their beings labeled as “mathematician.”

Mathematical reasoning is a part of the individual minds of some and the communal minds of all in an advanced civilization. Even those who have difficulty understanding specific bits of mathematics will have cultural outlooks reflecting modern understandings of numbers, of infinity, of shapes. To be sure, this process of integrating recent mathematical understandings into the West has been slower than it could have been, largely as a result of the problem I discussed above: the failure of teachers and leaders to respond properly to the greater and higher possibilities of our civilization. Besides, it’s awfully hard to integrate something into decaying human communities. This is a problem I’ll be trying to address over the next few years, or more, by trying to develop a moral language drawing upon modern mathematics and other sciences, which language would allow us, for example, to speak of our ‘moral space’ being bent by large masses of human beings rather than forcing us to try to put everything in the linear and flat terms of Euclidean geometry, the terms which do show up in our moral discourse, “the straight and narrow way” and all of that. It’s our now improper geometric biases which make it so difficult to understand what it means to be a ‘non-conformist’ and, equivalently, to understand the strange way in which we’ve truly progressed in the growth of the Body of Christ though recent times show events which indicate to shallow intellects that

demonic evil has become more powerful.

Mathematics is the most fundamental set of tools in the human effort to explore, analyze, and understand the world in which we live. In Professor Frenkel's words: "Mathematical formulas and equations represent objective and necessary truths, which describe the world around us at the deepest level." Again, I argue often and repetitively that mathematical understandings underly and provide many of the concepts and terms even for our moral discourse, which remains inadequate and even improper largely because we haven't yet learned how to speak of our moral lives, individual and communal, by use of our far richer mathematical knowledge. We speak of our moral lives in terms of mathematics, such as Euclidean geometry, as understood in the ancient Mediterranean world and, as a consequence, our moral understanding has not advanced from those ancient understandings. To say, that moral realities haven't changed over the centuries of human advance in technology and political systems, and the huge growth in population and in the complexity of human communities, is to take up a strangely inadequate form of conservative thought.

Despite all that can be said about the importance of mathematics, and other fields of human endeavor, to the greater human understanding of reality which is civilization in a true, if limited, way of speaking, most of those blessed with chances to attend the well-funded if mostly dysfunctional school systems of Western Civilization consider all that culture stuff, the great novels and great visual art of various national traditions in the West as well as science and mathematics and engineering, to be so much stuff to leave behind when handed their diplomas. We are barbarian children. That stuff we don't like comprises many of the various aspects and parts of civilization; what we like are violent sports and disordered music and other entertainments which are the stuff of barbarian tribal life.

In contrast, Puritan divines, clergymen and theologians, such as Cotton Mather and Jonathon Edwards devoted part of their leisure time to the study of the great science of their days, including the work of Newton which was presented in the very demanding form of Euclidean geometry instead of the more sophisticated but simpler form of Newton's own calculus. Many of the great, multi-volume works of serious American history and biography from the Gilded Age and a little later were produced by men who were insurance brokers or lawyers or the like and were read by a variety of middle-class Americans who wouldn't have thought themselves to be particularly intellectual.

I return to mathematics to note that it takes some effort to learn the calculus but then many arguments of modern physics can be presented in a few lines in terms of that calculus instead of pages of involved arguments in terms of Euclidean Geometry. In part, this is the genius of mathematics, a genius shared with many fields of study and practice: put in the effort to build a vocabulary and set of techniques which can be applied in efficient ways to very complex and complicated problems. In metalworking, it shows up in the best current machines being used to manufacture current products and also future machines which are better in some desirable way. This is one major way to view a civilization under development: ever more wisdom and technique is being encoded in more compact and more usable forms.

We pretend to recognize the importance of the mind and yet we glorify mostly those who develop extreme skills in sports, those who are ruthlessly successful (or lucky) in politics and business, those who invent gadgets we enjoy. This isn't to denigrate the perceptual intelligence and quick decision-making skills of a Tom Brady or the similar intelligence and skills of an experienced catcher guiding a young pitcher. Yet, we should realize that it was Shakespeare who gave us so much of our beliefs about what a modern, Western nation is and what its leaders should be like. Can you name the great athletes alive at the time of the Bard of Avon? We remember Plato as a great thinker and moral presence and know only vague rumors of his accomplishments as a wrestler.

Many of us can't engage in mathematics to be sure. One rejoinder is that few Americans can run fast enough to play wide receiver in the NFL but many Americans sit in front of the television each Sunday watching NFL games. If we better form ourselves as images of God by being NFL fans than by engaging in efforts to understand God's Creation, then we Americans are in good shape for our final judgments. If God would prefer that we devote some serious effort to understanding His thoughts as manifested in Creation, we might be, at best, headed for a long stay in a remedial education program before entering Heaven. The prior statement should be understood in terms of human communities and not in terms of human individuals, many of whom aren't gifted with mathematical abilities and won't be held responsible personally for not understanding, or even knowing about, the work of André Weil or its completion by Pierre Deligne.

My guess is that we better serve God, Western Civilization, and future generations by understanding the work of those mathematicians than we do by gawking at the achievements of Tom Brady, though—to be fair—sports

is a part of human civilization as well as mathematics. Tom Brady has his place also, along with those forgotten great athletes of the Elizabethan Age.

# 52 Reality Bites Back but Maybe It Started Nibbling Many Years Ago

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1683>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/09/02.]

The essay, *Disorder on the March* at <http://www.thecatholicthing.org/columns/2013/disorder-on-the-march.html>, by Joseph Wood ends with the paragraphs:

The confusion of the moment is so comprehensive, as demonstrated in just the recent examples above from popular culture, law, science and politics, that any kind of coherent political or public square response is difficult to envision.

As a friend recently reminded me, a famous physical scientist once said that as science goes off on various excursions, “reality always bites back.” We have reached a point, in our collective cultural and political abandonment of true order, where reality is going to bite back—maybe slowly and gently, maybe quickly and violently.

The question is how to witness for truth in the meantime. One answer is Alasdair MacIntyre’s advocacy of small communities that by and large withdraw from the national public square.

That stance is uncomfortable for Catholics—and many have rejected it—because the Church is interested in all aspects of truth, including how truth shapes political action. But until our nihilistic culture and the power politics of secular progressivism

are reformed by some sort of spiritual renaissance, or collapse of their own dead weight, there will be severe limits to what can be accomplished in the public square. And participation in that public square has to be weighed against the risk of legitimizing and perpetuating all that is wrong with it.

We will have to learn from Christians in the Middle East, from Christians in central Europe in the communist era, and most of all from first century Christians. They all survived a great deal of reality's biting back. And they witnessed for Christ, first and always.

It's refreshing to read essays and articles by traditional Christians who are respectful of harsh realities while trying to see a way out, a way to recover what is true rather than simply demanding others conform to our claims about truths. I assume by his reference to Alasdair MacIntyre that Wood is at least somewhat supportive of MacIntyre's claim that those who aren't traditional Christians aren't just being willfully evil, they hold ideas and use words in such ways that they often do not hear the truth and cannot think the truth, where I use "truth" to refer to our best current understanding of such, an understanding which should mature—be made more complete and less imperfect—as God continues telling the story which is this moral realm. Those holding the views of "secular progressivism" may be amoral or immoral human beings or they could be morally confused, courting disorder by seeking lesser truths in preference to the greater truths, or even the absolute truths, but something has gone wrong on our side as well as on the side of the anti-Christians or the straying Christians or perhaps the non-Christians straying from the wisdom of their own traditions of belief.

Traditionalist Christians, Catholics and others, don't seem fully aware that any complete understanding of God's Creation, hence of His acts as Creator, depends upon not just direct revelations from God but also upon an understanding of empirical reality and also upon a good amount of speculative framework and glue. My claim in a large volume of writings has been: modern Christian intellectuals, including Catholics, have shirked their duty to be, more or less, continually updating and enriching and complexifying our best understanding of God's Creation.

It could be said that traditionalist Christians began to make their own reality, in a certain strange sense, centuries ago, perhaps when Galileo—

most prominently among a number of thinkers—rediscovered the empirical orientation of true Biblical religions, at least Judaism and Christianity. Many Medieval Scholastics, given at times to an overly intricate and jargon-ridden way of speaking—many of their writings were intended to be transcriptions of formal and apparently stylized debates whether actually held or not, taught that all that we know, even “direct” revelations!, come through our physical senses. Oddly enough, in the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, St John of the Cross even stated that as an obvious truth before heading off on a spiritual path which was very much dualistic instead of being fully grounded in empirical reality, this concrete realm of God’s Creation. This is somewhat strange for a member of an order (the Carmelites) founded upon the material-spiritual (there is no contradiction) practices and teachings of the Near East hermits of Judaism (think Elijah) and early Christianity.

In more general ways, Catholic thought and much of Lutheran and Anglican thought is well-grounded in God’s Creation, necessarily starting with what we can see and smell and hear and touch. From there, we can begin to understand more abstract realms of created being—most of which realms are still present in the most concrete of things. For those new to my thoughts, I’ve written often about my views of being, and of space and time and matter, but I summarized some of that in three short essays included in this book as:

- Chapter 172, *Frozen Soul and Other Delicacies*;
- Chapter 173, *Studying Steam When All You Have is Ice*; and
- Chapter 175, *More on Matter as Frozen Soul*.

The trouble with the current version of Christian traditionalist thought is that it has become a disembodied story of sorts, something not quite part of our concrete world but still true in some sense. “Some sense” isn’t good enough. Christianity teaches that God is a Creator who is the source of all being, His own divine being and also all contingent being. In terms more accessible to those trying to understand this: we need a story of salvation which includes even, for example, human beings whose sexual development went awry in a world created by the all-good, all-knowing, and all-loving God of Jesus Christ. This doesn’t mean that all are saved and certainly doesn’t mean that any particular class of sinners is excluded from salvation. I suspect a lot of serious sexual sinners will be saved and

a lot of lukewarm, relatively sinless men and women will not arise from the grave except, perhaps, to be judged and then dropped from the only possible existence without end for mortal creatures: a life shared with God, a life as a member of the Body of Christ.

We need a story of salvation, our best version of the story of the birth and development of the Body of Christ, which takes place in a world where stuff is ephemeral, is created by relationships and can be shaped or reshaped by relationships. This is where quantum physics meets the school of thought associated with St John the Apostle. I'll add that the world of the resurrected is much like this mortal realm, it is the completed and perfected version of this world. After all, grace completes and perfects nature rather than destroying or replacing nature. Even when we're raised from the grave, we'll be not freestanding creatures but rather the result of specific relationships beginning with God's love of us.

We need a story of salvation being told in a world where the best of human efforts can produce very bad results. For example. American Catholic leaders and many in their flocks have fought for certain political and social programs for at least a century. Many of those programs have been established and the results aren't pretty, but, Christian leaders, not just those in the Catholic Church, continue to follow a script that seems to be grossly defective.

We need a coherent story which makes sense of sociobiology as a grounding for the *Sermon on the Mount*, of modern theories of space and time and matter as a grounding for an understanding of the Eucharist. We have both individual and communal being—see my freely downloadable book, *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53]. Many Christians active in large-scale social and political actions rely upon communities combining for acts of charity but act as if those communities are nominal entities, not entities with real existence. With such a defective understanding, those activists don't properly consider the interests of those communities as communities. In the case of immigration and the willy-nilly formation of multicultural pseudo-communities, great damage has been done to both host communities and the immigrants. For a discussion of this problem, see Chapter 477, *What is the Role of the Christian Church in the Public Square?*, and pay particular attention to the discussion of the findings of Robert Putnam, a mainstream liberal and professor at Harvard whose research spotlighted, to his great discomfort, the damage we can do to our concrete and "natural" communities by mashing them up into what could be called "multicultural

gunk.”

In my version of God’s story which makes sense of modern mathematics and physics, of evolutionary biology, of modern literature, of a solidly literal but not literalistic understanding of the Bible, of the creeds of traditionalist Christianity, we need to care for our communal human being and that of others and not give in to the modern temptation to think and act as if we are individuals who happen to gather into masses of individuals. Unwisely squeeze together two morally well-ordered communities and you’re likely to end up with a morally disordered mess in which the churches and voting booths are empty, a mess of the sort which leaves the individuals vulnerable to exploiters of various sorts. Sound a little bit like what we’ve done to our own societies in modern times? To be sure, God’s story has always had horrible periods in which famines and wars and disease and even great prosperity led to the same sorts of problems we’ve created for ourselves, but that’s the story God has chosen to tell and I’ve not gone into a career of apologizing for God or criticizing His work. The Almighty chose to create a race with reproductive systems such that a lot of embryos die in the womb, often without the mother even knowing she was pregnant. That doesn’t give us the right to kill embryos. The fact that population pressures caused invasions of the British Isles by Celtic tribes, of western Europe by Germanic tribes, of India and the Middle East and Europe by Central Asian horseman, of southern African regions by Zulu tribesmen, doesn’t justify aggravating the moral and social breakdowns which are taking place in the West. Be charitable but think rather than vomiting compassion upon the world and don’t badly damage the organs of the Body of Christ in misguided efforts to help individual members of that Body.

A lot of traditionalist Catholics, while wanting to help the troubled of the world, are aware—usually in a vague way—of the problems I noted above. If we are to understand so that we can act without doing the patient harm, if we are to play our proper parts in the development of the Body of Christ, we must have a good story, a plausible human understanding of the context in which Jesus Christ gave the *Sermon on the Mount*.

Without a good story, that is, a story of salvation which makes proper sense of what we know of Creation, including the complex human communities which have grown up, good and bad human beings will continue to use, and often misuse, what they have. What they have is a suite of stories which don’t make much sense if you try to combine them into our best version of the story God is telling. I think we’ve actually lost our belief that

it all does make sense, lost any true understanding of why it is that Dante would have thought it possible to consider this realm to be part of the same unified Creation as Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven. Biased I might be, but I'll claim to have re-established such a true understanding—see Chapter 577, *The Only Sane Christian in the Modern World*, originally published on the Internet in 2008.

I think Wood, like many traditionalist Catholics and traditionalist members of the separated Christian churches, knows much of this. He tells us: “[T]he Church is interested in all aspects of truth, including how truth shapes political action.” I don’t quite know why it is that so many solid Christian thinkers see there is a problem but don’t see their part of the problem is caused by, not something bad, but something good which has outlived itself. The current traditionalist Catholic version of God’s story is, in fact, a version which has outlived itself. It is the result of efforts by the greatest of Christian thinkers and artists—up to some time between 1500 and 1800; it, necessarily, has timebound elements. We speak the truths of the *Sermon on the Mount* in terms of an understanding of human nature less “exact” than is demanded by our modern circumstances. I take the word “exact” in a certain sense as intended in a quote I used as an epigraph for my freely downloadable book, *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53].

Modernity is not simply a historically-datable cultural phenomenon; in reality it requires a new focus, a more exact understanding of the nature of man. [Pope Benedict XVI, in a speech given on 2008/06/07 to participants in the sixth European Symposium of University Professors, which was held in Rome from 2008/06/04 to 2008/06/07 on the theme: *Broadening the Horizons of Reason. Prospects for Philosophy*].

The Christian tradition is always the same but always the same in the way of a child yet growing. We should be making a serious effort to integrate at least major parts of modern empirical knowledge into a Christian understanding of God’s Creation, as Augustine and Aquinas did in their own times.

A new and better version of God’s story must consider the truths manifested in the stuff studied by Heisenberg and the different relationships studied by Einstein (space and time) and Darwin (the ties between the

generations of mortal, living creatures). The truths of this Creation includes even the abstract thoughts found in very difficult mathematics. For example, I've argued that we need to upgrade our understanding of "moral paths" by moving from simple Euclidean language and concepts to those of modern geometry, especially the differential geometry used by Einstein to formulate the General Theory of Relativity. I've written about this need, caused by the sheer mass and complexity of human communities, in a number of places including Chapter 403, *Differential Geometry and Moral Narratives*, where I wrote:

The American physicist John Wheeler once summarized general relativity by telling us that matter tells space how to shape itself and space then tells matter how to move. Maybe we can play around with this metaphor:

"Human beings tell moral space how to shape itself and moral space then tells human beings how to move through life—how to act."

Four years later, I'd reached a more complete and complex development of this idea. In Chapter 475, *Physics, Politics, and Metaphysics*, I elaborated a little on the use of higher-level concepts derived from some of the powerful ideas of modern mathematics and physics:

[W]e could maybe come up with concepts which are abstract descriptions of what can happen when relationships between members inside a community or between communities change. A moral creature embedded in a variety of communal relationships might suddenly find one or more of those communities is changing substantially so as to seem an entirely different sort of community. This might be a result of the community growing and becoming denser in relationships or as a result of a community losing moral structure.

We need to understand stuff, the universe, physical relationships; then we can study narratives, including those of a political nature. I've done much of that as well, even coming to a tentative understanding of political gangsterism and other forms of "conspiratorial" behavior within my understanding of God's Creation as a setting for the story of the Body of Christ.

My somewhat voluminous writings, most available for free downloading, are described in *Catalog of Major Writings by Loyd Fueston* [52].

# 53 How a Christian Finds Metaphysical Truths in Empirical Reality

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1771>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/02/03.]

I confess to failing the tests of being a ‘professional’ philosopher, having been forced to face up to that criteria during a reread of Etienne Gilson’s *Being and Some Philosophers* [62]. I don’t really care since I see serious advantages in being non-professional, advantages similar to those of the highly energetic semi-barbarians (da Vinci, Michelangelo, etc) who were bridges of a sort from the glories of the Middle Ages to those of the early Modern Age. I’d really known from my first efforts to write philosophy or theology that I wouldn’t ever be a professional; perhaps a less disciplined thinker writing philosophy and theology in the way of a novelist. Not always bad at all. Plato had a bit of that in him, Augustine was thoroughly non-professional, as was Nietzsche though being one of the greatest scholars of all philosophers.

I wasn’t always resolute in my non-professionalism, thinking years ago about spending lots of time meditating on the exact meanings I should transmit to specific words and phrases. I thought about spending a great deal of time on a small number of works, bringing the prose to the turgid perfection found in the great works of so many professionals. To be sure, turgidity isn’t always the best measure of philosophical greatness—there are likely many unknown university professors who have surpassed Kant and Heidegger. And I have to confess to writing at times to the standards of turgid imperfection. So it was that I had thought to become a profes-

sional but decided instead to pursue the truth which always lies outside the boundaries of human systems, of human professionalism. Sometimes it's more important to deal with questions within the current reach of professional philosophy and sometimes we are forced to step beyond that reach.

Gilson strongly prefers professionals for the most part—why not?—but he acknowledges that David Hume was a potentially pivotal non-professional who tried to turn philosophy back to a recognition of the proper claims of empirical reality; the consummate professional, Immanuel Kant, undid what Hume had done. The story's a bit more complicated than that, but not so much different.

I'm only about half-Scottish but I've been following in Hume's footsteps, in my own way. This is to say I work hard to return my own attention and the attention of my readers to empirical reality, not the reduced empirical reality of too many modern thinkers—such a reality can be plausible only when beefed up by the modern dualism by which our brains, though bereft of minds, can access Platonic realms of the Real to pull down transfinite numbers or schemes of political order or schemes by which chaotic systems magically order themselves. This is to admit the pantheists and even atheists who see Reason as ruling the world see part of the truth; human reason, even in its most ethereal forms, is found in the world or—more accurately—in our responses to the world around us. If those dedicated to Christian revelations are right with regard to some truths, these sorts of pantheists are also right with regard to some truths. The first sees God in His transcendence but not His immanence as Creator and the second sees god-like Reason in its immanence without seeing the transcendent God. Of course, there are some believing Christians who see God the Creator and see Him in His unity as the God of the Creeds. There are also some pantheists and atheists who see hints of a transcendent God but never achieve personal belief.

There are also some in the modern world who think in ways scientific or reductionistic. As literalistic as any Bible-thumping preacher out of a Flannery O'Connor novel, they see human language as being transparent, framing the truth underlying what is so that it can be organized to fundamentalist purposes but otherwise showing us the unadorned truth, as 1960s sit-coms were once believed to show the real truth about American life and moral order. As Miss O'Connor acknowledged and even celebrated, those sorts of thinkers see a limited portion of the truth but see it as in the rays of a police searchlight.

Reductionism isn't the only problem making it difficult for philosophically and theologically inclined men to make sense of all that is now known of certain domains or aspects of Creation; such men are both those who respect the underlying reason of our universe as being a part of the wisdom of God and those who respect that underlying reason as if it were some better version of Pan. Such men have created great systems of thought and belief, including some men with a partial or clearly defective view of created being.

Ways of understanding all that exists (by whatever definition) have staying power—call them cosmologies if you will; I've called them 'worldviews' in some of my writings. Such cosmologies or worldviews are built into our language and the workings of our minds, the workings of our attitudes toward God or the gods and toward other men and toward the world as a whole, and the workings of our hands as we make our livings or create works of beauty.

So it is that we modern men have to deal with the persistence of what might be called categorical schemes of metaphysics, building block concepts of being and existence, in a world which is dominated by evolutionary and developmental processes. In fact, so far as the realms of created being go, these building blocks don't pre-exist the entities which are made of those blocks. They evolve and develop as do the complex entities themselves. In fact, the dividing line between part and entity is always somewhat fluid and always somewhat arbitrary. There is no essence of man but rather the stories of creatures branching into other stories, some of which were and are the stories of men. And there is the story of the perfect and complete man, the communal being who is the Body of Christ, communal as God is. The Almighty is three Persons who retain their individuality while being one God. The Body of Christ is a multitude of human natures who retain their individuality while being one Man or one Body of Christ.

I'll switch to using the term 'process' and reserve the use of 'story' for streams of events involving higher entities—including the physical universe as a whole. A man lives a story intertangled or embedded in a variety of other stories but that man came to be, in terms of his evolved species and also his individual being, by way of evolutionary processes and metabolic processes and so on.

(I'm in a semi-professional mode here, loosely defining my words and also moving on to loosely define some of the relationships between realms of being.)

Are those processes found only at the level of concrete being? Could they possibly go to the most fundamental levels of created being? My answer is that truths of a sort claimed as metaphysical principles were manifested by God as the raw stuff of created being. That raw stuff was shaped in various stages coming to a climax of sorts, from our viewpoint in this mortal realm, in the phase change to thing-like being which we know as the Big Bang. It's better in many ways to see thing-like being as arising some hundreds of thousands of years after that when 'matter' and electromagnetic radiation decoupled, an event we see as the cosmic background radiation. I provide an overview in Chapter 438, *The Essence of Liberalism*, drawn from an essay where I perhaps first stated clearly my motivation for my current philosophical and theological work by raising doubts as to whether "we even understand the components of human nature and human community life well enough to have meaningful discussions based upon such aspects of human life as 'freedom' or 'happiness'." I went on to speak about the nature of being and how this needs to be re-understood to deal with human nature from the modern perspective, allowing for modern empirical knowledge of man and of his world.

In Chapter 438, *The Essence of Liberalism*, I also provided "a diagram explaining a little of what it all means":

If the reader wishes to understand the meaning of this diagram—very important to my worldview, he should read or reread the entirety of Chapter 438, *The Essence of Liberalism*.

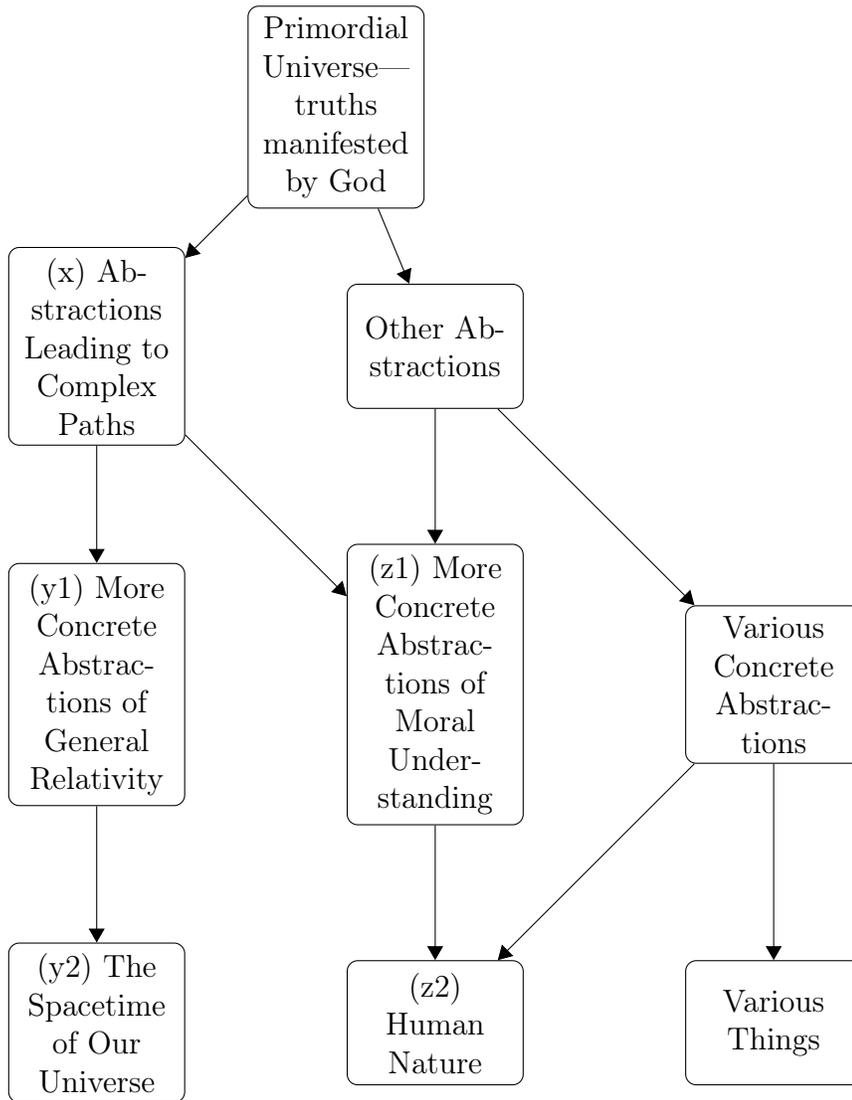


Figure 53.1: Simple Relationships of Abstract and Concrete Levels of Being



## 54 Rebellion Against Reality is a Sin and a Moral Fault

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1869>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/08/25.]

Christians are bound to recognize that the God of Jesus Christ is truly Lord and truly Creator. We are bound to do our best to honestly and courageously and faithfully respond to God's Creation as we can best know it and as we come into contact with it.

To turn away from Creation or to attempt to impose your own dreams or schemes upon Creation rather than properly responding is an act of rebellion against God, that is, an act of rebellion from the Christian viewpoint. It is also a serious moral fault and courts practical consequences—to virtuous pagans and others as well as to Christians. In my updated Thomistic terms, I think of this rebellion as a refusal to make peace with empirical reality. (See the freely downloadable book, *Making Peace with Empirical Reality* [49], which is also the name of a part in the much larger collection of essays, *Acts of Being: Selected Weblog Writings From 2006 to 2013* [51]. An update of this more complete collection is produced shortly after each year-end.) This refusal to make peace with empirical reality can be an understandable response to a sometimes brutal Creation, but it cannot be sustained without falling into a rebellion against God. Certainly, a major human institution or country or civilization falls into a state of moral disorder and courts disaster by sustaining such a rebellion.

As Jeremiah pointed out in explicit terms, if you know that God has willed that your very country be conquered and your people enslaved, then you have to give in to that will of God. It is rare, to say the least, that the members of a community would be asked by a true prophet of God to

surrender their entire community, men and women and children, Temple and home and stores of food and gold, to a brutal and greedy conqueror. Lesser surrenders to political or military subjugation by brutes or simply those who hate your people are sometimes mandated by bad situations. A lesser form of this surrender might well be the fate of the American people if they continue to tolerate leaders who abuse other peoples with American power. We will need to surrender our (quite irrational and historically unjustified) claim to being an ‘exceptional people’. I think this is already happening and our leader class (power-elite or whatever) is not going down gracefully because they have nothing to contribute to the world but a brutal willingness to use the firepower made possible by American wealth and to use it even against the most defenseless of civilian targets.

How can we understand the sort of rebellion against reality, against the most blunt of facts let alone against reasonable, but speculative, understandings of that reality? Is it a form of *Idealism* as described at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Idealism>? That article in the link defines Idealism in these terms:

[T]he group of philosophies which assert that reality, or reality as we can know it, is fundamentally mental, mentally constructed, or otherwise immaterial. Epistemologically, idealism manifests as a skepticism about the possibility of knowing any mind-independent thing. In a sociological sense, idealism emphasizes how human ideas—especially beliefs and values—shape society. As an ontological doctrine, idealism goes further, asserting that all entities are composed of mind or spirit. Idealism thus rejects physicalist and dualist theories that fail to ascribe priority to the mind. [Footnotes can be found in the original.]

Presented in these abstract terms, Idealism would seem to be a concern of ivory-tower philosophers. It’s certainly not clear why it would be a problem for Christians or for Americans, Christian and non-Christian. In fact, my view of God manifesting His thoughts as created being of which we are a part and from which we form valid thoughts by way of responses obscures, but in a useful way, the difference between ‘mind’ and ‘reality’. By way of a higher level understanding made possible by an ‘encapsulation’ of reality as a substantial part of our own minds, we can expand our understandings of reality to include larger pieces of Creation. By way of emphasis upon mental

activity, my claims bear a somewhat askew but close resemblance to at least a possible form of Idealism. The difference is that valid mental constructs in my worldview are formed by honest and courageous responses to reality, in the small or in the large. Creation itself corresponds to our minds (most completely and most perfectly to the communal mind of the Body of Christ) because our minds correspond to Creation as we best know it. Actually, there is a time-lag which brings about the possibility of serious problems, some of which are realized pretty well in the modern world, especially in the Christian churches and in the countries of the West. Our understanding is always based upon yesterday's responses and the knowledge formed by those responses. When, for example, the physical and mathematical sciences have advanced so fast as to conflict with our knowledge from yesterday, then our general understandings of Creation are out of synch with our best, and perhaps only partially digested, knowledge of empirical reality. The same can also happen when knowledge of abstract realms, such as mathematical understandings of infinity, has advanced too rapidly to have been properly absorbed by philosophers and theologians, historians and biologists, poets and novelists, clergymen and believers, politicians and citizens.

What does all this mean? Perhaps that Wikipedia article at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Idealism>, can shed some more light through a passage dealing with more ordinary usage of the term:

In ordinary use, as when speaking of Woodrow Wilson's political idealism, it generally suggests the priority of ideals, principles, values, and goals over concrete realities. Idealists are understood to represent the world as it might or should be, unlike pragmatists, who focus on the world as it presently is.

The above statement is a large-scale simplification of the sort found in my essays. I like it.

For the rest of this essay, I'll use the term 'Idealism' for this 'vulgar Idealism' and I'll ask, "Why is Idealism wrong?"

Idealism assumes that the truth is found in our heads, and perhaps in our hearts. In most cases, this is not a conclusion from personal contemplations or perhaps debates with friends or others. In most cases, this is a result of the very processes I advocate. We form our minds in responses to reality, but nearly all boys and girls form their minds by responding, usually in affirmation, to what they are taught by Mom and Dad, Grandma

and Grandpa, minister or priest or rabbi and religious teacher, movies and formal schooling. Some are born with a tendency to rebellion which is one of those traits dangerous, or even self-destructive, in some circumstances but valuable to society if not to the rebellious human being in other circumstances. Most tend to absorb what they are taught explicitly or implicitly. Turning the communal mind is akin to turning an oil tanker—it takes a good number of miles or years.

We hold “ideals, principles, values, and goals” and believe them to be absolutes because we adopted them or they were pushed into our heads or—more realistically—both, starting with the very first attitudes we picked up as infants. When reality seems to differ from our absolutes, we go with our absolutes. I could say it’s even broader than the above list by including even facts. We hold ideas of what “must have” happened during, say, World War II or the Vietnam War or the campus protests during the late 1960s and early 1970s or Watergate. Those fairy-tales, sometimes with as nasty an edge as any from Soviet propaganda, overrule any potential facts which present themselves to our senses or minds. Americans are so good and pure in the mind of these juvenile patriots that they don’t even question what really happened when we hear of Vietnamese or Afghan villagers, sometimes with weapons in their hands, being killed by Americans carrying heavy arms. Who was in whose backyard? Who was carrying military rifles and explosives near whose children? We don’t even question the meaning of the context; we know any villager who killed an American soldier was clearly one of those gooks who have no respect for human life or a raghead who hates us for our freedoms.

More generally, that refusal to accept God’s Creation on its own terms—terms set by God in His freely chosen role as Creator—is an act of defiance against God. This doesn’t mean we’re called to accept our fates in some passive way; it does mean we are called to respond to God’s Creation rather than to attempt to impose our own rules upon that great Work of all works. We play within God’s rules which include the 5th Commandment so spectacularly violated by the United States and its allies since the dominant countries of the West decided to fight the gangster regimes of Hitler and Stalin by becoming more skilled gangsters.

God’s rules also include the rules covered by modern physics and mathematics and the general principles of evolution and development which are so central to physical cosmology as well as biology and history and sociology and creative writing. Even highly educated scientists are having trouble

learning how to truly accept all of this new empirical knowledge, and the theories built upon it; even philosophers with flexible minds can't readily make the strangeness of quantum physics a natural part of their thinking though it is quantum physics that is true and our minds which are wrong or at least inadequate. (See Chapter 90, *Shaping Our Minds to Reality*, for my responses to some powerful insights by John Polkinghorne, physicist and Anglican priest.)

Our worldviews, our overall understandings of all that exists, are largely matters of speculation and are necessarily limited and impoverished compared to Creation, but we should be careful to avoid willful wrongheadedness. We should also avoid wrongheadedness in our understandings of lesser realms of Creation, such as the history or moral standing of our country. Our understandings are limited and impoverished because of the ways in which an imperfect creature has to learn over time, his own lifetime and the generations over which develop the communal human beings into which an individual human being integrates his own individual being while yet keeping it and remaining himself. To be wrongheaded is to be morally culpable for willful ignorance and the resulting stupidity—however inherently intelligent those ignorant and stupid human beings often are. The ultimate wrongheadedness is to willfully misunderstand the very meaning of God's Creation, imposing our own—often self-righteousness—schemes or failing to courageously respond to signs that we need to rethink some matters and come to a somewhat different understanding of what is, for example, the Body of Christ. In Christian terms, this is a sin as well as a serious and dangerous moral fault. In terms of virtuous paganism (think Aristotle), this is still a serious moral fault. It's not a simple mistake, it is an effort to impose your own preferences upon God's manifested thoughts, even an effort to assert the superiority of your own 'moral vision' over the work of God.

Human beings can be in a state of seeming rebellion against reality, or at least in a state of separation from reality, for a variety of reasons which might carry no moral culpability or only partial culpability. A schizophrenic who weaves fantastic tales of being a disinherited granddaughter of a very wealthy man, only half believing it herself—if even half, isn't evil. A seemingly sane President or Vice-President of the United States who weaves fantastic tales of vast international conspiracies against Americans, "They hate us for our freedoms?", is evil, no less though he believes his own fables. American citizens who continue to follow men who present only updated

or even more outlandish versions of these fantastic tales are in a state of sin or moral fault after these decades of Cold War followed by a “Clash of Civilizations” and the huge body count, disproportionately composed of the Vietnamese villagers we were ‘saving’ and all those Iraqi children evil enough to live under the rule of an American bastard our leaders no longer wanted.

Let me step back and speak in terms of centuries. The current separation of the intellects, or communal minds, of the West from reality is a highly possible, though not necessary, result of the rejection of evidence that God’s Creation doesn’t correspond to the ideas held by those who persecuted Galileo who was trying to respond openly and honestly to that evidence. (In this, I simplify by using the most prominent martyr to the truth of God’s Creation as a symbol.) To be sure, however stupid some of Galileo’s persecutors were, they were the holders of what were honorable and quite plausible speculations on the nature of this concrete realm and of what might lie outside of it. Plausible but wrong as it turned out, though we should allow some sympathy for those with inflexible minds and rigorous training in a worldview about to be superseded. But, mostly, we should criticize them strongly for not even losing their confidence in their worldview in the face of strong evidence it was not adequate for understanding empirical knowledge in even the early decades of the “Age of Discovery”—they were willing enough to profit from the new lands being discovered where no new lands should have been by their mainstream understanding of geography.

As it turns out, Galileo himself knew that some of the great contributors to that ultimately wrongful understanding, such as the Christians Augustine and Jerome and Thomas Aquinas, taught that reality is the ultimate judge of our understanding of reality—to put it in a modern way. Popes and other Christians can criticize the modern tendency to impose fairy-tales upon reality, evil fairy-tales when it comes to the Nazis, but that is a tendency first born in the Catholic Church’s intellectual and ecclesiastical institutions in the so-called Renaissance and then developed in parallel in the corresponding Protestant and secular institutions of the West. Reject reality in favor of your own dreams and schemes and reality might reject you. Sadly, in the short-term, the victims might be quite innocent and not even involved in the struggles to maintain an outmoded worldview or to establish a new one to the tastes of men willfully separated from reality.

# 55 Mathematical Models of Human Communities: Local and Global Processes

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1892>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/10/01.]

In *Sociodynamics: A Systematic Approach to Mathematical Modelling in the Social Sciences* [145], the physicist Wolfgang Weidlich develops a model of some aspects of human communities; his model is developed bottom-up in a manner similar to the development of a model of an industrial process or of (allegedly) well-defined human activities. Weidlich is wise enough to qualify his efforts by acknowledging that there are aspects of human communities which can't be modeled in a quantitative manner.

Weidlich engages in what I would consider traditional modeling, an activity running pretty much parallel to the modeling of an industrial process such as the mixing of gases or liquids or even the modeling of a more complex system where multiple processes are involved as well as human workers. It is also a form of modeling which assumes the whole is the sum of its parts, though undoubtedly many 'emergent' properties can arise in a complex, sophisticated model. Again, Weidlich freely admits and intelligently discusses some of the ways in which the whole is greater than and different from the sum of its parts, but this type of methodology tends to separate a complex entity into sorts of being which are hard to again see as one entity. Sometimes, this will be a matter of separating the local (such as the individuals) and the global (the communities). In fact, in some of the somewhat successful models of economies or other aspects of complex human communities, the individual disappears. In other somewhat

successful models, such as that of Weidlich, the individuals are summed up in an additive way that isn't quite convincing.

I'm advocating the use of models in which the local and the global are somewhat separate but are part of one coherent model, as in a Riemannian manifold where the geometry in a small region of a point is Euclidean, that of a Euclidean plane tangent to the point, but the manifold has a global geometry which might be very complex and very much non-Euclidean. There is nothing in Weidlich's model which can truly be labeled as 'global' and this is true also of other models I've discussed in recently published essays.

I'm not advocating a direct use of the differential geometrical techniques which have worked so well in science and engineering—most famously in the general theory of relativity. I'm advocating rather a step towards the realm of the most abstract form of created being, the truths which the Almighty manifested as the raw stuff of Creation. Since these realms of being have complicated relationships in themselves and with other realms, then we have to work in a manner largely empirical, learning about reality from reality, learning how to think by observing how the objects of our thought actually behave. Let me take a situation, that of the American people and the United States. In Chapter 315, *Do We Need Conflict to "Drive the Rise of Ultrasociality"?*, I wrote:

A people can be nonviolent and well-meaning in the small but, in the large, as a people, can be murderous and thieving war-mongers. In recent centuries, some of the most violent nations have been those with populations made up of individuals who are law-abiding and even somewhat gentle by historical standards: Germany in 1914-1945, Japan in the 1920s through the 1940s, Great Britain during the years of Empire and a bit beyond, the United States through much of its existence as loosely connected colonies up to now and still going strong though maybe about to run out of gas.

The global (national) properties of Americans in the form of the American people are much different from the local (personal) properties. This difference between, say, the individual and the community is perhaps necessary and likely to be a good thing in many cases, but not in this case. More importantly for now, we should recognize that a qualitative (think of traditional historical or political analysis) or quantitative model of a complex

human community can't be built up by simply summing up the behavior of the individual members of the community. On the other hand, models such as that of Turchin and colleagues (which I discussed in Chapter 509, *Mathematical Models of Human History: Are They Plausible?* and Chapter 315, *Do We Need Conflict to "Drive the Rise of Ultrasociality"?*) succeed in exploring specific aspects of human communities by modeling those human communities as independent entities with no relationship to the individual members of those communities. In the end, much is missing. The model of Turchin as his colleagues can tell us Central Asian nomadic warriors had a great effect on the development of complex societies in the Fertile Crescent and then upon the expansion of such complexity into other regions. They don't tell us, aren't set up to tell us, what qualities separate the barbarians who destroy and leave from those who conquer and stay as successful rulers. There is much else they can't tell about many important matters different from, perhaps at a finer-grain, than the geographical spread of civilizations and military technology.

Again: I'm advocating that we try to develop models of human being, individual and communal, by abstracting from the more sophisticated models of physical science such as that used in the general theory of relativity where local regions of space are Euclidean and larger regions are curved in non-Euclidean ways. There might be a model in the state-space (undefined as yet in any authoritative way) in which regions around a single state (of a single entity?) are Euclidean and larger regions might have a non-Euclidean geometry. As is true of the general theory of relativity, large might include larger mass as well as larger distance. Other possibilities will likely arise.



## 56 Mathematical Models of Human Communities: We Live in Narratives, Not in Models

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1896>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/10/09.]

In Chapter 55, *Mathematical Models of Human Communities: Local and Global Processes*, I discussed briefly my oft-stated opinion that we need to model human nature, personal and communal, by a model (qualitative and quantitative) which is much like those of the theory of general relativity where local regions of space and time are, so to speak, Euclidean and Newtonian, while larger regions of space and time (with great mass also being a form of ‘larger’) are curved into some non-Euclidean and relativistic geometry. Even such a model doesn’t do the ‘whole’ job. That model of human nature must be seen as a general model of particular entities interacting in what we might call narratives or stories and much of what is important is found in those narratives or stories.

That prior posting was written as a response to specific comments by the physicist Wolfgang Weidlich in his book, *Sociodynamics: A Systematic Approach to Mathematical Modelling in the Social Sciences* [145], which is an effort to develop a model of some aspects of human communities. I’ll continue responding to specific comments made by Weidlich in that book. As is my custom, I’ll be playing off a work worthy of respect in order to take a discussion in the direction of my worldview, a sort-of Thomistic philosophy expanded to explicitly consider modern empirical knowledge, including both the ways in which the ideas of St Thomas Aquinas on human nature are enriched and complexified by drawing upon the insights of modern evo-

lutionary biology and brain sciences and also the ways in which the ideas of St John the Evangelist on the primacy of relationships over stuff are enriched and complexified by drawing upon the insights of quantum physics and modern mathematics.

In this short essay, I'll move on to deal with narratives, stories, which aren't even parts of this world so much as they are the world and certainly even our human lives, individual and communal.

On page 149, Weidlich writes:

These large scale transitions in societies [such as that from the liberal Weimar republic system to the totalitarian Nazi system] are mostly of a tragic nature. They include the breakdown of a whole political system, the liquidation of its established institutions etc, and for the people involved as witnesses and/or active or passive participants it means a break in their personal biography, and in the worst case of the arising of a violent totalitarian regime it can mean concentration camp and death for its victims.

Each of such large scale phase-transitions is of course a unique event in so far as it will never recur in exactly the same form. However, in each event of this kind there appear *universal structures* of human character and social behaviour which play an essential role in enabling political phase-transitions.

“[U]nique event[.]” Indeed. I emphasize this is Weidlich's term and I'll claim without qualification he is right to use such a term. We're dealing with unique events in a story moving forward. Whatever might be the truth or legend of tales, sometimes egomaniacal boasts, of genocidal brutality in the Hebraic books of the Bible, none of those ruthless men were Hitler. Nor were the Mongols under Genghis Khan and his descendants much the Nazis though they did share a brutal attitude toward other human beings. Ruthless killers they were, but they followed different ways of killing, different ways of being cruel to survivors. And the brutality of the Medieval Mongols was differently motivated from that of the 20th century Nazis.

The title of this essay says much: We live in narratives, not models. Models, whether those of modern physics or social sciences, can tell us much about some specific aspects or specific types of flows of events in a narrative of a human life, whether that of an individual or a community.

Models, as they are generally understood and are generally built, can't reproduce the richness and complexity, the "uniqueness" and "randomness" of our human lives. So far, no one has even managed to build a model true to the more quantitative narrative of the physical universe. Such will likely occur and maybe soon, but the point is the difficulty of building even a 'straightforward' model of physical processes of a more complex sort.

There is such a thing as reality. Some would wish to override reality with selected pieces or aspects of reality from which they would construct all that exists or at least pretend to do so. In reality, in the universe as human beings know it and as it can reliably be described to truly be, narratives exist and are not limited to what can be found in the algorithms of human models. Those narratives include "unique events" and also "random events" (sometimes, but not always being the same events). Sometimes those events are such that they can be used to enrich a model going forward. Sometimes not; sometimes they are of a nature beyond the mainstream discipline of modeling. I'm arguing for the expansion of our understanding of reality to include what might be called the qualitative tools of mathematics and some of those can be added to models, but only at the expense of making those models at least somewhat indeterminate and at least somewhat non-quantitative. And, even then, we don't know if our knowledge of being, abstract and concrete, is great enough for us to produce a proper encapsulation of this universe, of this world which is this universe seen in light of God's purposes for it, and of all of Creation.

I have used the word 'encapsulation' as I often do in my discussions of the nature of the human mind and how it forms. "What do we know?" "What is knowledge?"

What we know is not some sort of rules, axiomatic knowledge independent of Creation and to be applied to Creation to bring it into order. What we know is what is, though that is a simplistic description of a very complex process of shaping our minds to created being and its various processes and—most importantly—its relationships. We encapsulate reality and then can sometimes enter into a recursive process of understanding more complex parts of reality by building them up from simpler parts. This secondary process can be taken seriously only when it matches our encapsulation of reality, that is—our minds, and then perhaps adds to the richness and complexity of that encapsulation.

Our most basic knowledge, common sense and intuition, is what is put into our heads by the evolutionary processes which selected our ancestors

for their ability to respond properly to their immediate environments and more. These selection processes resulted in a brain that assumes much that is useful about our environments and more—as we began to see the abstract forms of being from which those environments are shaped. Some of those assumptions are true only in qualified ways and some at least point to greater truths, though I think we know not enough to be sure what is an absolute truth.

Knowledge is some sort of model, qualitative and quantitative, of reality, of created being. Knowledge, true knowledge, is drawn from reality and encapsulates that reality in various ways and in various realms of created being. Sometimes, as I stated above, this process of drawing and encapsulating has occurred in the evolution of our species and sometimes it occurs in our individual lives or our communal lives, though many individuals and communities can be said to more truly mis-know reality and not just in the sense of being in an early stage of development and learning.

I've spoken of different realms of being, ranging from this highly concrete world of things which is being shaped from a more abstract realm of being, which is itself being shaped from a still more abstract realm of being, right back to the most abstract realm of being I can conjecture—the realm of truths which God manifested as the raw stuff of Creation. Our world, this concrete realm of things and thing-like relationships, is also the realm of narratives. There are the narratives sketched by cosmologists and evolutionary biologists and all sorts of historians, from those specializing in prehistory to those specializing in last week's events. There are far greater narratives, some even having or hinting of moral purposes.

We've crossed over to realms where God's presence is more personal in a meaningful sense; the Almighty is no longer some sort of mathematician or physicist or engineer who might well be the Deity of many Enlightenment thinkers. The basic structure of spacetime has been shaped, the other stuffs of thing-like being have been made—protons and electrons and all that. When our universe came into being, God began to show Himself a story-teller and a participant in the stories He tells. I've already mentioned the truths God manifested as the raw stuff of this Creation, but what is the purpose of it all? So far as we can currently see, Creation relentlessly moves toward the concrete, the particular and even the peculiar. The power which drives this story and its many stories might well come from the Enlightenment Deity or the Godhead of a higher pagan, but stories move toward particularity and even the potential of personhood, toward a meeting

with the Triune God, three Persons in one divine Nature. The possibility of persons in the form of mortal creatures and the possibility of stories with moral meanings arise during this process, the process by which Christ and His Father and Their Spirit are revealed as the true Creator.

We human beings must ask: “What sort of Creation, Cosmos if you prefer, has the abstract stuff of personhood and stories?” and we Christians answer: “A Creation of a Personal Creator.”

I’ll freely admit that there is no way to prove my answer in the way of an experiment in physics or chemistry but that matters little because we can’t prove the universe or the world which arises from it. We can only accept it on its own terms and try to understand. We need to also explain stories and persons on their own terms and not reduce them to the physical stuff and physical relationships in which they are truly embodied but to which they aren’t limited. I’m certainly not arguing for supernatural souls but rather for what might be called natural souls: much that is so important about human nature, individual and communal, and also important about even the physical universe in its greater scope is to be found in the totality of created being, abstract and concrete. We understand not by trying to reduce the world in terms of scientific myths created by those who would explain by biology or physics what must be explained by first accepting reality, Creation, on its own terms, encapsulating it in our own minds and as our own minds, and then realizing that the encapsulation (of, for example, human nature) is the understanding, is the explanation. But it is an encapsulation which makes sense only as part of far greater encapsulations which consider all that we can discover about created being and all that is built into the very physical stuff of our brains and our entire bodies.

The ultimate in particularity is a person, an entity which is self-aware and seems to hint, however lightly, of a greater sustainability and even one without any necessary end. Death intrudes, casting doubt upon our hopes or pretenses of possessing true life, life without end even if it had a beginning. We must remember that ‘death’ as a human concept is a result of our self-awareness, the very self-awareness that brings the possibility of being images of our Creator and even of sharing His life. Our awareness of death also raises the possibility of the greatest of blessings, a sharing of the life of God.

Let me restate my position in even more explicitly Christian terms. From God comes terribly abstract truths manifested as the raw stuff of Creation, of created being of all forms and all combinations. This is some-

what analogous to God in His divine nature, that is—Creation viewed as stuff is somewhat the image of God's Nature. But the Lord set in motion processes by which abstract being becomes particularized, eventually becoming thing-like being of a somewhat abstract sort, muons and baryons and leptons and so forth, which develops and evolves toward concrete forms.

We can imagine, in a highly disciplined way, what might be the stage just one step more abstract than the thing-like being of this universe. That is, we can speak of the strange and abstract form of being which is described in the works of Schrodinger and Heisenberg and their successors, abstract and mathematical being which 'collapses' to thing-like being. More than 'described', I think there is a strong sense in which those mathematical formalisms are that being from which the physical stuff of this universe is shaped.

One product of the particularization of abstract being to concrete being, followed by the processes of concrete being evolving and developing, is the human animal which has some of the properties of a person and the potential to become more truly a person. At this point, what was analogous to the divine nature of God has produced biological beings analogous to the Son of God, a divine Person. This is the ultimate goal of these processes of shaping more particular forms of being—to produce a world and a species into which the Son could be incarnated, emptying Himself, learning the discipline appropriate to a mere human creature, and offering His own Self back to the Father. This theological analogy would imply a situation discussed, in an aphoristic style, by Wittgenstein: if we succeed in penetrating to the smallest components of this universe, we might find that foundational level is supported by the whole of the universe. From that extremely abstract stuff which is the raw stuff of created being and which is analogous to the nature of God arises the possibility of person-like creatures, creatures which can maybe become true persons by way of sharing the life of God.

There are those who examine human life, communal or personal, from the viewpoint of an empirical scientist recognizing the validity of only knowledge which can be validated by the standards of physics or biology or perhaps history. Some will claim that only this bottom-up knowledge can be accepted, denying in the process much knowledge of the global nature of processes not yet completed. There are also parallel misconceptions among Christian thinkers, including those who deny the validity of natural theology just because they think of nature only as this thing-like stuff and these

processes which arise from matter and its self-interactions. In realizing that greater sophistication and complexity is needed in our understanding of Creation—even in the restricted sense of ‘Nature’ in its traditional sense, we pass by the limiting idea that the whole is but a complicated assemblage of parts and thus not capable of coherence or unity or completeness. Under the limiting and non-Christian viewpoint, the universe is not capable of being a world; a human animal is not capable of being a human person

This is to say that a reductionistic form of respect for empirical reality will fail to see a world forming from a universe, a human person forming from a human animal, a morally meaningful narrative forming from interactions of the entities of thing-like being. Neither a universe nor a human animal can achieve, even in principle, the coherence and unity and completeness toward which they seemingly strive.

The world does form from the universe, itself a rather remarkable entity. A human being does form from a human animal, itself a rather remarkable entity. Greater stories, stories with deep meanings, arise from mere tales—themselves remarkable—of interacting entities reducible to ‘mere’ physical processes.

We live those stories and live in those stories; we seem not only wrong but also rather silly when we deny such to be the case.



# 57 Mathematical Models of Human Communities: Randomness

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1899>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/10/14.]

In Chapter 55, *Mathematical Models of Human Communities: Local and Global Processes*, and Chapter 56, *Mathematical Models of Human Communities: We Live in Narratives, Not in Models*, I acknowledged the usefulness and potential truthfulness of mathematical models but claimed we need to consider wider aspects of this world and of all of Creation. In particular, I discussed in the first of those essays, very briefly, the ways in which many complex systems, those of physical spacetime and—with near certainty—those of human social relationships, have global properties which don't fully come from summing up local properties. In the second chapter, I discussed, with equal brevity, the nature of one of those global aspects of complex systems and especially human communities—they are stories or narratives with the properties which we expect in novels or tales and which don't come from mathematical models as such.

At the same time, the reader should keep in mind that I believe our 'mathematical' understanding of this world can be expanded greatly by further use of the proper mathematical fields and ways of thought such as those fields of geometry which deal in qualities rather than quantities or those which have the power to deal separately with local and global properties.

I'll continue to respond to specific quotes from a book, *Sociodynamics: A Systematic Approach to Mathematical Modelling in the Social Sci-*

*ences* [145], which does a good job of dealing with the power and limitations of mathematical modeling in the ‘social sciences’.

On page 155, the author, Wolfgang Weidlich, writes:

Historical and/or social phase-transitions are by definition revolutionary events in which the macrovariables of the system *change their whole dynamical mode*. A *necessary concomitant circumstance* of such a phase-transition is the appearance of *critical fluctuations*. These critical fluctuations are crucial for deciding the question *which direction* the path of the system will take at the *cross-roads*. In our case they are decisive for the question whether the political system will remain a liberal democratic one or whether it tumbles into the new totalitarian phase.

However—and this is the essential argument—the critical fluctuations are of *random nature* and are *neither* predictable by the research of historians, *nor* by the macroequations of any mathematical model! At best the *full set* of macrovariables and (not predictable) fluctuating microvariables which *both together* are causative for the concrete course of historical events at a phase-transition can be recognized by historians *only retrospectively*.

Therefor the general conclusion must be: In the rare cases of historical phase-transitions *fluctuations* become decisive (in contrast to smoothly and continuously evolving situations). These fluctuations consist of thoughts, decisions and activities of one or a few persons in key-positions in a global situation on the verge of a possible phase-transition.

This does of course not mean, that the continuous—to a high degree “calculable” and therefore predictable—macrovariables would be unimportant. In the contrary! They lead to the “revolutionary situation”, i.e.[,] into the vicinity of a destabilizable situation where “*everything can happen*”. However, *at* the phase-transition these macrovariables are *insufficient* to make the further course of events predictable!

Weidlich tells us, “the critical fluctuations are of *random nature*.” True enough, but what is *random nature*? I’ve dealt with this issue before and

have claimed in various ways that the usual definition of such terms seems to smell a bit of the occult, even of outright superstition.

In February of 2010, I published a slightly updated post I had first published on my other blog in September of 2007; this updated post is included in this book as Chapter 160, *Randomness as a Sign of God's Presence*. In the updated version, I wrote:

One of the most important, if little noticed, intellectual events of modern times is the development of a rational understanding of randomness to potentially replace an ancient understanding which is surprising mystical for such an important concept in modern mathematics and other fields of modern science. Based on that rational understanding, I made the following claims in my first published book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41]:

- Only God can make a truly random number, and
- Only God can act in a truly random way.

What is this all about? The short story is:

Algorithmic information theory, deals with degrees of randomness more than with perfect randomness because we can't produce a random number. Nor do we have the slightest reason to believe that nature can produce a random number or any movement or change that corresponds to pure randomness—unless God interjects that randomness. It seems to me to be an open question whether God could even do that without violating the integrity of His own Creation. See the ending to the story of Noah in the book of Genesis for an early discussion into God's promise to honor His Creation. I'd say that promise was inherent in the sort of Creation He chose to bring into being.

In any case, Chaitin's major result in many ways was a surprisingly simple proof—by the standards of modern mathematics—that every number is random. No number has a pattern. This doesn't mean that 1.22222... or 1.25 are random nor does it mean that they aren't numbers. It means that those numbers and similar finitely describable numbers represent a

vanishingly small point on the number line. It turns out that all numbers with patterns, all the numbers of our elegant and well-ordered mathematics, add up to a vanishingly small length on the number line. It also means we can't generate a truly random number yet there are so many random numbers that the infinities of numbers with some patterns are overwhelmed. In the sense of that field of modern mathematics called 'measure theory', there are essentially no numbers with patterns in relation to the totality of numbers, 'all' of which are true random numbers.

What does this mean? As the mathematician Marc Kac (pronounced 'cats') said in the early 1970s when the ideas of Chaitin and Kolmogorov were becoming known: "Now we know what a random number is. It's a fact." I quote from memory.

This is the basic insight lying behind my claim that God created the truths of Creation, the truths from which our physical universe is shaped. The number line is a set of facts rather than a construction as Pythagoras and his successors have thought. Elegance in the Pythagorean sense, order in the sense of the theorist of Intelligent design, and randomness in the mystical sense of a typical Darwinist philosopher, play no part in rational mathematics.

One of my college professors put it in a slightly different way. He told us that all of probability theory can be enfolded into a fully deterministic *Measure Theory* (see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Measure\\_\(mathematics\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Measure_(mathematics))) without losing any content. Still another way to express this insight is: probability theory is useful mostly as an introduction to measure theory, though many don't really go beyond the simple applications which can be taught using decks of cards or pairs of dice or bins of colored balls. A naive and pseudo-rational version of mystical randomness remains valid as a teaching tool. What is remarkable is the number of people who learn their probability and statistics from this viewpoint, never move on from the mystical viewpoint, and yet advocate a fully deterministic understanding of our complex world.

From facts come—sometimes—patterns. We've become somewhat accustomed, by way of terribly vulgarized mathematics and biology and other sciences, to the idea that patterns come from 'randomness' or 'chaos'. Some-

thing of an overview can be communicated to those who have not heard of Poincare or Hadamard or Duhem, Ruelle or Smale or Prigogine and to those who don't know what a nonlinear equation is; we should wonder what sense these people make of it. We are at a more complex transition point than the one noted by Oystein Ore, prominent number theorist and teacher (see *Number Theory and Its History* [107] republished by Dover Publications in 1988): in the 14th century or so, long division was coming into use and was considered to be a topic for mathematical geniuses, well beyond those even of more normal high intelligence. Nowadays, we start learning long division in mass education elementary schools, though many still have trouble with it and some can never master it even to the point of figuring how much per pound a roast costs if 4.5 pounds costs \$25.

The main point is that a shift from a 'mystical' or 'irrational' understanding, or misunderstanding, of probability theory to a more rational understanding of measure theory changes little except to clear our minds of rubbish and to allow us to move on. The famous distributions of probability theory (Poisson and binomial and so on) remain as does the remarkable tendency for patterns to arise from seeming disorder, mystical randomness or factuality. Those who see a Creation and those who see a Universe barren of divine presence can continue their debates, perhaps on a somewhat more rational level. The various arguments remain equally strong or weak.

Moreover, most scientists including physicists such as Weidlich and many evolutionary biologists and certainly most geneticists use the term 'random' without qualification but seem to be using that term in the more modern sense—that of algorithmic complexity theory. And, to be quite fair, I think many philosophers and historians and scientists and engineers have always interpreted 'randomness' in terms of factuality or even some sort of complexity. After all, there is nothing non-deterministic about those standard teaching tools in probability theory, cards and dice and bins of colored balls.

We've allowed our thinking to be constrained and distorted by popular misunderstandings of such terms as 'random' and 'deterministic' and 'non-deterministic'. To a certain extent, this deep confusion has even spread into our understandings of 'factuality' and 'causality'.



## 58 Mathematical Models of Human Communities: Failing to See the Future

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1903>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/11/07.]

In the previous three chapters: Chapter 55, *Mathematical Models of Human Communities: Parts and Wholes*, Chapter 56, *Mathematical Models of Human Communities: We Live in Narratives, Not in Models*, and Chapter 57, *Mathematical Models of Human Communities: Randomness*, I acknowledged the usefulness and potential truthfulness of mathematical models but claimed we need to consider wider aspects of this world and of all of Creation; mathematical models have to be put into a greater context, a belief also seemingly held by Weidlich, the author of the book I was responding to. In particular, I discussed in the first of those essays, very briefly, the ways in which many complex systems, those of physical spacetime and—with near certainty—those of human social relationships, have global properties which don't fully come from summing up local properties. In the second essay, I discussed, with equal brevity, the nature of one of those global aspects of complex systems and especially human communities—they are stories or narratives with the properties which we expect in novels or tales and which don't come from mathematical models as such. In the third essay, I presented a very preliminary discussion of the true nature of randomness (more or less—factuality) in this context of mathematical models.

In this essay, fourth and last in this series, I'll respond to the same quote that I responded to in the third essay. In *Sociodynamics: A Systematic*

*Approach to Mathematical Modelling in the Social Sciences* [145], Wolfgang Weidlich writes on page 155:

Historical and/or social phase-transitions are by definition revolutionary events in which the macrovariables of the system *change their whole dynamical mode*. A *necessary concomitant circumstance* of such a phase-transition is the appearance of *critical fluctuations*. These critical fluctuations are crucial for deciding the question *which direction* the path of the system will take at the *cross-roads*. In our case they are decisive for the question whether the political system will remain a liberal democratic one or whether it tumbles into the new totalitarian phase.

However—and this is the essential argument—the critical fluctuations are of *random nature* and are *neither* predictable by the research of historians, *nor* by the macroequations of any mathematical model! At best the *full set* of macrovariables and (not predictable) fluctuating microvariables which *both together* are causative for the concrete course of historical events at a phase-transition can be recognized by historians *only retrospectively*.

Therefor the general conclusion must be: In the rare cases of historical phase-transitions *fluctuations* become decisive (in contrast to smoothly and continuously evolving situations). These fluctuations consist of thoughts, decisions and activities of one or a few persons in key-positions in a global situation on the verge of a possible phase-transition.

This does of course not mean, that the continuous—to a high degree “calculable” and therefore predictable—macrovariables would be unimportant. In the contrary! They lead to the “revolutionary situation”, i.e. into the vicinity of a destabilizable situation where “*everything can happen*”. However, *at* the phase-transition these macrovariables are *insufficient* to make the further course of events predictable!

It’s hardly surprising that we can’t predict which of, say, five major paths a country might follow as a crisis approaches. I’d claim, and perhaps

Weidlich would agree, that it's worse than that—we can't really even lay out the landscape in which possible paths lie.

As Weidlich says: “the concrete course of historical events at a phase-transition can be recognized by historians *only retrospectively*”. I'm currently reading a mainstream and apparently well-regarded book: *A History of Russia* [123] by Nicholas V Riasanovsky. It reminds me of what I've read before: even Lenin, a remarkably competent actor in real-time whatever we might think of his ideas and actions, was improvising and adjusting his ideas to justify those ad-hoc responses to a rapidly changing situation. Ahead of us lies the fog of war and of other crises, ongoing or concentrated in a short period of time.

When I was younger and playing regularly in pickup basketball games, I also couldn't see the position of all the players on the court let alone see their positions a second later the way that Larry Bird and a few other great playmakers could. They have mental skills, talents for geometric imaging, which are not found in many; they are inborn but highly developed by way of doing.

Suppose that there are also mental skills, cognitive and imaginative, which could allow us to see the possible futures ahead of us; this form of seeing would be abstract; it wouldn't be likely we could visualize these possible futures in terms of discrete possibilities as is true on a basketball court. These would be high level mental skills, more like the highly developed skills of a mathematical physicist than those of a great playmaker on the basketball court.

But, as John Polkinghorne—theoretical physicist and then Anglican priest—pointed out: physicists haven't learned how to think in this way. (See Chapter 90, *Shaping Our Minds to Reality*.) As a one-time professor of physics at Cambridge University, he wrote of the difficulty in convincing (presumably elite) physics students that a vector is simply a mathematical object which obeys certain rules of transformation. It took about a year for the students to accept what they were told by Professor Polkinghorne and then they apparently couldn't imagine they'd ever believed anything different. Polkinghorne also noted, in my terms, that physicists were still trying to make quantum physics conform to the preconceptions of reality they had brought to the study of advanced physics. We are all still, in a strong but constrained sense, opponents of Galileo. Galileo himself was not so flexible of thought as some renderings of his story would have it. A human being fully flexible of thought would be forever chasing will-o'-the-wisps.

More importantly for now, we need to recognize that scientists and philosophers aren't so progressive as they claim to be; that is to say, they haven't really reshaped their thoughts to conform to a coherent understanding of reality. Even the last sentence is inadequate, not nearly radical enough, as could be probably also be said of Polkinghorne's ways of expressing the problem.

We don't need new thoughts for our existing minds. We need new minds, that is, new relationships to reality. We need to encapsulate our best knowledge of Creation, the best knowledge from physics and mathematics and evolutionary biology and neuroscience and engineering and history; we need to encapsulate that knowledge in our brains as understandings capable of holding this knowledge in a coherent way. Even better: we need to encapsulate that knowledge in our brains as images of reality, in its concrete and abstract levels. We need minds which are mirrors of Creation, that is: mirrors of certain thoughts the Creator manifested as created being.

If we succeed in such a task, or more plausibly—succeed in helping future generations to form minds proper to our world, even all of Creation, as we now know it, then we will no longer feel obliged to pour our new knowledge into an inherited understanding of the world, though, perhaps patched-up. We'll be at peace with the world, until something happens to bring to light some major aspects or levels of Creation which are new to us—and thus seem to be alien to the purposes of our God.

I'm most certainly not claiming we'll be able to see the future in the sense of knowing what will happen or even to be able to propose, in all cases, a set of all possibilities along with a probability of each of those possibilities being realized. What we will be able to see is some overlapping possibilities somewhat like a collection of quantum wavefunctions. From there we can get to work by returning to the forms of reasoning more appropriate to the concrete world. I wrote of my own efforts to work toward a better understanding of Creation, way back in 2009—see Chapter 411, *Defining Landscapes and Possible Paths, Not Determining Paths*. This is the sort of general analysis which applies in the small as well as the large, applies to our efforts to understand the emerging relationships between East and West in our period as well as to our efforts to understand the emerging relationships of Creation at its fundamental levels—the emerging relationships which will allow richer and more complex understandings of rocks and stars and our own human natures. And also richer and more complex understandings of algebraic relationships and of transfinite numbers.

In Chapter 57, *Mathematical Models of Human Communities: Randomness*, I wrote: “[I]n the 14th century or so, long division was coming into use and was considered to be a topic for mathematical geniuses, well beyond those even of more normal high intelligence. Nowadays, we start learning long division in mass education elementary schools, though many still have trouble with it and some can never master it even to the point of figuring how much per pound a roast costs if 4.5 pounds cost \$25.”

There are other transitions in history, one perhaps being the birth of the mind in the sense of an entity which can deal with abstract forms of being as well as concrete forms of being. Many there are who seem bright but see “true being” as the single level of concrete, thing-like being. Many there are who can use formalisms, such as those of mathematics or logic or common-sense of various types, in trying to see the “rules” of concrete being. Few there seem to be who can see abstract being as being such. It takes certain developments of the cognitive and imaginative regions of their minds; many there might be who are capable of such but few seem to have developed such.

Back in 2008 and 2009, I wrote some early essays on the issue of the human mind as being an encapsulation of what lies around it, in the sense of what can be perceived and conceived and imagined in a particular cultural and physical setting. Some of those essays are printed in this book as Chapter 99, *What is the Role of Philosophy in an Age of Science?*; Chapter 100, *What is Mind?: Can Inadequate Formation Mimic Mental Diseases?*; and Chapter 250, *Preliminary Thoughts on the Evolution of the Human Mind*.

Since that time, I have not concentrated on this issue—in this particular explicit form. As it turned out, my early feelings seem more and more correct: the human mind in a particular place and at a particular time reaches its peak, and then most noticeably in its communal form, when it accurately encapsulates as much of Creation as can be ‘reached’ at that place and time. We expand our individual and communal minds, enriching and complexifying, by using our existing minds to do this reaching. We explore. We measure and build quantitative models. We struggle to reach greater qualitative understandings. We reason and we imagine. We enlarge and complexify our own minds to some extent and those of our children to a greater extent.

In this sense, we modern men, including Christians, have poorly developed minds. We can’t see the cloudy futures because we don’t have a good understanding of spacetime, of matter, of human nature. Our weak under-

standings of Creation, of particular forms or aspects of created being, are sometimes good enough to see the past in an intelligible and intelligent way, but seeing possible futures for, say, the United States is even harder than trying to see what it was that the Founding Fathers really did. Even our vision of past and present will clarify and provide for more intelligible and intelligent understandings if we simply come to a better understanding of the world, including the evolutionary and developmental aspects of human nature and also including the somewhat similar aspects of the nature of brute matter and energy.

Back to seeing future possibilities: we need to truly understand blurriness as it shows up in complex statistical situations and in quantum physics—with an underlying measure-theoretic understanding of probability, these are similar problems and problems of a world which generates facts rather than a world generated by some pseudo-mystical mathemagic. I can't even say what it might mean to visualize such aspects of reality, just as the greatest of ancient mathematicians, Greek and Indian and Arabic, couldn't say what it might mean to visualize the quantitative aspects of shapes or movements in symbolic forms. Yet, they worked, however unknowingly, toward algebra and it's now taught in most high schools and some higher-quality elementary schools. Some precocious youngsters even learn it at an age before most are learning to read or write.

## 59 Debunking the Putin-as-Demon Myth

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1937>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/12/29.]

There are those who prefer facts and rational thought. There are even those who are Christians and realize that participation in a campaign of lies against a man or a country is a mortal sin. Moreover, Christians should realize that a mind deformed by lies is a disordered mind, a mind of a human being who wouldn't be happy living in any Heaven consistent with Christian beliefs. The wages of sin are death, a death proceeding through and more deeply into regions of disorder. This can be literally true when the lies seem intended to perhaps start one or more wars but certainly to prevent countries not subservient to Washington and Wall St from rising to a prosperous condition. Yet, the main issues remain the moral duty to treat others, God's creatures, with the proper respect and the corresponding moral duty to treat God's world, the story He is telling in this concrete realm of Creation, with the proper respect. True Christians, certainly not including the huge number of American jingoists who play at being Christians, look for the truth and don't try to keep alive fairy-tales convenient to the American power-elite—who oddly enough are the ones who have stolen much wealth from the ordinary American citizens and have nearly succeeded in making this country no more than their toy.

In any case, those who wish to have some facts in hand before forming opinions might wish to read Boyd D. Cathey's article on some of the basic facts of Vladimir Putin, his life and his expressed thoughts, as well as a little bit of the facts supporting Russian nervousness about the intentions of the West: *Examining the Ha-*

*ted of Vladimir Putin and Russia* at <http://www.unz.com/article/examining-the-hatred-of-vladimir-putin-and-russia/>.

My personal take on Vladimir Putin: He seems to be a true Christian who will hold the line on matters of importance; he will defend Christian social and moral order. He also seems to be a true Russian patriot who will protect his country against the pirates, politicians and bankers, of the West who are looking for loot to keep their murderous and thieving schemes going for just a little longer.

My personal take on Western Christians: They have revealed themselves to be treacherous, fair-weather friends of God. They are waging war upon God's Creation, thinking tolerance for troubled human beings should be turned into a celebratory endorsement, stealing from those and murdering those who refuse to allow themselves and their countries to be exploited by a West that lives beyond its current means.

# 60 Do Numbers, as Mental Constructs, Come from Concrete Being?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1970>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/02/09.]

We think ourselves now so sophisticated because we know the world isn't designed, at least not in the way of a human engineer. But there are patterns and the ways of thought which provide some serious understandings of those patterns arising from states of seeming disorder are difficult to analyse and are certainly not yet part of the machinery of the human intellect or communal mind, the mind which does the sort of thinking which has made it possible for past "skills for geniuses" to be taught in the elementary schools of mass education within a few centuries of the development of those skills. See Chapter 57, *Mathematical Models of Human Communities: Randomness* for one of a number of discussions I've provided of the general topic of order arising from seeming disorder. That same essay also discusses the strange history of long division: "[I]n the 14th century or so, long division was coming into use and was considered to be a topic for mathematical geniuses, well beyond those even of more normal high intelligence. Nowadays, we start learning long division in mass education elementary schools, though many still have trouble with it and some can never master it even to the point of figuring how much per pound a roast costs if 4.5 pounds costs \$25."

I've suggested in various writings and in various ways that thoughts are created being, images of that created being but images in a sense similar to: "Men are made in the image of God." Created being is the manifestation of

specific thoughts of God and we learn how to think truly by sharing those thoughts of God, by shaping our minds (but also our hearts and hands) in response to created being and its relationships and actions. Images can be concrete things. Concrete things have abstract created being as well as concrete created being.

One of the main points behind this line of reasoning can be stated: created being is created being is created being. There is a complex network of various streams coming from the truths God manifested as the raw stuff of created being, probably branching out at places and then joining again as it journeys, so to speak, to this very concrete realm of created being, of thing-like being. See Chapter 145, *Developing Human Minds, Individual and Communal* for a discussion of this general issue in a particular, focused form. Pay particular attention to the very simple chart of created being to gain some idea of what I mean about abstract being branching out to more particular forms and joining along the way; many of those branches come together in this world of things. Even relatively simple things, for example—simple lifeforms, are the result of the shaping and the combining of a lesser or greater variety of abstract forms of being.

It would be hardly surprising if various animals have characteristics once claimed for human beings only. I've argued that man is unique because of the very complex human brain which is capable of 'making up' a mind. See *How Brains Make Up Their Minds* [35] by the neuroscientist and philosopher Walter J. Freeman for a discussion of what it means to make up a mind. I go beyond Professor Freeman, or perhaps in a different direction from him, in seeing the human mind as capable of encapsulating what lies around it, even the entire universe and beyond, in the form of what I call a worldview, that is, a complex understanding which is unified and coherent and complete in the way of a world or—still better—all of Creation.

But this human uniqueness, seen in more or less expansive terms, is the result of evolutionary processes and a series of specific events over time. It would be hardly surprising if specific human characteristics, even particular skills of abstract reasoning, could be found even in animals we think to be truly dumb, such as chickens. Chimpanzees can keep objects in mind when those objects are no longer present and can imagine them as being useful in solving an immediate problem. Birds from the crow family can engage in relatively powerful reasoning processes, as can octopuses.

Now we can learn from this article, *Chicks Put Low Numbers on the Left, Just Like Humans* at

<http://phenomena.nationalgeographic.com/2015/01/30/chicks-put-low-numbers-on-the-left-just-like-humans/>, that even relatively dumb birds can not only deal with number concepts but they can order them. That they order them left to right seems to me to probably be an accident of evolution, perhaps a coincidence and perhaps a result of brain structures we've shared with the chicken's line of evolution for tens or even hundreds of millions of years. Such details are important for some purposes but not for mine; at least, these particular details aren't important for my main point in this essay.

The main point is a joining of the my first line of thought for most of this essay and the reference to some experimental facts discussed quickly in the above paragraph. Neither human beings nor chicks derive numbers, or the ordering of numbers, from some pure realm of abstractions and concepts, a Platonic realm of Ideas. Numbers are in the most concrete of things. Concrete being is shaped from those forms of abstract being we explore by way of mathematics, which is a way of exploring a form of created being with that same form, as physicists probe matter with matter. We can see this clearly with the knowledge of matter and energy and fields which comes from quantum physics. My contention is that this knowledge, mathematical formalisms which are the wavefunctions, is really abstract created being and not 'mere' knowledge. In a similar way, knowledge of numbers and the ordering of numbers, left-to-right or top-to-bottom or other, is actually a particular sort of abstract created being which is present in the concrete being of this mortal realm.

In a similar but more complex and complicated way, the order which arises from seeming chaos can be described in mathematical terms. I contend we are seeing actual created being in those patterns—fixed point phenomena, for example, are a form of abstract being. They are points of stability,  $f(x) = x$ , where the function 'reproduces' the input though perhaps in a complex and iterative process. I contend that stability isn't just something which can happen and then can be modeled by experts in the sciences of dynamic systems. I contend that that stability is a form of created being which is described by " $f(x) = x$ " and is  $f(x) = x$ , just as a man can be described as "rational" and rationality is a form of created being which is part of that complex entity, a man.

When we see a system come to order, perhaps by stabilizing around a fixed point (stability is rarely absolute even in simple systems such as pendulums), we could talk of an emergence in that system of that abstract form

of created being we know as ‘stability’ or we could talk about a stream of created being which is flowing into that system. I don’t know if one or the other is more right or otherwise more preferable. I do know that the stability of a fixed point isn’t so different from the set of relationships found in Schrodinger’s wavefunction, the set of relationships which are Schrodinger’s wavefunction. Concrete things come from something which can be described in those mathematical formalisms. I’m suggesting we can do no better, at least for now, than to regard those mathematical formalisms as abstract being from which concrete being is shaped; I’m suggesting that mathematical formalisms are a form of created being and not simply descriptions of some form of created being which is currently only describable in terms of those formalisms. It’s a clean way of thinking and talking which may ultimately be wrong or just part of the truth, but it allows us to avoid a lot of gibberish and to develop more unified and complete and coherent understandings. And I contend those understandings are encapsulations of created being, even of Creation, and I mean encapsulations in the same sense as used by the Biblical authors: man is an image of God. Our minds are images of what we recognize as existing, perhaps a very limited environment in the case of early men and perhaps all of Creation to those who share in abstract reasoning—not just philosophers but all of those who are engaged members of a civilization which contains philosophers and physicists and historians and composers of complex music.

# 61 Imposing Ideals Upon Empirical Reality is Insane and Not Noble

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2049>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/05/18.]

Psalms 24 tells us rightly: “The Lord’s is the earth and its fullness, the world and all its peoples.” [141]

It’s God who creates from nothingness and God who brings order to the raw stuff He first creates. This isn’t to deny that we human beings, in fact—all things and living creatures and all of created being, can work with the Almighty as He creates and shapes. It is to deny that we, in this mortal realm, have any direct access to transcendental truths; it is to deny that it is even sane, let alone good, to try to order the world to human ideals drawn from such alleged truths of a transcendental sort. I’m also claiming that Christians and Jews and other believers in an absolutely powerful Creator-God are, or at least should be, more committed to empirical reality than any other human beings.

We human beings can hold ideals contingently drawn from God’s revelations and His other acts in Creation, but that word ‘contingently’ packs a punch. Of course, Christians believe the fullness of God’s revelation was the Son of God incarnated as a man, but all who draw their beliefs from the Bible or any other sacred texts or prophetic traditions should realize that God speaks to us through human beings and in terms compatible with the individual things and the totality of what He has created.

There are some fundamental points to be made here:

1. Moral order is what orders this particular world to the purposes of

God.

2. Institutions and ways of meeting human needs and other goods serve moral order, or they don't; those institutions and those ways aren't primary goods in themselves.

To a Christian, the primary purpose of God as Creator is to shape the Body of Christ and bring it to completion in the world of the resurrected. To a Jew, the primary purpose is similar but centered upon the People of Israel. Both of these purposes were drawn speculatively from empirical knowledge. Even the 'ideals' expressed in the *Ten Commandments* are drawn from:

1. Our empirical realization of our state as creatures and our relationships to our Creator.
2. Our empirical knowledge of our own human selves and other creatures and of the relationships between these many entities.
3. Our speculative understanding of the world or of all of Creation.

After all, commandments are commandments, not truths and not ideals. I think it more plausible to believe those commandments arose in the minds of the early Hebrews as they speculated, perhaps unconsciously or even schizophrenically, upon their understanding or encapsulation of reality. Yet, the point is the same: the truths and ideals were drawn from commandments stated as if by a commanding general and were stated fully in terms understandable to monotheists emerging from a pagan background and to human residents of this particular planet in this particular universe. [See the Wikipedia article on Julian Jaynes at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julian\\_Jaynes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julian_Jaynes) for an explanation of the word 'schizophrenically' in this context.]

Wherever I have written 'empirical', the reader can assume there is a mountain of factual information, including that which has been written into our human beings by the events of the evolution of life and of human life and also by the events of the development of human cultures and our individual selves.

There are many books to be written on this topic, many which will be written if a new Christian Civilization is raised to the glory of God. I'll

stop at these mere hints, but I'll be dealing in upcoming essays with this general topic of order, moral and other sorts, as well as with my efforts to develop qualitative versions of mathematical and 'scientific' reasoning about the forms of order most basic to human beings.



## 62 The Empirical Foundations of Abstract Systems of Thought

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2158>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/02/01.]

I've made the claim in various ways that all of our knowledge and thought comes from God's thoughts as manifested in Creation, including this universe with its concrete thing-like being. This claim implies the further claim which I would strongly support: even the structures and basic elements of our most abstract systems (say those of mathematics and logic) are drawn from empirical reality by exploration and experimentation. I am most certainly not denying that there are valid abstractions, some of which can even be labeled 'absolute truths' (at least within the context of this particular Creation), but I am saying that abstracted Darwinian selection processes are the basis of even the best of human thought.

In a classic mathematics textbook, we can read:

In applying the unifying principle of abstraction, we study concrete examples and try to isolate the basic properties upon which the interesting phenomena depend. In the final analysis, of course, the determination of the "correct" properties to be abstracted is largely an experimental process. For instance, although the limit of a sequence of real numbers is a widely used idea, experience has shown that a more basic concept is that of a limit point of a set of real numbers. [*Topology* [73] by Hocking and Young, p 1]

Because of this process of experimentation followed by a process of analysis and contemplation—possibly leading to more experimentation, the un-

derstanding of the field of ‘topology’ has changed over time, though each of the understandings has held true even as a new understanding was added.

Topology was first envisioned as an abstraction of geometry; as Euclidean Geometry was the study of the movements of rigid geometric entities (abstracted from reality), so was topology a study of the possibilities of deforming some of those geometric entities into other geometric entities, say, a square into a circle. The standard video easy to find on the Internet shows a teacup being deformed ‘continuously’ into a donut.

And so it was that topology was partially re-envisioned as the study of ‘continuity’, the study of ‘limit points’.

More recently, topology has been again partially re-envisioned in terms of abstract algebra, abstract relationships and transformations.

The main point in this limited context is that this has all come about as a result of exploration and experimentation, not as a result of setting up pure and ideal systems of axioms; the process will involve the setting up of proposed systems of axioms which are then ‘played with’, tested against the ‘reality’ of mathematics. Systems of axioms play a major role in all fields of mathematics and should maybe play a greater role in other fields of human effort, but the useful such systems—those which hold up to hard use and are productive of further fruits—develop in surprisingly empirical ways and stand or fall by way of their usefulness and fruitfulness. Even light readings in topology (seems to be a good example for analyses of human thought processes) will show that the processes of exploration and experimentation has resulted in very abstract definitions and ways of analysis—it’s hard for a neophyte to know what some of those definitions can mean and serious mathematicians will simply point out that that particular definitions of ‘topological space’ or ‘limit point’ are the well-established results of an effort to, my words, distill out some essence of topology. They work; the essence is for real and more recent distilled essences are more real than earlier distilled essences.

This is pragmatism of a sort, a pragmatism of the best sort, and it has developed in the most abstract of human fields of thought. Perhaps this is what William James and other hardheaded pragmatists were aiming at—not the denial of abstract truths and abstract ways of thought but an insight into the dependence of a flesh-and-blood creature upon its concrete world, a dependence which extends even to abstract thought. In other words, perhaps a truer pragmatism makes no statements about the nature of truth but only about the nature of human efforts to discover truths.

A directed selection process which leads to valid systems of abstract thought?



# 63 Human Thought Needs More Curves, or Thingies Stranger than Curves

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2229>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/06/08.]

We of the modern West can't deal with the complexity of human communities nor with the complex world implied by our modern empirical knowledge. We can't produce proper 'global' understandings of human being, individual and communal, nor of this world with all its realms only partly reconciled and made coherent at even the 'purely physical' level of matter and space and time.

This is a very important issue in our troubled times, though many have trouble grasping that such seemingly ivory-tower lines of thought are crucial to our survival and prosperity. As I see matters, a civilization is dependent upon an understanding of reality. I would actually turn it around and say that an understanding of reality which allows some sort of substantial ordering of society, even a brutal ordering such as that of the early Assyrians or the Anglo-Saxon warlords in Great Britain, can lead to the development of a more complex human community, perhaps an international community of scholars and perhaps an empire or perhaps that more complete and more perfect community which is a civilization. Order is a sign of the unity and coherence and completeness which is found in any complex and rich entity, such as an individual human being who has risen from the state of simple human animal or a communal human being (community) which has begun to show the signs of being or participating in that completed and perfected civilization which is the Body of Christ.

We in the West had at least a substantial fragment of that sort of civilization and failed to nurture or maintain it, though we certainly value what's left of our material prosperity even as we cut ourselves loose from any devotion to the God of Jesus Christ or to even pagan versions of truth, from any hard-earned appreciation of higher culture, from involvement in any truer forms of political and social order, and so on.

There are a lot of "so on's" in this story unless we try to write a prologue which would be a completed and perfected form of all human understandings of human being and of the Creation in which we are born and in which we die and in which we might be reborn. As any historian or student of history knows, history itself has these properties of a manifold of manifolds of manifolds and so on. Each manifold and each level of manifolds has different properties.

What's left of what we inherited? This is to ask: in what areas have we continued to be something like a civilization so that we can now plausibly aim to put a colony on Mars in this generation? We could also ask: why do we wish to do so? Are we looking for an ET to supply us with the order and a serious if tentative understanding of reality. Are we looking for someone or something to supply us with a brand-new, non-demanding version of what we've thrown away? Do we merely wish to find a fable which tells us our current state of decadence is really an admirable state of order?

We have some serious understanding of matter as being somehow formed as a result of 'collapse' (a controversial but useful word and concept for basic understanding) of some strange form of being that we conceive (in the sense of 'cognitive perception') as mathematical forms, the *wave functions* of quantum mechanics (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wave\\_function](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wave_function)).

We have some serious understanding of spacetime in terms of *general relativity* (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General\\_relativity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_relativity)) and other other gravitational theories (none of which have yet proven to be as truthful or as useful as Einstein's theory). More generally, we understand spacetime in terms of geometries in which we have local regions which are 'parts' of a globe which is not merely a paste-up of those local regions; local regions and global regions have some shared properties and some different properties. In any case, we understand spacetime not by directly perceiving it—we might have a few tortured seconds of such perception if we were to fall into a black-hole, but we, again, understand spacetime as a sort of 'cognitive perception'.

We also have some serious understandings of human origins and of human being as it currently exists and dynamically changes, and very rapidly so for the past 10,000 years or so because of cultural and genetic interactions. These understandings are being absorbed into historical and other understandings, mostly being consistent with earlier understandings—the ancient books of the Bible had an awareness of the nastiness which seems so shocking in books about evolutionary biology and sometimes condemned by Christians. And, again, we have some sort of a ‘cognitive perception’ of a human being which is formed by interactions of genes and culture and physical environment, which interactions are so complex as to bring to mind multiple levels of manifolds of high dimension, a high number of independent variables.

We can see the main point I’m making by taking the case of the surface of a sphere and realizing we can understand the geography (or geometry) in small regions by treating those regions as flat regions, plains or planes; we understand more by realizing those flat regions are ‘glued’ together to make a curved surface of a sphere rather than a larger plain or plane. We can understand far more deeply by realizing the point is that groupings of individual regions (which might be human individuals) form global (or more global) regions which might have different properties than the individual regions or localities, and those local properties might themselves change in response to the formation of global entities.

For example, we can read in histories of mathematics of radical advances are beyond the understanding of even well-educated ‘non-geniuses’ for years and sometimes generations, but are eventually absorbed into the material taught in mainstream schools or the material which is part of the background intellectual stuff of most residents of a civilization. We teach long-division in elementary schools, but that was considered beyond the capacity of the average college mathematics teacher when such a technique first became possible with the adoption of the *Hindu–Arabic numeral system* (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu-Arabic\\_numeral\\_system](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu-Arabic_numeral_system)) in the 12th century or so. (Few indeed, even among the highly intelligent, could do long-division with the earlier system of Roman numerals.)

To be fair, better quality thinkers seem to often account for these sorts of phenomena in histories and anthropological studies and—most certainly—in historical studies of genes. We see this in the acknowledgment that, for example, the peoples of Great Britain aren’t just a gathering of Welsh and Scots and English with sometimes quaint customs who come together to

form a people who are plain and simply the British, but sometimes we have trouble—using existing ways of thought—in avoiding the two false paths: treating communities as simply gatherings of individuals or else studying individual human beings in separate fields from those which study communities, implicitly but not coherently treating communities as having real existence. I am claiming that we can understand this British community of peoples with an explicit recognition of the reality of communities along with proper use of powerful conceptual tools which can be drawn from modern mathematics and physics.

Various problems also arise because a human being shaped to certain ways of understanding the surrounding world and to certain ways of responding to that world can not often be so easily reshaped and sometimes cannot be so reshaped at all in this mortal realm. A village of English farmers in the early 1700s might have been ‘flat’ in certain ways just because of its comforting homogeneity; forcing or enticing those farmers or their children into cities would cause disruption of a sort which would need healing and reshaping or else you might end up with modern populations of people living in the Cosmopolis but not truly part of it and citizens of a nominally self-governing country, not capable of carrying out their nominal responsibilities, such as evaluating their government’s actions in the international realm. Such has been our situation in much of the West for two centuries or more.

Yet, when we see the reality of communities by realizing the ethnic complexity of Great Britain even before significant immigration from Asia and Africa, we still assume flat models in which, say, Nigerians enlarge that greater community without any problems fitting in, without altering that greater community or being altered by it. When it’s clear that something akin to twisting and deforming is happening—to both immigrants and the host communities and their citizens, we try to complexify the flat model in a manner analogous to Ptolemy and his successors modeling the observed movements of the planets and the sun by adding ever more epicycles.

Let’s try a clean break, one which starts with the conceptual acknowledgment that mathematicians and physicists have given us a wonderful conceptual apparatus for tackling the problem which resulted when the cosmopolitan regions come into being, when peoples of different habits and ways of belief start interacting and sometimes forming new communities. Big warning!—even when the ultimate results are wonderful, after a century or so, that first century can be a time of horrors. When the German peoples

entered Romanized regions of Europe, there were some who came in groups simply seeking a better life. The Romanized Celts disappeared in the regions of relatively peaceful immigration as well in the regions conquered by bands of warriors. A matter of great relevance to the point I'm making: much of the horror resulted not because the Germans were all, or even mostly, bloodthirsty and malicious but rather because the Germans were a primitive tribal people who did kill many in a partial conquest and then they tried to take over a region of complex Roman civilization and simply couldn't do it. That region broke down in many ways and the Dark Ages resulted: disease and famine and violence at various levels. Even when the initial violence of conquest had ended, the original population continued to dwindle and the German population also probably suffered unnecessarily high rates of suffering and death over the next 2 or 3 centuries.

If you take my thoughts seriously, keep this in mind: I'm dealing not with some fancy way of knowing some sort of external world but rather with a way of encapsulating the being which is us and lies around us and flows through us.

Take your choice:

- Thinking is not abstract manipulation of knowledge but rather a shaping of one's mind in response to the various forms of being which come to us as perceptions or conceptions.
- We encapsulate reality in our own selves.
- To think is to participate in the corresponding being, whether it is the concrete being of a 2x4 used to build a wall or a nuclear particle under investigation or an emotionally disturbed human being under psychiatric treatment, whether it is the abstract being of algebraic structures studied for use in nuclear physics or transfinite sets studied for sheer aesthetic pleasure or some aspects of human being studied because they are us.

From a Christian point of view, the sort of complexity I wish to introduce to our efforts to understand being of all types is a radically consistent understanding of this universe. All of Creation is a sacrament of sorts, a unified and coherent and complete manifestation of a global set of God's thoughts.



## 64 The Innovations We Need

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2237>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/06/21.]

I'm reading *The Innovators: How a Group of Inventors, Hackers, Geniuses, and Geeks Created the Digital Revolution*[76] by Walter Isaacson and find it interesting that Isaacson sees matters in terms of individual effort vs collaboration, parallel to my efforts to deal with human being in its individual and communal forms.

The research laboratories such as Lawrence Livermore operated by the US government and those operated by Disney or Microsoft were and are similar to those centers of research in materials and optics and colors which were the workshops of Michelangelo and other premodern artists. Communities of poets in New York or Paris, wide-ranging think tanks such as the Institute for Advanced Study or the Aspen Institute, the many physics and mathematics and electrical engineering departments throughout the West, became centers of innovation because of the concentration of talent gathered to interact for conferences or perhaps for career-long stays. Some such as the Aspen Institute tried consciously to re-integrate humanistic knowledge and creative efforts into this modern world of such great technological innovation. Many individual scientists retained stronger and deeper attachments to humane activities than did most in the West. I'll note only this: Einstein was not so unusual among scientists in being a very serious violinist and pianist.

In any case, technological innovation continues in robotics and animation as does innovation in fields of theoretical science, at least in the sense of filling in gaps and settling some well-defined questions in particle physics (the mysterious Higgs Boson has been found though it be a bit less than divine) and in theories of gravity (the long-sought gravity waves have been

found).

Those scientists who have developed ways to explore the human past through genes have done their work and so have those who have produced miraculous materials that make possible our cell-phones; we are deaf to rumors that the rare metals used in those materials are mined in Africa by slaves. We are also blind to the link between such technologies and emerging damage to individuals and communities, though we talk fearfully at times of the younger generations being increasingly less literate, less knowledgeable about history or their family's traditional faith, more apathetic in many situations and more inclined to sink into a world of video games and Internet pornography and constant communication with distant friends even as they ignore the three friends at their side.

Innovation continues in technology and some other parts of human life and yet there seems little point to it but for the well-paid amateurs (lovers) who still possess the passion of Victorian gentlemen scientists. And for those who profit from it all. For the rest of us, the announcement of another possible ancestor, or ancestral cousin, of mankind or an article tracking the movements of post-glacial man into Europe, means little. It would seem that, without a substantial communal mind and without the overall understanding which is much of that mind, we can't even think through the implications of our genetic knowledge of historical and prehistorical movements of entire peoples or of large groups of armed men who took the wealth and women of other men in the regions of conquest.

So it is that science and technology in the West move forward even as the West decays. (That forward movement shows signs of slowing down or even stopping, but such trends are hard to read with certainty.)

We have enough technology to give a high standard of living to every living human being, if we could figure out how to distribute goods in a moral and well-ordered way to the many who—let's be blunt—have found themselves useless in the modern world, for the many able to get only jobs which could be done by halfhearted 12 year-olds or mentally handicapped adults. If they can even get those jobs.

Our problem isn't lack of advanced technology and we remain competent or better at innovating in technology as Isaacson and other historians and journalists tell us. We're good at it and we continue to do it even as our political and religious and educational and cultural institutions have decayed into bad jokes. We make ever more advanced cell-phones for the use of 24 year-old holders of (undeserved?) college degrees in English or

chemistry or electrical engineering, even as those young men and women move toward behaviors already adopted by the next older generation: high rates of alcoholism and heroin usage and suicide. Land of the junkies and home of the brain-dead.

Our problem is lack of innovation on the human side: the deeper understandings we need, the rich and meaningful social and political and cultural and religious practices which would result from those understandings. Despite the general decay of American educational institutions and rumors of an increasing tendency of talented foreign students to stay in their own countries or to return to them, IBM has little trouble assembling teams of scientists who can build computers which can replace chess grandmasters and TV game-players and, soon enough, those computers will be replacing teams of scientists who can build the next generation of computers. . .

What the hell is the point of it all?

Suppose we solve one major set of problems and learn to give a good life to all, working or not. What will we live for? Maybe for another go at that virtual machine in our living rooms that can give us a greater sexual arousal than anyone has hitherto imagined? Maybe we can spend our days in some Disney theme-park? Maybe members of future generations will look up from a blackjack table at the walls without windows or clocks and wonder if they're in Las Vegas or Atlantic City or maybe Casino City on Mars?

We need innovators who can produce a civilization. Not in one fell swoop to be sure. It will take a century or more to build a new West, even as we perhaps get to watch other civilizations currently in formation passing us by.

What should those innovators be doing? Whatever they feel they should be doing. There is no formula for innovation.

There are conditions which make innovation more likely, such as the proximity of various sorts of talented men and women, but there is no formula for innovation. As a rule, it occurs in response to opportunities or needs, at least it occurs in living and energetic communities. The very lack of innovation in recent centuries in the fields usually described as 'humanist', political and social and religious and philosophical and literary and others, testifies to a great decrease of confidence and of energy, of faith and of curiosity about concrete reality as well as of those abstract regions explored by mathematicians and some poets and philosophers.

I struggle to re-understand this world as part of a greater Creation, the

work of the God of Jesus Christ, but most in the modern West aren't much interested in a revival of Christian thought or of Christian civilization, not even most Christians so far as I can tell. While decadents revel in the false freedoms of a rotting civilization, many Christians seek no better than shelter in the houses or cathedrals not yet fallen down, wishing to personally remain Christians but not to draw the attention of the worldly powers.

No, don't listen to the cries of Christians that they are innocent victims. The secularists melt down to strange sorts of barbarians but those who claim to be Christians simply wish for and pray for a magical restoration of civil order and respect for Christianity and other traditional religions, for a return to a blander sort of secularism which respects Christmas and religious memorials for those who died in war. Those Christians have no interest in a re-understanding that sees Creation anew in light of both Christian revelation and some quite disturbing recently gained knowledge of God in His role as Creator. I'm referring to knowledge of how the human race separated from our chimpanzee cousins about 5 million years ago, knowledge of the movements of populations across Eurasia which movements often involved bands of men moving in to kill the native men and take their women, of gut bacteria which can manipulate our moods, of parasites which can alter our intelligence levels (slightly) and our social behaviors and maybe our sexual preferences.

The innovators we need will produce new understandings of Creation which merge understandings of recently discovered and quite disturbing aspects of Creation with old understandings of other disturbing aspects of Creation and with some traditional understandings which seem yet true and with the revealed truths of Christianity (mostly found in the ancient Creeds).

The West seems to have reached its end, though I struggle as if to help save it, knowing that the good I accomplish is more likely to feed into the new or old civilizations outside of the West. Strangely enough, it does somewhat bother me that this possibility no longer bothers me. We have shown that it took only a little prosperity to distract us from our duties to God and to future generations and I'm plain tired of even trying to talk to other Christians about the true nature of our problems. I can only dream of the energizing effect of being around others who wish to develop a new Christian (or Jewish or even virtuous pagan) understanding of reality.

## 65 Preface From “The Shape of Reality”

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2283>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/10/03. Draft as of 2016/10/03.]

Is a man a unity or is he a collection of warring fragments? Or is something else true, perhaps an intermediate view, or—my favorite—some sort of complex being not describable in current terms of discourse? I should qualify my statement of the last possibility, which I believe to be the closest to the truth: I think mathematicians working at the most abstract regions currently accessible to the human mind have discovered tools of thought, quantitative and qualitative, which can provide us with superior ways of discussing complex forms of created being. That entire argument is one which can be carried out only by way of a program to show such is the case. This book will be the first giant step in such a program—unless this giant step sends me into a brier-patch or over a cliff.

But a giant step isn't enough. We need to explore ahead of where we can reach; that exploration will necessarily take place by way of the human imagination as much by the more rational parts of the human mind. This is a project I've actually been working on for 25 years, if not always consciously so. I've explored in the way of a novelist and even (quite) amateur poet through novels including some in which characters were poets; I've explored in the way of an admirer of mathematics and science through essays; I've explored in the way of a philosopher and theologians through other essays often overlapping with those dealing with mathematics and science.

I'll step back. . .

Is being a unity or is there concrete being which can be partly understood by abstract ways of thought separate from being as such? Is it per-

haps the case, as I have argued, that what we think of as abstract thought is truly a form of being which is abstract in some way poorly understood? This poor understanding would be a result of misunderstanding of being, as I would claim in a necessarily circular way.

Let's move on to Christian claims, poorly understood even in the heyday of partially Christian civilization in Europe. Is the world a true sacramental unity of matter and something else? Is man a true sacramental unity of body and soul or mind?

Are our very questions on these issues misguided by the misunderstandings of thinkers early in the development of higher human thought and of human exploration of what lay around them? Should we be paying more attention to modern knowledge than we pay to speculations upon earlier bodies of lesser knowledge of lesser quality? Or at least differently balancing our attention to these separate bodies of speculative and empirical knowledge?

Is it possible that the divisions in views of reality that we see are the result of not understanding that "created being is created being is..." and it is so dynamic as to make early thinkers see things as inert collections of matter moved by something else, spirits or life-forces or whatever?

The problems stated in the above paragraphs, the other many problems, are not to be solved anytime soon and certainly not in a single book. Yet, what I say in this book points to an important gap in modern thought—despite the often excessive use of quantitative mathematics, mathematical thought is poorly understood and rarely used to tackle more general, more abstract, levels of understanding.

Human mathematics has grown as complex and as rich as other aspects of human being, the physical sciences and history and culture and forms of community and so on. These fields of studies are parts of the human mind which forms by way of encapsulating those parts of Creation we can explore or speculate upon, along with the very small body of revealed knowledge which comes to the human mind by some as yet mysterious process.

It would seem to me that general human worldviews, largely determined by various forms of human being perhaps best described as theology and philosophy and poetry, haven't kept up to the advances in those other components of human being.

Years ago, I conceived the possibility of adopting the insights of the most fundamental of the sciences, mathematics, to the development of a worldview adequate to the needs of man in the 21st century. This book

will be a step in that direction. Note that the epigraphs for this book are the same as my earlier book, *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53]. I'll quote them again for the ease of the reader but mostly because of the importance of the issue:

My soul [in Thomas the organ for thought] is not I; and if only souls are saved, I am not saved, nor is any man. [From the *Commentary to 1 Corinthians* by St. Thomas Aquinas as quoted by Hannah Arendt in *The Life of the Mind* (page 43).]

Modernity is not simply a historically-datable cultural phenomenon; in reality it requires a new focus, a more exact understanding of the nature of man. [Pope Benedict XVI, in a speech given on 2008/06/07 to participants in the sixth European Symposium of University Professors, which was held in Rome from 2008/06/04 to 2008/06/07 on the theme: "Broadening the Horizons of Reason. Prospects for Philosophy".]

To make one aspect of the above claim more clear, I'll provide another quote included in the body of *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53]:

[J]ust as a disciple reaches an understanding of the teacher's wisdom by the words he hears from him, so man can reach an understanding of God's wisdom by examining the creatures [God] made. . . [Page 17 of St. Thomas Aquinas' commentary on 1 Corinthians.] [3]

It seems to me, and has seemed to me for years, that the greatest weakness we bring to the task of understanding created being is our inability to see a human community (the Body of Christ in the limit) as being one without taking away from the individuality of the members of that community. We are some sort of gathering of isolated individuals or else we are a collective with compromised or even deleted individuality. This leads us to misunderstand the nature of the human mind and to miss the fact that we have communal minds; we can't deal well with the badness of brainwashing by peer (herd) pressure nor the mysterious goodness of difficult ideas, pioneered by creative geniuses, becoming standard material in elementary or secondary school courses and in human thought in general.

We can find better possibilities in just the introductory chapters of books on abstract algebra and differential geometry and topology and a few other areas of mathematics. We can even see some progress on this issue in more concrete form in some particular results from physics and chemistry and biology and various synthetic fields of study such as the sciences of complex or chaotic systems or—better still—the sciences of self-organizing systems.

In this book, I’ll start at the abstract but mathematically basic level of ‘shape’, using differential geometry and topology, “abstract or qualitative geometry” and just a hint of other ways of thought. This is inadequate to the task but I’ll be following, approximately, the path I’m taking in tackling this problem, especially in my efforts to learn or relearn the mathematics needed for this simple way of viewing human being as individuals which are points with nice properties—qualitative and quantitative, points which are members of communities considered as surfaces with nice properties (manifolds).

Let’s see if we can harness this to provide general attitudes and ways of thought sufficient to understand this unity arising out of diversity, this oneness which is actually a collection of particular individuals; this seems to be a way of reasoning which can make sense of various parts and aspects of this universe and the various complex entities it contains. More than this, to get to the oneness of abstract and concrete being, we need to take on the task of understanding what a Christian would label as ‘Creation’.

As a general warning: I don’t consider understanding to be some sort of textbook-friendly, closed system of thought. Understanding is the development of a good way of describing what we know and understanding reaches its peak when it becomes our very way of thinking. In other words, we have a duty to shape our minds, our basic and sophisticated levels of thought, to reality. We fail when we try to squeeze reality into a system of thought we bring to the task of understanding our world, a system of thought which is typically a rigidified version of an earlier understanding of reality as known in, say, the 13th century, or one which came out of the poorly founded metaphysical speculations of a German Idealist of the 18th century or a Liberal Idealist of the 20th century. Such understandings are inadequate and downright unreasonable in the world after Darwin and Einstein.

## 66 Introduction From “The Shape of Reality”

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2286>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/10/10. Draft as of 2016/10/03.]

Human being isn't *merely* quantifiable but many components or aspects of human being are quantifiable. Other components are more describable by the term 'qualitative', but this shouldn't be taken as connoting 'irrational' or 'mystical'. Our understanding of the qualitative aspects of being, human and other, should be as orderly as our understanding of the quantitative aspects of being.

If the above be true, how are we to see our human beings as unified, even if only in principle. Are the quantitative and the qualitative to be “the new dualism”? Some Medieval Scholastics rejected the concept of 'soul' or 'mind' because it's not clear if it be at all possible to unite two different sorts of substances to make a single human being. Aquinas took a different route and posited a mind as described by Hannah Arendt thus:

My soul [in Thomas the organ for thought] is not I; and if only souls are saved, I am not saved, nor is any man. [From the Commentary to 1 Corinthians 15 by St. Thomas Aquinas as quoted by Hannah Arendt in *The Life of the Mind* [5] (page 43).]

In other words, the Thomistic soul (or mind), said by Hannah Arendt to be something you would not wish to be, was a non-human entity attached to a human being as a cochlear implant is attached. You could almost joke Aquinas was the first prophet of cyborgs. It was clear that all that was human to Aquinas was en fleshed, embodied. This made sense given

Aquinas’ difficulty in seeing how the ‘inert’ matter of the brain could engage in conceptual thought. We know now much more.

- The matter of the brain, indeed all matter, is a very dynamic sort of stuff, a partially frozen form of energy which constantly interacts with hotter forms of stuff, hot energy and fields.
- The brain is the result of evolutionary and developmental processes of a complex and sometimes nasty sort.
- The entire universe is the result of a variety of processes which can be roughly and accurately classified as evolutionary and developmental.
- Matter forms, in some sense, by what has been described as a collapse of a quantum wavefunction.

This last item is disturbing, even if the term ‘collapse’ is rejected as some philosophers and scientists recommend. How can matter be made from some form of being describable as a ‘wavefunction’, a mathematical equation?

Thinking in usefully simplistic terms: Existing theories of gravity combine space and time into a single structure of spacetime in which time is added as a fourth dimension to the three-dimensional Euclidean structure of space. Then we find that space and time can be deformed by interactions with matter describable in terms of the quantum mechanical wavefunction. Yet, many physicists and at least some others who think deeply on these matters are convinced that all this can be combined into some sort of unified theory of physical stuff or of truly everything for those willing to define everything as what can be described in terms of physics. All sorts of entities of different stuff and even non-stuff are combined in an as-yet unconstructed grand—or perhaps grandiose—theory of ‘everything’ or TOE. This may well prove to be a scientific version of the mistake often made by generals and politicians: preparing to fight the previous war. Those physicists see TOE as a culmination of the extraordinarily successful efforts to construct a standard model of physical particles and most of the forces between those particles, but gravity has remained resistant to such efforts.

In any case, I’ve proposed a principle in past writings: Being is being is...

I've shortened the principle for poetic reasons; being in that claim is actually "created being". The whole issue of God's being is immensely complex for intelligent discussions by atheologians as well as Christian and Jewish theologians. (Although, I do think a limited but intelligent sort of conversation can be held on the basis of a simple faith or lack of faith.)

I think this created being stuff and non-stuff alike can be tied together into a coherent understanding by way of modern mathematics which has developed some powerful tools which are useful in dealing with various concrete situations, engineering and scientific, and can also be used for understanding quantitative and qualitative aspects of what I call abstract being—the non-stuff, or at least non-thing stuff, of modern algebra and topology and category theory and so on, as well as the non-thing stuff of moral character or soul or some aspects of mind and just the general feeling of order and goodness which often emanates from what lies around us. Can we somehow use these tools to provide an understanding of human being which gives proper room and respect to the various aspects of human being, qualitative and quantitative, individual and communal? I think so and am writing this book as an experiment of sorts.

Will I be providing some hi-tech answer to the question, "What is a human being?" No.

Will I be providing even a tentative model of human being which allows prediction of the future or at least accurate and precise modeling of the past? No.

I will be drawing upon some basic ideas from mostly differential geometry and topology in this book to provide a set of concepts and words which allow us, in one important case, to discuss human being as a coherent entity with quantitative and qualitative parts and aspects. I have tentative plans for future books which will use algebra and other mathematical fields to improve my discussions by further enriching and complexifying my understanding of created being. Those books might well be written by some younger thinkers with greater knowledge of modern mathematics than I have.



## Part III

# The Human Mind as a Re-creation of God's Creation



## 67 Introduction: The Human Mind as a Re-creation of God's Creation

In this part, I've collected essays or articles from my weblogs, *Acts of Being* at <http://loydfueston.com/> and *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* at <http://loydf.wordpress.com/>, in which I speak about the nature of the human mind, proposing it to be an entity which is shaped in response to our environments, to the world at a higher level, or even to Creation as a whole. In this way of thought, a human mind is an encapsulation of reality so far as we actively perceive it and actively respond to it. When we realize this is the nature of our minds, we can better develop them and we can begin to see that relationships, such as those which largely make up our minds, is primary over stuff. Relationships make stuff and shape stuff. God's love creates contingent being and His love continues to shape being right to the concrete realm of things. We can play our role in shaping that concrete realm of things with our active love.



## 68 Interpreting Scripture and Other Revelation

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=39>. It was finished and uploaded on 2006/09/06.]

I wish to make a simple point, seemingly obvious but perhaps only because I've spent the past 20 years of my life teaching myself how to read and write books of substance, books which are worth reading by objective standards.

When a friend recently read two of my theological books (*To See a World in a Grain of Sand* and *Four Kinds of Knowledge*) and three of my novels (*Corporate Sex*, *A Man For Every Purpose*, and *The Hermit of Turkey Hill*), she was surprised at the way my style changed to deal with the subject. She read first *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* which is a hard to read book at best and very difficult for the modern reader because we live in societies that fragment our attention and make it difficult for us to concentrate on long trains of arguments. More to the point so far as *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* goes, we have trouble stepping back to see the structure of an argument that is not even fully describable in our modern language.

In any case, the general point is that I've always known that style and content are not separate. If you have more than one type of story or more than one type of message to communicate, you have to develop the skills of writing in more than one style. This is not to say any particular author could write in any possible style, but, after all, no particular author can write about any possible content. This is to say that while many writers can put words on paper regarding any subject, no particular writer can be an author, an authoritative writer, on all subjects.

People seem to think of an author as a writing machine of some sort. Some Christians and Jews think of the authors of the Bible as having been writing machines under the direct control of God or an angel of God just as they think of a popular author, with great justification, as being little more than an empty-souled writing machine which operates in a highly specified way. That highly specified way would presumably be the result of programming during a period of training in a famous writing school.

Real writers are not programmable or trainable. Real writers are driven to say something, though that something may not be well-defined when the writing urge first arises. Moreover, real writers with any significant talent will have lots of things to say and will have appropriate ways of saying those lots of things.

The writers of the various books of the Bible were real writers. Under the inspiration of God? Yes. Machines writing only what God dictated? No. Writing machines that had only one way of operating? Clearly no.

The same writer who could write in a straightforward way of the events of the mission years of Christ—the years known to the Apostles and other followers of Christ—could very well write a birth narrative in a mythical style while retaining his respect for the historical truth of Christ's life and death and resurrection. Some of the resurrection stories are in a mythical form though not the basic stories of the Lord's first appearances, to the women in the garden and then to Peter and John and then to the gathering of the Apostles and some other disciples.

The birth narratives also show a respect for some historical core without showing the stylistic humility of a simple historical narrative. The birth narratives of Matthew and Luke show a mythical style appropriate for writings which are the result of reflection of early Christian communities upon the Person Who was their Lord. There are other passages in the Gospels which show the same stylistic signs which set them apart from the straightforward narratives of the mission years, including the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The story of the three temptations of Christ by Satan in the fourth chapter of Luke seems also to be likely the result of years of contemplation upon one aspect of the character of Jesus of Nazareth: His sheer incorruptibility.

The Hebraic books, which Christians call the Old Testament, also contain passages which are clearly intended to be straightforward history and other passages which are the result of contemplation upon some historical core of truths. Some, such as the events of the Exodus and of the conquest

of Israel by Joshua show a strange intermingling. In fact, historical analysis of archaeological findings indicate that there was an exodus and there were events corresponding to the conquest of Israel by Joshua but the exodus was not one event and the conquest was not one military campaign nor even the work of one generation.

There was a small exodus which would correspond to the one which everyone reads out of the Bible though there is another exodus referred to in the Bible, apparently larger and peaceful and heading directly to the Holy Land. One of the complications of the Joshua narratives is that there would have been Hebrews in and around the Holy Land when the descendants of the followers of Moses arrived. Archaeological evidence indicates the conquest was also an extended series of events which took place over several generations and maybe many generations.

Historical truths and efforts to speak of contemplations upon those truths combined with others being recovered as those early books of the Bible were being written or edited or redacted. The second book of Kings makes much of a supposed discovery of 'long-lost' books as the temple was being physically restored during the reign of King Josiah. (See 2 Kings 22.) Teachings long forgotten were intermingled with everything else in a way that is very difficult to unwind. As a consequence, some lose sight of the core of historical truths, truths which are the foundation of the intermingled lines of mythical narratives. Others struggle hard to retain a sense of those truths, out of respect for Holy Scripture, and lose the ability to see those mythical lines of narrative.

The problems the authors of the Bible authors face in being read properly, in a way of speaking, is that there are very few readers with high levels of literary skills. I've spoken of the issue from my viewpoint as a frustrated author in Chapter 345, *Writing Serious Books During an Age of Illiteracy*.



## 69 Hellenistic Metaphysics is Too Small

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=45>. It was finished and uploaded on 2006/10/29.]

Recently, Pope Benedict XVI caused a bit of a stir in his address at the University of Regensburg (Sept. 12, 2006). I'll address the true thrust of his speech and not those remarks which were taken out of context. Specifically, I intend to work in line with his stated intention:

The intention here is not one of retrenchment or negative criticism, but of broadening our concept of reason and its application.

Along those lines, I will argue for an enlargement of Hellenistic metaphysics. I believe that this enlargement is possible because of empirical knowledge, knowledge which points to the reality which shapes the human mind and may shape the human being into a truer image of God. My belief in this regard is shaped by modern scientific knowledge as well as the plausible forms of speculative knowledge based on the rapid progress in physics, mathematics, geology, evolutionary biology, and neuroscience over the past few centuries. We also have learned more than some people would appreciate from the human events which have occurred since the days of the ancient Greek thinkers. Even in literature, we now see greater possibilities for the movement of the human mind and spirit than the Greeks could have realized. All of this knowledge can be pulled into a surprisingly coherent Christian worldview if we have faith that God truly is all-powerful, that the physical universe is the way He intended it to be and not the result of some primordial fall from a state of grace. With this faith, we can begin

to understand the universe, which becomes the world when seen as morally ordered, as a place of linear development and not the static or cyclical cosmos which was part and parcel of Hellenistic metaphysics. This is not to deny reason nor even to deny the truths given us by the ancient Greek thinkers. It is to say that Hellenistic metaphysics is too small for the God of Jesus Christ, a Creator who has been shown through modern empirical knowledge to have greater freedom than would be indicated by the systems of mathematics and logic which gave birth to the thoughts of Pythagoras and Plato and Aristotle. He is not even limited to the systems of mathematics and logic which gave birth to the thoughts of Cantor and Einstein and Planck, Heisenberg and Schrodinger and Dirac, Godel and Turing and Chaitin.

Hellenistic metaphysics is too small for modern empirical knowledge and for modern speculative knowledge such as the theories which make partial sense of our physical universe and those which have expanded our ideas of what number is and what mathematics is. And those physical and mathematical theories are entangled in surprising ways, though I only note that so the reader doesn't think there is an ultimate division between speculative, or theoretical, knowledge and empirical knowledge. I addressed the issue of human knowledge in my first published book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], and went more deeply into the subject in a book available for free download: *Four Sorts of Knowledge: Revealed Knowledge, Speculative Knowledge, Scientific Empirical Knowledge, Practical Empirical Knowledge* [43], Ultimately, the only two sorts of knowledge are: knowledge of God and knowledge of Creation. Even that split might be somewhat artificial from God's viewpoint but it's a necessary division in knowledge from a creaturely viewpoint. But the four-fold division in knowledge is forced by our ignorance and by the frailties of the human intellect.

The Greeks gave us much we should appreciate and much that underlies even the most radical forms of modern speculative knowledge, that is, the more rational forms of modern speculative knowledge and those which are empirically supported. I'll not try to differentiate between speculations formed by rebellion against what is and speculations formed by efforts to move with the grain of the universe, though I will say that some thinkers, notably Nietzsche and Foucault are examples of thinkers whose books give interesting mixtures of both false insights and profound insights. Some other famous radical thinkers of recent centuries appear to worth reading only as examples of human pathologies.

Let me turn to an area where powerful forms of reasoning have clearly led to an expansion well beyond Greek thought. Modern mathematics has not proven that Euclidean geometry was wrong but it has proven that it is not the only possible geometry. There is plenty of evidence that our universe, at the large-scale, does not have a physical structure fully describable in Euclidean terms though the true structure is not yet known. At the relatively small-scale, such as the objects at the center of all known galaxies which are likely black-holes, the structure of space time is definitely non-Euclidean.

The geometry of this universe have been so complicated and complexified that it seems unlikely that we can even settle on a single geometry for all of physical reality. Any broad and realistic view of physical reality now involves multiple forms of geometry to describe that one reality. Roger Penrose's book *The Road to Reality* [113] is a good example of such a view – that book is a tangled maze of geometries and various mathematical systems which must be employed to describe that one reality. Greek metaphysics, and all the non-Thomistic metaphysical systems I know of, assumed that physical reality must be describable by one speculative system of thought employing one mathematical model, or at least a single family of models. Now it seems that reality is unified but no one human system of thought can cover even the purely physical aspects of that reality.

Concrete reality does not seem to be the sort of entity which is being built the way a child builds a bridge with an erector set or even the more complex way an engineer builds a bridge in a busy city. Concrete reality is rational and well-ordered but its rationality seems to be more complex than the thoughts that can be credited to the Greeks, though they are the fathers of the later thinkers who have expanded the range of human thought. Concrete reality has mathematical aspects but those aspects are far beyond anything the Greeks could have recognized as mathematics, though Euclid can be seen as the father of Cantor and Cauchy, Gauss and Kolmogorov.

In the same way, Plato and Aristotle can be seen as the fathers of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. It was Aquinas in particular who gave us the foundations of a truer Christian metaphysics which seems to be immensely greater in scope than anything the Greeks could have imagined. St. Thomas Aquinas expanded the possibilities of metaphysics more than he probably expected by noting that metaphysics uses the specific sciences and by endorsing Aristotle's claim that the human mind is shaped by its physical environments, though even Aquinas didn't suspect there was also a

shaping of the human mind, in a species sense, over an immense amount of time. It's interesting that it was the simple Christian faith and the empirical leanings of Aquinas which were responsible for his most important insights, though he used the disciplined forms of reasoning he inherited from the Greeks by way of Christian Neoplatonists.

The differences between Greek metaphysics and modern metaphysics bear some similarity to the differences between Greek mathematics and modern mathematics. By this I mean that the enlargement of scope creates a variety of seeming contradictions that mask our Greek heritage to those who prefer reductionistic or surface views. There was a seeming contradiction between Euclidean geometry and others discovered in the late 1700s and early 1800s but that was caused by Euclid's fifth axiom which that ancient Greek himself apparently knew to be doubtful: parallel lines never meet and never diverge. In fact, consistent geometries can be developed using other assumptions about the relationships between lines that are 'parallel'.

In a roughly similar way, Greek metaphysics assumes that any existing entity has to have some underlying substance at least analogically similar to creaturely substance, the stuff of this universe. This is because substance is considered primary, the real point of those seemingly silly proposals that all stuff is made from water or air or fire or earth or perhaps some combination of those four. Yet, all that the ancient Greeks knew was made of substance or was the result of relationships between entities made of substance. Modern sciences, especially physics, have given us serious reason to raise relationships to the primary status. Substance is necessary for creatures to exist but some sort of relationship, primarily God's love, brings about some act-of-existence which precedes that substance.

Let's be fair to the Greeks. The Hebrews received the revelation that God is 'I-am' at about 1000BC though it probably meant something closer to: I am present for you. In any case, the Jewish thinker Philo read the Hebrew scriptures through Platonic eyes and he was followed in this by some of the early Christian Fathers. They understood God's 'name' of Yahweh as an existential claim. This was apparently a misreading but I think a very fruitful one. And so it is that we Christians had something of an existentialist understanding of God from the start. We also had the revelation who was the incarnate Son of God as well as the revelation that "God is love". We were even told that God loved us before the world existed. And yet neither we nor the Jews ever asked if maybe relationships

could be primary and substantial being might be brought into existence by relational acts. At that, substance seems to be necessary for us to have the limited independence from God that allows us the freedom to become His companions.

We knew the world was brought into existence by God's love and yet we speak as if substance is primary. As if God Himself must be made of stuff, divine stuff to be sure but still stuff. As a consequence of our faith in the primacy of substance, we believed that many aspects and relationships required a different stuff than flesh and blood, dirt and water. Mind-stuff and soul-stuff were purer and more ethereal substances, but they were substances. God was divine stuff and our thoughts were mind-stuff.

No. With less reason than the Greeks, we literalized relationships, including those which appear as 'mind-like' or 'soul-like' aspects. God is made of stuff. He looks like a dignified but gentle old man who sits on a throne. His Son sits at His side while a Divine Dove hovers over their heads. The three of them looked down upon countless numbers of human souls or minds entrapped in decaying and sin-laden stuff.

We need to break out of the prison of substantialism or essentialism (as most philosophers would call it) and see the importance of relationships, especially of God's primary relationships to us which I call acts-of-being.



## 70 Recovering Your Mind and Soul

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=17>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/01/03.]

Let's face it. We Americans can be so careful when we buy a house or a car. We want to know the exact effect on our bank accounts, now and during the entire period we own it. We want to know if it will keep us safe during fires or accidents or attempted burglaries. We want to know if we can trust the salesman and the insurance agent, the banker and any engineers or mechanics who check it out.

We also recognize the need to keep our hearts and lungs and livers in good shape though many make only half-hearted efforts to eat right, moderate their drinking, and get the appropriate exercise for their situation.

On the other hand, we aren't all that concerned when we purchase something that might change our lives, having perhaps a dramatic effect on the development or state of minds and souls, perhaps having a still more dramatic effect on the development or state of the minds and souls of youngsters growing up in our houses. We buy televisions that gobble up living-room space, as well as our visual fields. . .

That's dangerous. We have monkey brains. That is, our visual systems are so important to our survival, finding food and reproductive opportunities and so forth, that a re-focusing human visual system will pretty much shut down thought. Our brains don't have enough resources to power our prefrontal lobes and our re-focusing visual systems at the same time.

Moreover, our brains are physical systems of the sort which need to be constantly exercised or they begin to decay. In this, our brains are no different from our hearts and lungs and thigh muscles.

So, how are we to restore robustness to minds decayed after decades of such stuff as *All in the Family*, *MASH*, *Rosanne*, *Friends*, and *The Jerry Seinfeld Show*. Having separated myself from the mainstream of American culture some short time after *MASH* went off the air the first time, I'm stretching back in time but I have vague memories of what I did.

At first, I floundered about a lot. I tried to read professional-level mathematics books and journals, as if it were possible or wise to make up for my laziness and lack of mental discipline during my school-years. I still do read some mathematics books, but mostly reviews (such as Clifford Pickover's *Keys to Infinity*), serious books but written for the non-specialist.

Then something led me to the Bible, well—Someone led me to the Bible. I had an intellectual hunger, a spiritual hunger, and a quiet stubbornness allied with a stunted but living sense of self-respect – I wasn't going to let the television networks and theme-park operators brainwash me into thinking their products were enjoyable.

Around 1988 or so, when I first returned to practice of Christianity – at an Campbellite church in Atlanta, I set out to read the Bible in a year. About 5 verses a day does it, if memory serves me right. I also gave up reading science fiction and thriller novels. After struggling to finish *The World According to Garp*, I also gave up modern novels for years. I set out to read *Moby Dick* for real. It had been a boring struggle to read it in college. And it proved to be a boring struggle again. Two years later, the third time was a charm.

In the mid-1990s, I discovered the pleasure of reading *Don Quixote* and then *The Enigma of Arrival* by V.S. Naipaul – that book had been sitting in a box in the attic since leaving my Connecticut house four or five years earlier. I ran through most of Naipaul's books over the next few years, as well as discovering *The Lives and Times of Tristram Shandy*, *Gentleman* by Laurence Sterne, *The Big Rock Candy Mountain* by Wallace Stegner, and an interesting but strange novel by Iris Murdoch. I also began to read the collected essays and historical works of Jacques Barzun, the books of John Lukacs, and was quite impressed by Douglas Southall Freeman's biography of Washington (1-volume abridgment, alas). In the meantime, I'd discovered it to be easier to read books in the sciences which were intended for serious non-specialists, even some serious overviews of, say, particle physicists, written for physical scientists outside of that highly specialized field.

Best of all, I was reading critically though I'd resisted the efforts of a few good teachers in high school and college who could have taught me

a few good skills and could have helped me shape my mind at a younger age—perhaps to better effect.

As faith leads to understanding, imagination leads to the harder-edged cognitive skills. Einstein claimed that imagination is more important than knowledge and his own intellectual biography indicates that his imagination led where his reason sometimes struggled to follow. In particular, human beings are the sorts of creatures living in the sort of universe that our imaginations should be shaped to the demands of narratives.

Do you wish to rehabilitate your mind? Do you wish to throw off the shackles you put on your own mind and soul to the benefit of the gods of the marketplaces? If so, you should consider adopting weird reading habits. You should read demanding novels by the likes of Tolstoy and Austen, old-fashioned historical narratives by the likes of Daniel Boorstin and Stephen Toulmin, philosophy by the likes of Plato and MacIntyre. Most of all, read the Bible and read it literally in the sense of St. Augustine of Hippo: take it as truth according to the intentions of the human author of that particular book. And it will take some imagination and discipline to determine what that intention was.



# 71 What is Mathematics?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=64>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/01/26.]

Mathematics, no matter how abstract and symbolic it can be, is founded upon numbers, the number line for those who have taken a geometry or algebra course. Even with the abstractions of group theory and projective geometries, our understanding of mathematics follows our understanding of numbers. However abstract the objects and relationships studied by modern mathematicians, they are abstracted from the entities we call ‘numbers’ and the relationships which hold between or amongst those numbers.

In recent years, it’s been proven by Gregory Chaitin of IBM that all numbers (in a measure-theoretic sense) are random. [19] This means that the percentage of numbers with patterns is zero in a very strong sense. It suffices to say for this discussion that there are infinities much larger than the ordinary infinity of the integers (1, 2, 3, etc). The infinity which is the count of random numbers is much larger than the infinity of numbers with patterns, including the integers.

Let me define the rational definition of randomness used by Chaitin and others who worked towards this theorem or had the intuition that such was possible. I’ll use the simple definition given by Marc Kac, a prominent mathematician who taught at Cornell: a random number is simply a fact.

Those who wish to see rigorous development of the modern redefinition of randomness (development in a historical sense as well as the sense of the discussion of the final proof) can check out the downloadable papers and references to books at Dr. Chaitin’s home-page: a fast mirror can be found at <http://www.cs.auckland.ac.nz/DMTCS/chaitin/>.

We should always remember something that even some knowledgeable philosophers and theologians seem to forget, at least when they try to do

creative thinking. The metaphysical principles of the Greeks didn't arise as pure symbolisms or verbal assemblies. They were shaped by the Greek understanding of mathematics and the Greek respect for the importance of mathematics. I don't wish to deny that heritage from the Greeks, but I do wish to expand our metaphysics beyond that of the Greeks. The best of human thought respects the best of empirical knowledge but that knowledge has grown greatly and forced us to new understandings of mathematics as well as new understandings of physical thing-like being. Right now, our traditional theologies and philosophies are superstitious in the sense that so much no longer valid knowledge is embedded in the speculations about the nature of human thought, the meaning of moral principles, the possibilities of life beyond the grave, the differences between God and Creation, and so forth.

The Greeks assumed that mathematics, hence the world, was built up in an orderly manner from well-defined possibilities. Even stuff that seems messy is understandable as patterns.

I don't disagree with that, though the patterns have proved to be far more complex than the Greeks could have guessed and also the patterns in our universe tend to develop, and fall apart, rather than being constructed in the way of a theorem or even a human building. Even things such as stars have a 'biography', a dynamical nature that goes beyond being which corresponds to axioms or theorems from Euclidean geometry. We have to go beyond the prison that the Greeks constructed for us by teaching us that there is only one possible mathematics and even God must work with a certain body of truths which are directly accessible, at least in principle, to something labeled 'the human mind'.

I've made it clear in my writings that I think we've misunderstood the human mind through much of history. I believe it to be the bodily and relational aspects of the human brain, an organ with the amazing ability to encapsulate the messiness of the universe inside itself. The neuro-biologists working from an evolutionary perspective are right: our thoughts are not built up from some sort of abstractions drawn from an immaterial world or from necessary truths.<sup>1</sup> I would add there are no such truths which we

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<sup>1</sup>It isn't hard to find the occasional voice in the wilderness, that is the philosopher or general critic or creative writer, who speaks of man in such terms. The most important such thinker is St. Thomas Aquinas, though he did compromise his theory of human nature in a way not of immediate importance. Yet, even the overwhelming majority of thinkers who have rejected the idea of mind-stuff or soul-stuff have remained dualists in

could understand which are binding upon God. By this, I don't mean to say that He could have created a universe in which ' $1 + 1 = 3$ ', but I do mean to say that He could have created a world in which ' $1 + 1 = 2$ ' is either irrelevant or a higher-level synthetic truth, a theorem of some sorts of higher mathematics.

Why would I make such a claim? Because of the theorem of Chaitin: all numbers are random in a measure-theoretic sense. It turns out that Gödel's more famous theorem is actually a corollary of this deceptively simple theorem. What we know as mathematics comes from the patterns in a certain set of numbers, patterned numbers, which are a vanishingly small percentage of all numbers.

We now face two choices so far as I can tell. We can see that small set of patterned numbers, the foundation of classical mathematics, as being somehow necessary though now appearing as tiny islands in an absolutely infinite sea of randomness. This would be a heroic stance of sorts, living in a Platonist sub-set of a greater Heraclitian reality. Batten down the hatches, there's a nasty world out there and we can only make our stand against absurdity and death by standing on these tiny islands which somehow exist in a meaningless world.

The other possible choice is the one I've taken. We can see that overwhelmingly infinite sea of random numbers as being an analogy to a more general situation which the human mind can't directly access. This leaves us in a far worse situation because we lose our ability to see even these tiny islands as holding some meaning which rises above the surrounding chaos.

It's time to follow Hermann Melville's advice: have courage and set out into those chaotic seas. The settled life on those islands is an acceptance of a death-like life.

Have courage? No. It's better to have faith and hope that courage will come, or at least some Christian version of stoic acceptance of one's hardships. I believe that I might understand. I have faith in God that I might have the courage to face up to the task of understanding the world in which I find myself. I admire Sartre, for all his moral problems, for having the courage to face up to a realistic understanding of the physical universe without even wanting to have faith. But I don't wish that fate upon any man, certainly not upon myself.

The curious reader might be realizing something at this point. Whatever

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the way they treated the viewer-viewed, the thinker-thought, the concrete-abstract.

judgments are ultimately made upon the quality of my thought, I'm one of the very few truly creative thinkers in modern times because I've broken out of the ruts in which modern thought trapped us with the politically useful but wrong-headed claim that theology and philosophy and history and physics and literature can be split up into these realms labeled as 'fields of knowledge'. The structure of modern knowledge has been shaped to the needs of modern liberalism, a way of life and thought which has proven best at producing nice people who are morally spineless, people who can continue to teach physics or push paper or build railroad lines when the Jews and Gypsies are being rounded up a quarter-mile away. As a consequence of my way of understanding of human knowledge and the possibilities of understanding our environments, our physical universe, and the morally ordered universe I call a world, I will sometimes burst out into discussions of moral or literary issues in the midst of discussing mathematics or cosmological physics.

Now, I return to mathematics to repeat three claims I made in my first book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41]:

1. Only God can make a random number.

Under the more modern understanding developed by Chaitin, anticipated by Chaitin as a high-school student in the middle of the 1960s and also by Kolmogorov at about the same time, a random number is nothing more than a number with no patterns at all which allow a shorter description than the actual listing of the number. Amazingly enough, Chaitin proved—in a book published as an undergraduate computer science text [19] – that the measure of non-random numbers 'divided' by the measure of random numbers is 0. In a measure-theoretic sense: all numbers are random. I can imagine a comic saying that mathematicians have proven the integers don't exist.

2. Randomness, as the term is commonly used, is a type of factuality viewed through superstitious eyes.

As I said above, the prominent measure theorist Mark Kac said a random number is simply a fact. He made that statement more than 15 years before Chaitin completed his work. Even before that, in the early 1960s, the philosopher Stephen Toulmin noted that when evolutionary biologists (and I would claim many others) speak of randomness, you could substitute for 'random' a complicated phrase

about the unpredictability of the results of the interaction of two fully-deterministic and independent systems. Speaking simplistically, that would be genes and the environment in the field of evolutionary biology.

3. Any patterns in the world are small islands of order in the midst of tumultuous oceans of randomness or factuality which threaten to overwhelm us, physically and also spiritually. On the other hand, there seems to be a clear narrative structure which is perhaps too 'big' in some sense for us to see or perhaps too complex. Sometimes, we need to diligently study the chaotic events in the world to see so much as a hint of those patterns.

If mathematical descriptions of the universe point to deeper truths and are not just coincidences, then we can say that there is a 0 probability that anything should exist. The sorts of patterns that support thing-like being have a zero probability of existing in a mathematical sense. In my opinion, this points to the importance of existence in the sense of what I've called *acts-of-being*. This points toward something like Thomistic existentialism.

I'm not a big fan of the idea that we can prove, in the modern sense of 'prove', the existence of God—I discuss some of the reasons for this position in *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41] and in Chapter 574, *Proving the Existence of Zeus*. On the other hand, we need to make sense of this universe, also our local environments and human communities. Systems of mathematics don't suffice—narratives are needed. Cosmological physicists have found themselves in the position of writing narrative descriptions of the evolution of this universe which aren't so much different as some would imagine from the creation 'myths', actually narratives, of the so-called primitive peoples. Because of our mule-headed insistence on separating fields of knowledge, there are two important differences which make our modern creation narratives less adequate than the traditional narratives:

1. There is no recognition of the need for necessary being to 'explain' how contingent things could have come into existence. Various thinkers throughout history have had the instinct that this sort of a world has what I call a zero-probability of existing. Prior to Plato's *Timaeus* and then Philo's understanding of the book of *Genesis* in light of

*Timaeus*, there was no real understanding of the concept of “creation from nothing”, but earlier thinkers, including those who wrote the early chapters of Genesis, knew that some being of a greater inherent coherence was necessary as a shaper of chaotic being.

2. There is no moral structure in our modern scientific narratives and those are the dominant narratives of our days. In terms I’ve developed on my two blogs, narratives become truly such and make a deeper impression on the human brain when they are morally purposeful. During the first stage of making sense of this claim, it’s sufficient to remember that human beings are social mammals, rational and dependent animals as Alasdair MacIntyre pointed out in his Carus Lectures published as *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* [91]. Our moral natures are not particularly strong compared to those of some other social mammals, but our ability to think abstractly means we can make sense of the universe and can also adapt ourselves to new conditions. Unfortunately, we can also learn to create and justify various sorts of hells on earth. St. Francis of Assisi and Clara Barton are possible but so are Attila and Hitler.

The traditional narratives which seek to understand our world are inadequate because they are superstitious in the sense of being built upon older understandings of empirical reality which are known to be inadequate. We have some strong hints in the bloody wars of the modern world, as well as the horrors of Auschwitz and the Maoist murders of millions of peasants, that maybe moral structure is more important than scientific ‘truth’. With the fragmented nature of knowledge and beliefs in modern times, we inhabit not a world but rather some sort of battleground in the midst of chaos.

However, I’ve taken the position that we can move on and achieve a new understanding of the world which respects revelations, the moral needs of our race, modern empirical knowledge, and the human need to creatively speculate on how this all fits together. In my first book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], I constructed a worldview which tries to pull together our modern empirical knowledge and the revealed truths of Christianity in a creative, even playful, way. My speculations were formed and informed by a radical version of Thomistic existentialism, a way of thought which can respect both God’s revelations and also man’s knowledge gained by

exploration of God's Creation. Moreover, this way of thought teaches us we can't even understand God's most blunt revelations without a reasonable understanding of Creation. Most certainly, we can't understand Creation without some understanding of God's revelations.

I believe that I might understand, but my understanding corrects and enriches my beliefs.



## 72 Why Do We Need to Speak As-if?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=83>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/03/15.]

As-if is a strange and wonderful language that we all speak inside our normal language—whether English or French or Japanese. Even an Enlightenment rationalist like Adam Smith spoke of the *Invisible Hand* when he found himself not able to speak directly about what might now be called a self-organizing system. This is not really different from childish talk about fairies or superstitious talk about demons and spirits. Both are efforts to deal with a theory of reality, what I call a worldview, when that theory is richer than our explicit thoughts and the available words. Before going on, I'll note that I generally reserve the term 'worldview' for a relatively fleshed-out and rational 'theory of created reality', but simpler views—including those of some imaginative children—are much like worldviews.

As-if language can be a sign of a serious misunderstanding of reality or it can be simply a sign that metaphoric language is being used where straightforward language fails for the reasons I've already stated. There might also be a spirit of willing or willful playfulness driving the speaker or writer.

We can be trapped by as-if language. To be trapped into demonic language when speaking of the evil done by masses of men is to be trapped in one of the literalistic mazes. Once demons may have been the only likely explanation of the eerie way in some types of evil is done with surprisingly little design. In terms of self-organization, the Holocaust was as much a wonder as the Economic Man of Glasgow who was watched by Adam Smith with wonder in his heart. How can we speak of such matters? Scientists

and mathematicians and engineers and philosophers and others are still struggling to get a handle on that major source of the obscurity which leads to as-if language – self-organizing systems.

Schools of fish act as if under global direction: a school of many thousands of fish can turn in a fraction of a second. This comes about though the fish are only reacting to their immediate neighbors.

Human social and political movements are surprisingly similar—this is what Adam Smith called the *Invisible Hand*. An economy or a political society can organize itself though the individual human beings are doing nothing more than acting locally. Smith observed a society in which the individuals were subject to the moral order of the Presbyterian Church—whether they were believers or not. Hence, one characteristic of the economy of Glasgow was good moral-order.

The term *Invisible Hand* is potentially as superstitious as any talk about goddesses who bring the earth to life in Spring or demons who possess human beings to cause various diseases. As-if language can be useful because it pushes the boundaries of our talk beyond the limitations defined by our well-formed knowledge. And sometimes, there is a certain beauty and power in as-if language so that biologists, such as the early Darwin, will wax poetically about the elegance and beauty of nature in a way his successors will often label as anthropomorphic. You might even catch an astrophysicist speaking about the beauty of those exploding and imploding gas clouds which are the breeding grounds of stars.

As-if language can contain legitimate metaphors speaking of truths which can't be stated in scientific or mathematical language. As-if can be useful even when there's an element of fantasy or outright untruth involved. The problem comes when we literalize ways of speaking, including the times when we Christians literalize allegorical or metaphorical texts from the Bible.

The question remains: why do we speak as-if in the first place? I've given an answer but I'm not satisfied.

This is a problem that deserves serious study and I'll be trying to free some of my time to catch up on developments in neurobiology, including those branches of neurobiology which try to use the power of evolutionary theories to explain issues of human perception, cognition, imagination, and speech.

So little time and so much to think about.

[As it turns out, I've not done any more research on this problem.]

## 73 The Imagination that Can Be All Creatures

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

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

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

As a Christian, I should add that the true 'dualism' comes down to a difference between God in His own necessary Being and God as a Creator who chose freely to create from nothing and then to shape this world from the truths He had manifested in His primary act of Creation—I call that

primary manifestation the Primordial Universe. Thus, even the dualism between Creator and creature is really a dualism between (God as necessary Being) and (God as Creator acting freely).

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

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

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

1. those who know well the laws God has given us by revelation and in the nature of this universe; and

2. those who understand love, the primary relationship.

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

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

I'm once again floundering a little because I'm trying to form thoughts for which I have only vague concepts. I'm not confident yet where I'm heading and, thus, more than a bit reluctant to re-define words or coin new words. I may find some help in various books that discuss quantum mechanics but probably will find no help at all in the more traditional literature of philosophy. It's not that scientists are more clearheaded thinkers than philosophers, not by a long shot – some of each are geniuses at philosophical modes of thought and some of each are not. It is the case that the weird facts of quantum mechanics have forced honest thinkers to realize that the world isn't always so impressed with traditional metaphysical thought. Some of the best thinkers in the field of quantum mechanics are the philosophers who've come in to see what they could make of the evidence, including Kurt Hubner, whose *Critique of Scientific Reason* [75] played a major role in helping me to understand the debate between Einstein and Bohr. See *A Christian view of Einstein's and Bohr's debate on the meaning of reality* 156 for a short discussion.

God's ways are not our ways and it seems that the truths He manifested in this universe are greater than those which the traditions of metaphysics would have us believe. I've spoken of this in various postings (such as *Hellenistic Metaphysics is Too Small* 69) and also in my first published book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], I've never said that Hellenistic metaphysics is wrong just as I would never say that Hellenistic mathematics is wrong. Heraclitus and Plato and Aristotle laid down foundational thought in metaphysics just as Pythagoras and Euclid and Archimedes did in mathematics. God's creation has forced us to expand greatly upon those foundations. I think that a reincarnated Plato would agree with this if he were to survey modern physics and mathematics. Aquinas did agree with this, at least in principle, by noting an implication of the development of philosophical thought in its early centuries—metaphysics uses the specific sciences.

A greatly expanded understanding of the possibilities of physics and mathematics would lead to a greatly expanded understanding of the possibilities of metaphysics. At least, it should. In general, it hasn't done so. Our age might provide interesting materials for the study of future historians of human thought. With that burst of creativity in mathematics and physics during the 19th century and the early 20th century, why have we not seen a burst of creativity in metaphysics and theology? Has something happened to stunt our imaginations? Why else have our minds not expanded into the greater regions of Creation which we have perceived very faintly?

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

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

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

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

of this world into bats or black-holes.

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

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

1. Substantial being in this universe is linked, at the quantum level, in ways that don't usually seem to affect the behavior of macroscopic things. The quantum level is measured by energy—it's not necessarily small in size but rather small in energy changes. I'm not attempting to downgrade the importance of this insight by qualifying it. Those links even imply an entanglement of all parts of the universe—your body is part of systems that include stars which are billions of light-years away. Moreover, it's quite possible that a delicately balanced macroscopic system could be sent into a different state by a quantum change, a change of energy corresponding to the transition of a single electron to a different orbit.
2. Collapse of a vaguely defined particle to one state of being occurs by some interaction. Many scientists and writers of popular science refer to this interaction as observation, often entangling this issue with that of consciousness. It seems to me to be more true to describe this interaction as the formation of a relationship and it matters not if a conscious being is involved.

This supports my general claim in my first book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], that God manifested the truths which underly Creation as some sort of homogeneous being, the Primordial Universe, which is perfectly bound together in a perfectly homogeneous state of factuality or

chaos<sup>1</sup>. At least, this would seem to be true from a creaturely viewpoint. We ourselves have thing-like being and can perceive thing-like being though we can work imaginatively to at least explore the properties of highly abstract forms of being. We can think about that Primordial Universe, but likely couldn't ever see it. In fact, it's not palpable being and God Himself thinks about it rather than touching it in the way He can touch a human being.

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>1</sup>By this, I mean that we could not distinguish anything in this sea of chaos, assuming we could even perceive that something is there. In fact, if this way of looking at Creation is valid, this *Primordial Universe* is here and everywhere else, that is, it's present wherever God has shaped it into any form of more particular being.

purposes. This possibility of encapsulating the world is very much a matter of principle and not of fact because of our ‘smallness’ and our various frailties.

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

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

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



## 74 Rules or Context?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=92>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/05/29.]

I've argued that moral reasoning has the nature of narrative, a story, rather than being reasoning about axiomatic principles. This is certainly the most reasonable standard for Christians who accept the reality of the Incarnation. The Son of God didn't come in glory carrying books on systematic theology and other supporting works in logic and mathematics and science and philosophy. He came among us, being born a seemingly ordinary baby, grew up to become a carpenter and then an itinerant preacher of sorts. He lived a life, a concrete life in which He showed preference for some human beings over others, for some forms of life over others, for some forms of human virtue over others.

I'll not pretend to be developing a 'neutral' or ecumenical theory of the mind. My theory of mind assumes an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving Creator is manifesting His thoughts in the physical reality of which we are part. The human mind, when it develops properly, is a more or less complete, more or less accurate, encapsulation of God's world. The world is a manifestation of certain thoughts of God, thoughts loved by God Himself and loved in an active way so that they became real in a creaturely way.

Our minds are not just some sort of mechanism for processing raw data about, say, the life-cycle of stars. Our minds develop by proper response to the realization that stars are not immortal entities but rather physical objects which develop from diffuse clouds of gas which compress. . . And so forth. An astrophysicist will himself live the life of a star, so to speak, in the process of bringing that star into the greater story of a galaxy and the still greater story of the universe. His thoughts, so to speak, are not about a star so much as they are thoughts about what it's like to be a star, a star

aware of itself as a very complex and very particular physical object.

If we consider our immediate environments and the universe as a whole as content-laden, then our brains are shaped by our response to that content but we encapsulate that content in the very ways in which our neurons are connected. Our minds, the relational aspects of our brains, reach out into our environments, even to the very edges of the universe as we currently consider it. We imitate God by playing, in the way of children learning to behave as adults. The game we play is to encapsulate reality in the very stuff and operations of our minds, making those manifested thoughts of God our very own thoughts. It's harder for us to enter the realm of the abstract though our world was shaped from a more abstract realm of manifested truths, the truths which are the particular thoughts of God which He wished to manifest as objective reality, a reality which takes on a life of its own with a proper creaturely freedom.

As Creator, God loved one particular Creation in an active way, bringing it into existence. That Creation is one possibility out of a set of possibilities which is almost certainly describable as 'absolutely infinite' in size. The interested reader can explore some of the reasons I think of Creation in this way by reading my published book *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41] or some of my earlier entries such as *God as the Creator of Truths* included as Chapter 7 of this book.

The study of empirical reality, including philosophy and mathematics as well as physics and biology, is the study of God in His contingent acts, but truly the study of God. Even when He acts to create and shape empirical reality, even when He tells the story which is Creation, He is still God and not some intermediary Demiurge. Nor is the universe something which somehow came into being as opposed to God. Nor is the universe something stolen by demons. The universe is the manifestation of certain thoughts of the all-powerful and all-knowing God.

We are images of God not because of some mystical and supernatural soul or mind—we are physical creatures of this universe, born into this universe and shaped with the potential to live as the companions of Christ in a perfected version of this universe. We are images of God the Creator because the human mind is the sort of entity capable – in principle only—of encapsulating this universe and more. In our imitative way, we can think God's creative thoughts. We imitate God not in His completeness and His transcendent Being but rather in His freely chosen acts as Creator.

We are capable of encapsulating more than just this universe because

this universe seems to certainly be but a phase of Creation, though I'm not sure phase is the right term. What I called the Primordial Universe in my book, is the basic stuff of Creation, the manifestation of the truths God chose freely. Somehow, we seem to be able to think the thoughts which are manifested in that general and more abstract stuff of the Primordial Universe. In a way, this isn't so surprising if our very stuff, the stuff of stars, and the stuff of magnetic fields and strong nuclear forces, are all shaped from that abstract stuff. At the same time, we have to remember that characters in a complex narrative might be made of physical stuff that can be understood in terms of equations and explicit rules but those characters gain much of their nature from the narrative in which they are embedded and from the way they respond to their environments which are ultimately themselves part of the story God is telling—where this world is our universe seen in light of God's purposes.

In any case, the Primordial Universe is yet with us, underlying our being and surrounding it. It allows us to think in terms of transfinite set theory and other extremely abstract systems which are seemingly distant from our concrete universe, however useful they are in helping us to understand this concrete reality. To put it simply: we human beings are part of Creation as a whole and not just part of this universe. Perhaps more basically: the universe is a part of Creation as a whole and is a particular shaping of the truths God manifested in the Primordial Universe.

The human mind is not a free-standing entity which processes information and facts the way that a steel-mill processes iron ore. The mind builds itself of the materials it processes and does so by shaping itself to the processing of those materials by those processes. In this, the human mind or relational aspects of the human being is no different from the human body. The wheat we eat and the wine we drink is not just processed—it becomes part of our body in the deepest sense and we also shape our very digestive and other metabolic processes by what and how we eat. What we watch or learn becomes part of us, a frightening claim if we look honestly at the entertainment to which we've chosen to subject our selves and our children.

Neither our bodies nor our minds are sealed off from our environments. More serious thinkers, spiritual geniuses and poets as well as physicists, blend into the universe and into God's story which is this world—that is, the universe seen in light of God's purposes. In physical terms, we can think of our bodies living in seas of oxygen and other gases, breathing them in and also breathing in the various bacteria and fungus spores. Some of that

oxygen soon becomes, quite literally, a part of our bodies strictly defined. Some of those bacteria take up residence in our guts, being part of us in another way—they can help us digest our food. Others attack us and can kill us after long periods of suffering.

The mind, immaterial but perhaps the core ‘component’ of the human being, shapes itself into an image, an imitation, of God in His role as Creator. That shaping process is possible because the universe, part of the greater Creation, is a manifestation of God’s thoughts in His role as Creator, the thoughts He freely chose to manifest in a way that they took on some limited independence from Him, becoming objects of His love rather than simply thoughts of His. At the same time, we have to remember that this universe moves towards God’s purposes by way of struggles between order and disorder. Sometimes, disorder can win temporarily so that great evil can come to life. Though that evil will itself move towards God’s purposes, we can destroy ourselves by letting that evil into our own selves, perhaps by watching some of the latest and greatest products of our entertainment industry.

Briefly, I’ll summarize the reason for thinking the human mind is the core ‘component’ the human being, though a human being is physical and the human mind is immaterial. In earlier postings, I’d noted how I’ve come to take the side of Niels Bohr against Albert Einstein in their famous debate on the meaning of reality. Bohr saw relationships as primary, even as bringing substantial beings into existence, though I don’t know that he realized so clearly the meaning of his position. Einstein saw substances as primary and thought of substantial beings as having relationships that didn’t change those substantial beings.

Each created entity helps to shape itself and other things from more basic forms of created being. Each created entity plays a role, however limited, as an assistant to the Creator. As a consequence, all creatures, all particles of matter, all specks of time and space, are intertwined in ways that physicists and philosophers are just starting to explore. To be part of this universe is to be entangled with all our fellow-beings, even those stars ten billion light-years away from us. Though most physical processes follow ordinary rules of cause and effect, we have little reason to believe right now that these relationships and the implied acts of shaping are constrained by our understandings of time and space. In fact, there is some evidence from quantum mechanics that these very basic relationships aren’t constrained in such ways.

The human mind is unique in being capable of rising to awareness of those entanglements and can even willingly choose to entangle itself more fully with its environments and the entities in those environments in its acts of trying to encapsulate what is actually well beyond the capacity of any particular human mind but that of Jesus Christ. And there are some hints in the Bible that the Son of God emptied Himself in such a way that He didn't understand all of His own Creation while He was yet growing and maturing. He may have been wise beyond His years but His divine and absolutely infinite mind probably was somewhat detached from His human nature until near the end of His life. In His perfected, post-Resurrection human being, there was full union of divine and human mind and thus His human mind had full access to that absolutely infinite mental power.

As is my habit, I'll risk being repetitive because I know I speak of common issues in ways that don't seem too common. I push the language hard, having to use words and even grammatical structures in unusual ways. I often find myself stretching beyond my own understanding, but every true pioneer will find himself in alien territory. By constantly trying to make the same points from slightly different directions, I hope to better forge a language and a body of concepts which could be described as Thomistic Existentialism updated to consider modern empirical knowledge—as I already advertise it to be.

When the human mind is developed in an optimal way, it has a relationship to all of reality which is imitative of God's relationship as Creator to His Creation. He brought the Primordial Universe into being from nothing and then shaped this universe from that Primordial Universe. After the basic shaping, He continued to shape things, comets and elks and human beings, and, in fact, to continuously create all of Creation by acts-of-being, existential acts. We can't bring anything into existence from nothing and our ability to shape is far less than that of our Creator but we have frighteningly great power to shape our immediate environments, and to destroy them, to shape those human being over whom we have influence, or to deform or destroy them.

Our thoughts are not just in our own heads. The thoughts of an astrophysicist are found in his instruments, his collections of data, his techniques of analysis, and his understandings of what all this means. This is to say that his thoughts are, in principle, in those stars and black holes and in the developmental patterns of the universe. Michael Polanyi pointed out that tools are extensions of our bodies, even in the strong sense that a surgeon's

scalpel probably becomes part of that mapping of his body which his brain makes. This is what makes prosthetics work so well in some cases—the artificial limb doesn't become the natural limb but it becomes part of the body mapping as a new limb which probably doesn't work in quite the same way as a natural limb. I'm making a similar but somewhat more vague claim for our thoughts. Our thoughts are contained in our tools – not just the ones so intimate as to become parts of our body mappings, embedded in our social relationships, embodied in our habits and customs, assumed in our languages—poetic like Gaelic or flat and prosaic like English, written in our books and sung or played in our musical traditions. Like physical tools, all the objects of our attention, and the techniques behind them, become part of our mappings of reality which are our worldviews and also those mappings which are our own selves.

If this is so, then we are historical creatures to a greater extent than we might think. We can, in principle, know what it's like to be any creature, including a bat hunting for mosquitoes or a scout leading the advance of the Gaelic tribes as they entered Ireland more than 2500 years ago. But that assumes that bat and that Gaelic scout are part of their environments, shaped by their contexts. It is the environments we understand and then we creatively imagine the sort of particular creature that could have been shaped by any particular environment. We can't become a particular existing bat, but we can imagine what it's like to be a creature having a specific set of relationships with a particular sort of environment. A follower of Einstein's position would logically say that is far less than knowing what it's like to be a bat, believing there to be some sort of 'bat' substance independent of its environment and its relationships with that environment and other creatures. A follower of Bohr would logically say the relationships of a bat are what create that bat. St. John the Apostle seemed to be saying pretty much the same in teaching that God's acts of love are His acts of creation. I stand with Bohr and even more so with St. John the Apostle.

Depending upon our attitudes, we are either in a very bad situation or a very good situation. We can view ourselves as prisoners of our contexts, of the positions in which we were placed by God and whatever we make of those positions. Whatever we can imagine ourselves to be, we have to return to our own selves and our own contextual positions to eat and sleep and defend ourselves. Sartre, who was an atheist, saw himself as a prisoner, perhaps a mistake but one made for the right reasons. A thinker unable to shed his modern infatuation with individualism should be in despair, not

because of some presumed radical separation from whatever created us—a Lutheran or Barthian separation from God would negate our existence. Such a thinker should rather be in despair because an individual can be such only if he is primarily a being of substance over which he himself can, in principle, gain some serious degree of control. Sartre was too smart to believe that given what he knew from modern empirical knowledge.

Alternatively, we can see ourselves as parts of a much greater whole but unique parts capable of understanding the whole, not in the way of axiomatic reasoning but in the way of moving with the grain of the universe, of making God's story also our story set in our deepest parts. If we side with Bohr and St. John, and if we are willing to see this as a good situation—we are what we are—then we move on to try to control our relationships in the proper way. In my case, I returned to Christianity at a time when I didn't really enjoy prayer or worship and I had to force myself to read the Bible. The next 20 years were a series of ups and downs but finally was I able to discipline myself so that I prefer attending a Mass to watching a football game on television. By far. It's a still struggle to keep up a regular prayer schedule but I usually enjoy praying the Liturgy of the Hours when I force myself to open the book and get going. Over that same time, I also re-taught myself to enjoy reading books that demand a mental effort and to prefer good folk music or classical musical to most popular music. In these efforts, I was choosing to change my relationships to God and to His Creation.

We imitate God in His acts of creation though not His primary Act-of-Creation. It's our mind which can do this. A man or woman working with AIDS victims in Jamaica is shaping his or her mind to that of God and we do that by making ourselves more self-aware parts of God's story, by learning to understand and love that story. Those aspects of reality labeled biological are important in understanding our particular selves. Those aspects of reality labeled physics and mathematics are very important in understanding Creation at a more basic level. In the end, even physics and mathematics, yes, even metaphysics, are most important in the way they provide us with languages and concepts to tell our version of God's story which is this world. That story is not a series of encyclopedic articles nor a collection of logical or mathematical axioms. That story is a morally ordered narrative told in terms of the entities and processes of this universe, not in terms of individuals passing through a stage set and not in terms of magical processes or strange spirits.

That tells us what a human mind can be at its best—an entity flowing freely and smoothly along with that story, part of that story and yet capable of comprehending the entirety of the story, at least in principle. Yet, to reach that point, we have to always remember we are set in more particular contexts inside that story. There is no place to stand outside the story and observe it in a neutral way. It is only possible to understand the story once we move along with it, to move with the grain of the universe, in terms used by the Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder.

## 75 A Proper Sort of Reductionism

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=93>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/06/05.]

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

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

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

some understanding of actual parts or at least aspects of a complex entity or phenomena.

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

It's interesting that the theory of primary colors lasted more than a half-century after respected scientists explained why it was almost certainly wrong. It's even more interesting that it's lasted more decades since Edwin Land, MIT scientist and founder of Polaroid, showed it to be wrong in the middle of the 20th century. Land's experiments were rigorously conducted and definitive. What he showed, to simplify a bit, is that a colored surface with perfect smoothness and other properties that don't allow contextual and contrasting clues will be seen as pure white by human beings. It turns out that the human brain, and the monkey brain, use ad-hoc techniques to carry out operations which are somehow equivalent to the solving of systems of partial differential equations. The interested reader can browse a copy of *A Vision of the Brain* [155] by Semir Zeki, one of the neurobiologists who has done pioneering work on the question of how we see colors.

The primary color theory and the more recent theory of how we see color are reductionistic though that more recent theory is extremely complex and, in fact, no one yet knows what sort of basic elements will best allow analysis and discussion of the issues. We know our brains don't literally solve huge systems of partial differential equations and yet that is the only way human scientists know of describing what our brains do in allowing us to see colors. It's neurons that carry out these tasks by way of exchanging small electrical charges and chemicals through their various linkages.

We now know, and accept when we have to, that our control over our own bodies can be destroyed by problems with dopamine, a common brain chemical. This condition is Parkinson's. When we or a parent are diagnosed

with Parkinson's, we know enough not to go looking for an exorcist or for a witch to undo the evil spell which is destroying the ability to move our limbs properly. Nor do we engage in self-examination of our minds, independent of empirical knowledge. Yet, we think of such human aspects as moral will or poetic thought as if we should be understanding our moral character or our poetic skills by way of magic or by styles of philosophical thought developed in ages before the development of a proper respect for empirical reality as a concrete phase of Creation, not a world of things in some strange contact with a world of spirit or a world of truths or even a non-world of truths.

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

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

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

These lesser acts-of-being are different ways of speaking about the relationships including those which cause collapse of a wave-packet to an elec-

tron in a specific place with a vaguely defined momentum or an electron with a well-defined momentum and a vaguely defined location. As I said in my published book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41] without being able to elaborate: this sort of fluidity and—you might say—uncertainty in this universe at the level of creaturely perception and creaturely thought gives us some hints of the nature of the freedom which is appropriate for us, in our thoughts and in our external actions. Even our freedom is contextual and not a result of some self-contained human component called free-will. We form our minds by proper response to our environments but that formation has something of the nature of movements across a sheet of ice. We are still part of the physical universe created by God, still constrained by it, but some restrictions from our momentum have been reduced. A more fluid and graceful movement is possible—if we have taken care to obtain the proper equipment and to develop the proper skills.

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

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

It seems certain to me that the bare language of brain-cells, brain-chemicals, and so forth needs to be supplemented by a different sort of language that allows us to speak of the events that motivated talk of immaterial minds and souls, but there's no reason to let Christian reason, or any other sort of human reason, be corrupted by magical talk. The electromagnetic fields, and possibly quantum fields, generated by our brains might well correspond to 'minds' and 'souls'. Those fields would operate in a way that would give us the impression that we have components which are immaterial. And that's far from wrong unless taken literally. The so-called Big Bang model implies an expansion of the universe out of a state where it was an extremely compressed and homogeneous stuff. Fields seem to be the most 'relational' form of that stuff. In a sense, they are closer to 'reality', that is, to the most basic aspect of created being.

I've argued that relationships are primary and substantial being is created from nothing by God's love for it—the ultimate relationship. Relationships also bring substantial being into existence in a secondary way: they shape raw stuff into things and then continue to shape those things until they become, perhaps, bacteria and then jellyfish and then slime molds and then fish and then frogs and then snakes and then rats and then monkeys and then human beings. I've played fast and loose with evolutionary transitions to summarize a complex history in a single sentence. The point is that evolution can be seen, from the beginning of the current expansion of the universe, as a gradual shaping of very strange stuff – almost abstract stuff—into a creature with a brain that is capable of encapsulating the universe and perhaps Creation in all its phases.

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

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

understanding of those purposes revealed in the rather unexpected narrative of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

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

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

We reduce as part of our efforts to understand reality as a whole. Any efforts which use words like 'just' or 'only' too often are probably wrongful,

literalistic in assigning ultimate reality to our derived basic elements even at the expense of making sense of the world as a whole or even of making sense of human nature. That is how 'reductionism' gets a bad name. When we see the factual truth in the evolution of life, that doesn't force us to believe life is 'only' a chemical process nor to believe that man is 'just' an ape. If anything, it forces us to give greater respect to the chemical processes of this universe and greater respect to non-human apes. It forces us to give greater respect to all the physical aspects of God's world and to all the living creatures He has shaped within that world. It shouldn't at all lessen the respect we feel for God or for Creation or for individual creatures, including human beings.



## 76 What Does God Know?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=94>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/06/12.]

Obviously God knows all. Perhaps the real question is: “What is there to be known?” But the questions are the same at a very fundamental level. What God knows is what there is to know and what there is to know is known by God.

First, if things are true, that is—if Creation is an image of some of God’s thoughts manifested in substance He created from nothing, then any true metaphysics or theology assumes we can, in some sense, ascend to the level of God’s knowledge of created being. We have to assume we can achieve a God’s eye-view and see the truth in things. If things are not true, we might as well just re-consider all our inflated ideas about knowledge and the human mind. If things are not true, we might as well pursue knowledge only for utilitarian purposes. Only a radical, though perhaps hidden, dualism could construct true thoughts in a world which is not inherently true, in and of itself, and containing only things also true, in and of, themselves.

Second, we have to remember that God the Creator isn’t the Transcendent God. No, I’m not multiplying Gods, only pointing out that God revealed truths directly to prophets, through the history of Israel and His Church, and in the life and words of the Lord Jesus Christ. But much of what we know of God is in the form of His thoughts, His acts-of-being or creative acts, as expressed in the world we live in. These are contingent acts and represent only an infinitesimal percentage of the possible acts He could have performed. And He could have chosen not to act at all as a Creator, not to create a world.

Third, we have to avoid thinking like scholars or like dogmatists. We have to let God’s revealed truths mingle with human empirical knowledge,

disciplining our imaginations to those truths and that knowledge but then giving our thoughts somewhat free rein. We must consider ourselves in light of St. Paul's analogy to athletes. A fine race-horse would be still better. Train that horse hard and then give him free rein when he's carrying you in the Kentucky Derby.

To discipline the mind is the hard part. I feel it best to start with serious works of the imagination: *Moby Dick*, *Don Quixote*, *The Life and Times of Tristram Shandy*, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and others of that type. In my opinion, it's imagination that needs nurturing even more than logical reasoning power and memorization skills. In modern times, imagination seems to have withered so that we can no longer do the heavy lifting of dealing imaginatively with God's Creation. Increasingly, literature and cinema and—more recently—stage productions in the United States deal with comic book characters of the sort which used to interest mostly ten year-olds. Now, I don't even consider the time I spent reading Spider-man or Superman comics those forty-five years ago as more than a mind-stunting waste of time. My opinion about the vast bulk of science fiction and the time I wasted reading it is similar but stronger. See *Keep the Imagination Sane* 373 for a very short discussion of this issue.

Why do I consider imagination so important? Even better—why do I consider a sane imagination so important? God has more freedom than traditional theology and metaphysics would allow Him. That freedom shows up in our universe as the lack of a systematic way to view that universe as a whole: browse through *The Road to Reality* [113] by Roger Penrose and be amazed by the variety of exotic mathematics (such as non-Euclidean geometries) necessary to analyze and describe physical reality. If there is one theory of everything accessible to the human mind, it's hiding under a complexity of interacting and consistent—but different—theories.

Neither mathematics nor metaphysics, nor even theology, provide answers so much as they provide ways of speaking about Creation and its Creator. To think that any specific mathematics or metaphysics could give us ultimate answers—as opposed to understanding—is to enchain God in Necessity. But we no longer have the option of even pretending that to be possible. As mathematics has expanded its ways of thinking and speaking, raising new possibilities that truly stretch the human mind, metaphysicians have only reluctantly responded and Christian theologians not at all. Even mathematical physicists have often responded to this expansion of possibilities by trying to isolate a subset of modern mathematics that will give that

illusory **Theory of Everything**, a goal somewhat similar to the search of ancient and Medieval alchemists for a way to purify any base metal so that the true metal, gold, might emerge.

Many philosophers and nearly all Christian theologians wish to restrict the possible understandings of Creation to those given by one variety or another of Hellenistic metaphysics, ignoring the historical fact that Hellenistic metaphysics was tied to, maybe even founded upon, Hellenistic mathematics which we now know to be true but to be only a small subset of mathematics.

Metaphysics teaches us the possibilities which God actualized when He created the truths which correspond to Creation in general while most efforts in theology strive to make sense of Creation in light of our very small stock of revelations directly from God. The problem with modern metaphysics and modern theology, at least in its Christian forms, is that they speak of a Creation and a Creator far smaller and far more impoverished in being than those implied by modern mathematics and by mathematical physics as practiced by thinkers who have wider viewpoints—such as Roger Penrose.

In Chapter 7, *God as The Creator of Truths*, I've discussed these issues but constantly do I go over and over the ideas, looking for new ways to view matters and to discuss matters. In particular, I've discussed the findings of Chaitin, Kolmogorov, and others that numbers are random, that is, factual. The entire number line is a higher order infinity of facts, from which elegant or axiomatically constructed sets of facts can be selected. I have labeled that selection process as an act of creation, or an act-of-being possible only to God, but possible to us indirectly by way of the understanding that allows us to share in God's creative powers.

So how does God think? What does He think about? I've spoken of this Creation as being one that God chose to actively love, bringing it into being by that act of love, or act-of-being. What does it mean to say that God thinks about other Creations but doesn't chose to actively love them? Is there such a thing as passive love?

First of all, as a Trinitarian Christian, I would suggest we need to re-center some of our attention upon the Holy Persons of God and not just upon God's power to save us or to do us good in other ways. Specifically, the modern empirical evidence that relationships might be primary and substance secondary gives us analogical reason to believe that something of the sort is true for God Himself—see Chapter 156, *A Christian's view of*

*Einstein's and Bohr's debate on the meaning of reality.* In fact, traditional creeds and many of the Fathers tell us: the Son proceeds from the Father. This might well be restated as saying: the Son exists to be loved by the Father. And it is the decision of the Son to show His love for the Father by a great act of obedience that led to Creation and to the shaping of this world. The world was created so the Son could sacrifice Himself to the Father, an act from which we benefit infinitely but our salvation wasn't the main point of the crucifixion and resurrection of the Son. In His love for us whose life He shared, He created a bridge to eternal life which He can carry us across, but the drama of salvation was really a drama of love between the Father and the Son.

We're entering new territory here as a result of an expanded understanding of Creation, of mathematics and—hence—metaphysics, even an expanded understanding of the possibilities of the human mind. We're facing a need to strip out much of the empirical and speculative content of Christian theology, rebuilding upon the foundation of the small stock of revealed truths—see the several-times revised creed originally written by the Fathers at the *Council of Nicaea* for a concise statement of truths of a theological sort.<sup>1</sup> You can also see the *Sermon on the Mount* for an authoritative statement of truths of a moral sort. Even the truths of creaturely morality point us towards a state where we can accept a relationship with God analogous to that of Son to Father.

As I've argued elsewhere: God's revelations give us some knowledge of Himself in His Transcendence and also the purposes for which He has brought Creation into existence. Those revelations, in other words, tell us a little bit about God in His Transcendence and—along with empirical and speculative knowledge—a lot about His thoughts as Creator.

As Creator, God is a story-teller and the world is a morally meaningful narrative. The meaning is revealed most clearly in the crucifixion and resurrection of His Incarnate Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. In the current context, it's more interesting but also far more frustrating to return to that question: what thoughts does God have from which His thoughts as a Creator are drawn?

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<sup>1</sup>The *Profession of Faith* used in the Catholic Mass is one version of the Creed but as one example of how the greatest of truths have to be expressed in human concepts and words not capable of bearing such as weight: both St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas advocated theological and metaphysical principles which denied the validity of words of substantial being, such as 'consubstantial' when we speak of God.

This isn't a Promethean quest to somehow capture the essence of divinity but rather a part of the effort to understand our Maker that we might respond properly to His offers of companionship. It also isn't a quest to ever be completed. As unlikely as it is that we, even as a race, will come to a complete and accurate understanding of the universe, it's far less likely we can achieve such a goal for all of Creation, and flat-out impossible that we can do it for God even in His self-constrained role as Creator.

Still, if we have some sort of language for talking about the universe, a more encompassing (metaphysical) language for talking about all of Creation, a still more encompassing (theological) language for talking about God the Holy Trinity, we can talk when appropriate and perhaps have better judgment about being silent when appropriate.

Let me make a very tentative stab at language for talking about how God Himself thinks in His role as Creator:

We know that the universe resembles a narrative more than a designed construction and, so, we can speak of God as Creator of this world as also being the Author of this world. But the language of this narrative includes mathematical statements and a variety of other empirically founded statements covering the fields of physics and chemistry, biology and psychology, history and biography, poetry and fictions of all sorts.

I've proposed that this world, the universe seen in light of God's purposes for it, was shaped from something I call the Primordial Universe. This Primordial Universe is a manifestation of the truths God wished to use in shaping this world and also in shaping the world of the resurrected. The Primordial Universe would thus be a manifestation of all the complex mathematical systems which Penrose used in *The Road to Reality* [113] and many more systems of truth—not all mathematical for sure. But, using and perhaps abusing, the insights of modern theorists of randomness (such as Gregory Chaitin [20]), I would propose the Primordial Universe to be analogous to absolute infinity, a chaos – if you will—of factuality from which elegant mathematical systems can be drawn. In the more general sense of Creator of all of Creation and not just this universe, the Creator's thoughts range over an absolute infinity of facts and from those facts, He can create systems which correspond to various systems of truths, including mathematical truths but not only those.

And so we come to God in His transcendence. If the above two paragraphs give a general idea of appropriate language for speaking of God, in His freely chosen role as Creator of this role and in His freely chosen role as Creator of all of Creation, then we're stuck. What thoughts can lie beyond the chaos which is an absolute infinity of facts from which can be created all the systems of truth human beings seemingly know or could know? I don't know but possibilities have opened up that might allow us to speak even of God in His Transcendence, guided by both His direct revelations and those given to us in the physical universe and the systems of truth which we've derived from analysis of that universe and from imaginative thought based upon those systems of truth. . .

A modern program in natural theology would move towards God in His Transcendence by the three stages discussed above. It would require theologians, metaphysicians, and scientists who would have to be educated to extremely high standards and those thinkers would have to have a very wide range of talents. Following is an effort to state the three stages in a more programmatic way:

1. We would understand God as much as possible by way of the decisions He made in shaping this particular universe. This would involve broad and deep learning of modern empirical knowledge, history and literature as much as physics and biology. This first stage is, at absolute best, the highest point reachable by a pure natural theology such as that advocated by Intelligent Design theorists, but it's not a minor achievement to truly conquer penetrate this stage even in a time-bound and culture-bound way. Many of those thinkers I foresee would do meaningful, even great, work in this first stage.
2. We would generalize by way of abstract reasoning. This would expand our views by way of proper consideration of modern logic, encompassing Aristotelian logic but much broader and deeper, and modern mathematics, encompassing Hellenistic mathematics but also much broader and deeper. I'm particularly fascinated by the possibilities in transfinite set theory which forces us to think in ways far beyond 'everyday' numbers and mathematical concepts. At the very least, transfinite set theory would seem necessary to re-establish the proofs of God's existence on a firmer basis. This enlargening of our mathe-

matical horizons would force a great enlarging of our metaphysical horizons as well.

3. We reach a territory which is quite strange to finite creatures —that Act-of-being Who is Himself and is, thus, self-sustaining. We reach God. I have mixed feelings about any such stage, fearing and hoping that to reach this stage is to have the beatific vision which is the union with God described very tentatively by various mystics. Certainly, great mystics have reached something corresponding to this state without having any deep understanding of the empirical aspects of Creation. God can choose to bless anyone He pleases with direct communion in this life. That has no bearing on the program I'm proposing to rebuild Christian theology to retain the very truths being endangered by those who would be pious and holy by tying our thoughts about our Creator to outmoded empirical and speculative knowledge. We should also realize that while we have reason to believe that human knowledge can expand much further than anyone would have guessed, God in His Transcendence might always be best described by the semi-mystical and semi-poetical language of negative theology. Still, even that language can be enriched and disciplined by an expanded metaphysics.

It's clear that theology and metaphysics, at their frontiers, are not the domain of talented scholars but rather the domain of creative thinkers who are more interested in speaking to God than in writing textbooks. Some, such as Aquinas, could do both, but a little bit of knowledge and a sometime reckless creativity would probably accomplish far more than great scholarly knowledge and careful working techniques.

At this time in history, when we've gained so much knowledge of God's Creation and have so much potential for understanding His natural revelations that point to the Creator Himself, most scholars on the scientific and theological sides refuse to follow the leads as if there truly is a deep and unbridgeable chasm between Creation and its Creator, or perhaps as if this universe is something else than a Creation of love.



## 77 More on: What Does God Know?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=95>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/06/16.]

I seem to have spoken of Creation in two ways. There's no real inconsistency but I sometimes confuse myself. In Chapter 76, *What Does God Know?* found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=94>, I spoke as if the Primordial Universe, the stuff underlying all of Creation, is analogous to absolute infinity, a chaos—if you will—of factuality from which elegant mathematical systems can be drawn. In the more general sense of Creator of all of Creation and not just this universe, God's thoughts range over an absolute infinity of facts and from those facts, He can create systems which correspond to various systems of truths, including mathematical truths but not only those.

In past writings, I've spoken of the Primordial Universe as being the manifestation of truths God selected for this Creation and now I've spoken of the Primordial Universe as being the factual chaos from which systems of truth can arise (like islands arising from an absolutely infinite sea of chaos). Our bias, perhaps coming from the limitations (not outright errors!) of metaphysical traditions, is to associate truths with what we might call constructed or designed systems. I've moved more strongly towards a view of truths as being 'factual' with ordered systems being created or shaped from those raw facts. From that viewpoint: is the Primordial Universe the islands (ordered truths) or the entire sea (factual truths) along with all possible islands?

Whatever the answer to that question, the basic thought I'm trying to communicate is: God creates truths by thinking them and isn't just

a Supernatural Computer processing pre-existing possible thoughts. The Lord Almighty is a true Creator and creates factual truths as creatures know them. He's a Shaper of pre-existing chaos only in the sense that He further shapes His Creation into specific worlds.

So what would constitute divine thought outside of His acts as Creator? Possibly nothing. God is a pure Act-of-being, His own Act-of-being, and I think Christians are bound to see that Act-of-being in terms of love between Father and Son and Holy Spirit. As a Medieval scholastic might have said: God doesn't think. He simply knows. In this way of looking at matters, every manifested truth or unmanifested truth is to God a directly accessible fact and never a conclusion to a line of reasoning. And we move a small step closer to understanding the traditional claim: God is simple.

I've spoken in my book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], and elsewhere about the nature of random numbers. Two especially important claims are:

1. A random number is simply a fact. This claim, to my knowledge, was first made in the early 1970s by Marc Kac, the highly regarded measure theorist, on the basis of the early work of Chaitin and the similar intuitive suggestions made by Kolmogorov and possibly a few others.
2. Only God with His absolutely infinite mind and His absolutely free will could actually make a random number.

To God, there may be no difference between the most elegant mathematical theorem and a random number. To the Almighty, they are most immediately known facts while to a human thinker, the first is a result of a line of reasoning and the second is essentially unknowable. On the other hand, if relationships are primary over substance, we come to a possible fork in the road. Do systematically created or constructed truths regain primacy because of their richer relationships to each other? I'm not sure where to take this but my thoughts at this point turn back to the Holy Trinity and the relationships of love between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I wouldn't want to leave the impression that mathematics provides more than analogical models of substance or relationships or or persons or Persons. But those analogical models are important for any possible revision and revival of metaphysics in the modern world. The history of metaphysics and even a very casual acquaintance with Hellenistic mathematics

and metaphysics would suggest the relationship is deeper than just analogical, but I'll leave matters there after first claiming that our modern philosophical muddle is partly due to a lack of proper response to modern developments in mathematics.

God 'simply' exists and knows and doesn't think any way directly analogous to human thinking. This is part of the reasoning behind the claim that "God is simple". He has no parts and doesn't change. To say, "God is simple" might be the same as to say "God necessarily exists". It's hard to imagine a creature being simple in the way ascribed to God.

I can say that God doesn't exist in time or space, a more plausible claim on certain grounds now that mathematical physicists have produced models of reality which—though they fail—do indicate this universe might well be shaped from something which has no time-like or space-like aspects. Time and space would simply be infinitesimally small, sequential subsets of absolute infinity, ordered so that they can be traveled. The smallest 'dense' subset of absolute infinity, an open region of that ocean of chaos, wouldn't be sequential in the intuitive way I'm using mathematical language and thus it couldn't be traveled in a way that would make possible the sort of development God has ordained for this universe. This sort of thought played into my speculations on the Primordial Universe from which this particular universe is shaped.

So, after ascending to God in His Transcendence by way of Creation, that is, by contemplating the Creator of this world, I find myself supporting the views of the Fathers and Aquinas and other Catholic theologians when it comes to God in His necessary Being, a very 'simple' sort of Being. This is hardly surprising and fits in with some statements I made privately to some people at the time my book was first published: what amazed me then and now is the degree to which human thinkers can see ultimate truths even through the glass darkly. Might this be more proof that a well-formed human mind is shaped to copy by way of understanding what God does in bringing about acts-of-being? Sometimes, we can see His purposes though we're not yet prepared to see His ways of achieving those purposes.



## 78 A Review of *Adaptive Thinking*, Part I

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

Professor Gigerenzer states in the introduction of Part I of his book [61]:

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

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

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

solved, theoretically at least, by a machine based on quantum mechanical principles.

Simon and his contemporaries and successors in this line of thought had returned to some sort of dualism using different language. As someone said about the Artificial Intelligent crowd: the soul has returned and now it's called 'software'. It's this sort of view that's opposed by scientists who are, roughly speaking, non-reductionistic materialists. The brain-scientist Gerald Edelman would be a good example, since he's written clearly and powerfully on the philosophical implications of modern neurobiological discoveries and theories. (See *A Universe of Consciousness: How Matter Becomes Imagination* [132], co-authored by Giulio Tononi.) Edelman writes from a view which seems to be roughly that of a Jamesian pragmatism where all our higher knowledge comes from building upwards. I've argued against this way of thought because a world can't simply be built from its parts though that same world wouldn't exist without its parts, but this sort of a view is intellectually defensible and is also properly pious towards most aspects of the universe, failing to see only that it is a universe. The possibilities of a world, a universe ordered to some greater purposes, is not even intelligible in Jamesian thought.

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

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

These very discussions are possible only because of the human brain's capability of making a mind which—in principle—can encapsulate the universe or even the world which is, in my writings, the universe seen in light

of God's purposes for Creation. In other words, the human mind doesn't pre-exist as a well-formed entity, though the underlying brain has some well-formed abilities and limitations. The human mind can't be separated from its relationships to external things, to living beings, and—most of all—to God. A truly well-formed human mind is capable of seeing a universe and then maybe a world and capable of forming a relationship with it as well as forming relationships with many things and living creatures and abstract ideas. The mind of that same human being could have been formed to mirror a computer or bureaucratic ways of thought. I'll leave it to the reader to contemplate and fear other and still more horrible possibilities.

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

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

Gigerenzer also discusses the contradictions and misunderstandings embedded in the analytical techniques and basic assumptions of modern researchers in human thought. He shows that psychologists have been guilty of basic logical errors. For example, many researchers have assumed human beings should engage in Bayesian thinking when dealing with uncertainty and then the researchers have analyzed the results by statistical techniques inconsistent with Bayesian concepts.

Trained in statistics, some scientists saw the human mind as being some sort of statistical processing entity, confusing a potential skill of the entity for the entity itself. Others, such as Simon, were trained in operations research—generally, the use of algorithmic techniques to solve problems—and began to view the human brain as first a fancy calculator and then what we'd call a general-purpose computer.

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

Egon Brunswik began his professional life as a psychologist in the fertile intellectual turmoil of Vienna in the decades before WW II. In exile from Nazi-controlled Vienna, he was able to obtain and hold a respectable position at Berkeley, however he was never taken seriously for the rest of his life. Academics, including scientists, are capable of politics as bigoted as those of the average U.S. Senator. And we should remember what Polanyi once told us: Galileo's second and more brutal inquisition was less a religious persecution and more a particularly nasty academic peer-review.<sup>1</sup> It was scientists and philosophers, Aristotelians of a certain stripe, who tried him that second time because of the danger his ideas posed to the ideas which had formed their minds and made their careers. It was an historical oddity of sorts that those particular peer-reviewers were Catholic priests—poor

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<sup>1</sup>We should also remember that Stillman Drake's reconstruction of some mysterious events during Galileo's lifetime indicate it likely that Galileo's first trial never took place. In that reconstruction, Galileo met with Cardinal Bellarmine who asked him not to discuss the Bible in the context of his philosophical and scientific writings. Galileo agreed and had an unsigned and non-notarized piece of paper to that effect. Drake said that paper was written in Bellarmine's own hand. There is some evidence that Bellarmine was afraid Galileo was reading the Bible in the proper way and the Church in the wrong way and wanted time to deal with the situation. Whether or not that was a good way to handle the situation, Bellarmine died before being able to do much.

men could gain higher educations only through the seminaries because only the Catholic Church had proper resources and had also retained enough respect for education to provide it widely.

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



## 79 A Review of *Adaptive Thinking*, Part II

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

In Part II, chapters 4-6 of *Adaptive Thinking: Rationality in the Real World* [61], Professor Girgenzer provides a few arguments towards a view of what he labels ‘ecological rationality’ which he defines as follows:

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

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

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

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

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<sup>1</sup>More recently, I’ve separated out the formation of a communal mind, but that wouldn’t much change this review. It’s not greatly inaccurate to think of the communal aspects of our minds to be part of what’s shaped by the responses of an individual to his immediate environment.

process of the shaping of an individual human mind to its immediate environment is possible because the human species has been shaped to specific capabilities, shaped by the responses of our ancestors to their environments and shaped to be able to respond to those sorts of environments or to environments ‘close enough’ in some sense. Professor Gigerenzer is, in a sense, trying to define what ‘close enough’ means in the specific case of analyzing uncertainty.

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

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

In any case, Gigerenzer takes on the medical cases in a clear way, providing us with a frightening picture of the confused information and advice

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

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

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

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

1. Out of 1,000 women, 10 will have breast cancer and 8 of those will have positive mammograms; and
2. Out of the remaining 990 women, 95 will have positive mammograms.

With information presented thus, most medical personnel can reason and explain that the percentage of women who have cancer given a positive mammogram is  $8/(8 + 95)$ . Or, more directly, 103 of the 1,000 women will

have positive mammograms and 8 of those will actually have breast cancer: 7.8%. This is apparently a realistic example for actual breast cancer tests and a typical population of women being tested. The odds of having breast cancer given a positive result might be much higher for women from high-risk groups, such as some family lines or ethnic groups which carry genes predisposing the women to breast cancer. This can be seen easily by just increasing the 8 to, say, 25. The chances of actually having breast cancer given a positive mammogram rises from 7.8% to 20.8%.

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

As I noted in my book, (*To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41]): our minds are shaped in response to our environments but that shaping has occurred both in the evolutionary history of our race and also in the development of a single human being. I'm probably far more optimistic than most evolutionary theorists about the possibility that the human mind has become an entity that can transcend its evolutionary past so that the entire universe can become its true home—at least in principle, though no particular human mind can actually achieve this state, at least not on this side of the grave. In any case, we have to work hard to develop our own minds properly in a complex world and we have to work smart to develop minds which evolved to meet the needs of apish creatures during the New Stone Age. If there is truth in Gigerenzer's research programs on the human mind and also in my philosophical exploration of the human mind, then our thinking is a matter of interaction with our environments or with the universe or world as a whole. We're not computing machines somehow independent of the world and taking in data for that world, data which we

process while isolated from that world, data which leads to understandings of the world which imply there is some textbook to be written which explains that same world. Take the trouble to unbundle the complex interactions of the previous sentence. It not only implies a research program of the sort Gigerenzer is carrying out, it also implies the ways in which we can understand the Creator through His natural revelations and those are ways in which we can also imitate Him.

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



## 80 A Review of *Adaptive Thinking*, Part III

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=99>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/07/21.]

In part III (chapters 7-8) of *Adaptive Thinking: Rationality in the Real World* [61], Professor Gigerenzer tells us:

To understand the power of human intelligence, one needs to analyze the match between cognitive strategies and the structure of environments. Together they are like a pair of scissors, each blade of little use on its own but effective in concert with the other. [page 125]

A little later, he states the question he's dealing with in Part III:

Models of bounded rationality address the following question: How do people make decisions in the real world, where time is short, knowledge lacking, and other resources limited?

This is a good question to ask in an era where we've misunderstood rationality, thinking a man to be an autonomous agent whose major relationships to his environments and even his fellow-men are mediated through channels of information. The information taken in by that autonomous agent is then processed and used in logical processes which were mostly developed in recent centuries. Artificial intelligence researchers learned the error in this view of real-world intelligence from a basic robotic experiment conducted decades ago, I believe at Stanford. When they tried to 'teach' a robot to walk across a room by finding ways around each obstacle through

brute-force logic, they found the robot froze, not even able to ‘prove’ it possible to move around the chair immediately in front of it. More importantly, we human beings tend to freeze or react with emotionally induced blindness when we’re constantly presented with moral and social and political problems which we’re supposed to be solving from scratch as if we were moral philosophers developing a new approach to human moral life. This is the reason that all of us should be interested in this sorts of ‘bounded rationality’. We’re not autonomous agents, moral or rational creatures in a free-standing way. Our morality is a result of our interaction with our fellow-creatures, our physical environments, and our Creator.

In Chapter 7, *Probabilistic Mental Models*, Gigerenzer speaks of situations where test-takers are overconfident about their answers to individual questions but have good estimates of the frequency of their correct answers over the entire set of questions. Further analyses indicated that the problem is due to the deliberate selection of questions to correspond to a desired ratio of easy and hard questions rather than using representative sampling from the possible questions. The test-takers were giving their confidence in the correctness of each question as if they were facing a representative sample of questions rather than a set selected to have a higher number of hard questions. By the time they were through the entire test, they gave a better estimate of their percentage of correct answers, Presumably because they’d had a chance to evaluate the mixture of hard and easy questions on the test. As Gigerenzer notes, this implies that a selection of more easy questions than would be expected would result in an under-confidence problem. Other possibilities can arise but this should give a good idea of the type of misunderstanding that can arise when there is a mismatch between an experimental test and the expectations of the test-takers. We think in interaction with our environment and artificial tests which ‘lie’ in some sense about that environment can confuse us in one way or another.

At the same time, we should realize the environment can lie as well. It can generate possible but unlikely situations. It can change dramatically in fundamental ways as it does when a cosmopolitan society develops from a rural society. This raises two possibilities in my mind:

1. We human beings are born already being particular creatures and members of a species well-developed to a specific environment, one which has already passed out of existence for any given population of human beings.

2. We human beings are born as a host of potential beings and members of a species which carries in its flesh a lot of possible responses to a lot of possible environments.

In fact, the truth lies in some combination of the two possibilities. We're flexible to the extent that the human mind is the type of entity capable—in principle—of encapsulating the universe, but no actual human mind can do that though most of us can 'expand' our minds somewhat to imagine possibilities not found explicitly in our environments. There is a problem with not only smallness of mind but also limited flexibility and limited ability to overcome prejudices, some warranted in local circumstances.

In Chapter 8, *Reasoning the Fast and Frugal Way*, Gigerenzer tells us of situations where such effective knowledge is contained in the environment that too much explicit knowledge can actually drop the scores of test-takers. I'll give one simple example to show how this happens. Suppose German students are given a simple test where each question is a pair of American cities drawn from, say, the largest 100 such cities and the task is to say which has the larger population. Those students are not likely to know enough about American cities to be able to rank those cities in strict order of population size. It turns out that there is something called the 'recognition heuristic' which maximizes accuracy in decision-making in this situation.

If you recognize the name of one city and not the other, guess that the recognized city is larger in population.

Suppose you have a few different 'fast and frugal' ways of making possible decisions. You can use them to make the final decision in ways far simpler than the full-blown analyses of the 'classical reasoning' which came out of Enlightenment thought. For example, you can simply make the decision on the basis of the first 'strong' answer you get. Simulations indicate that such 'fast and frugal' methods can equal or exceed the performance of the fancier methods which are taught at Harvard and MIT and are used to manage General Motors and the Defense Department of the United States.

Gigerenzer's way of viewing human thinking processes is consistent with the Thomistic, empirically-based attitudes I've been advocating. In fact, it opens up a new possibility. Instead of our minds having to actually encapsulate the universe, we can instead develop our minds so that they can interact with that universe in a properly responsive way. The universe itself becomes our partner in our thinking and also in our remembering.



## 81 A Review of *Adaptive Thinking*, Part IV

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=100>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/07/25.]

Professor Gigerenzer starts off the introduction to Part IV of *Adaptive Thinking: Rationality in the Real World* [61] with a strong claim:

The study of human thinking is deeply suspicious of introducing anything genuinely social into the world of “pure” rationality. As in much of cognitive science, most researchers have fallen in love with syllogisms, first-order logic, probability theory, and other systems that abstract and distract from the semantics and pragmatics of thinking, not to mention social motives. [page 199]

Before passing on, I’ll ask the reader to ponder this question: if thinking has no social aspects, then what has rationality to do with morality? In fact, we modern human beings are in the embarrassing position of having our major philosophers claim that virtue, vice, and even Christian views of sin are metaphysically founded while most of our public morality is socially and biologically founded. Virtue must be imposed upon creatures of flesh where neither the flesh nor the social relationships of those creatures are morally neutral. I would argue, and will continue to argue, that morality evolved and reflects the history of life and the physical environments of earth as the oft evolved eye reflects the radiative characteristics of the sun and also the optical characteristics of the earth’s atmosphere.

Returning to Gigerenzer’s ideas, he says this also in the introduction:

Social environments foster different strategies than physical environments, such as imitation instead of deliberation, and demand attention to information that is unique to social interaction, such as cues that could reveal one is being cheated or bluffed. [page 199]

I would qualify this a bit. I think that we might do well by adopting the attitudes of old-fashioned farmers and coming into a communion of sorts with the parts of this world over which we are stewards. We interact with our physical environments and even blend into them in a sense. Though there are some short-term advantages to acting as if we were apart from our physical environments and trying to control them in the way we control pseudo-objects in a video game, we in the early 21st century are maybe seeing hints that our physical environments will take revenge of a sort when we act and think as if our surroundings were just a collection of objects independent of us and subject to our control. Given our tendencies towards unified thought and action, however weak and defective, an overlord attitude towards our physical environments may also spill over into our social and political attitudes, but the more important point is that we interact with our environments rather than standing above or outside them.

Our ways of thought towards our physical environments should reflect our true situation and I think some peoples, such as the Amish, have shown they can respect the trees on their land without turning them into ents or other magically conscious beings. As I understand it, evolutionary biology has supported the anthropological claim, based upon observation of foraging or pastoral societies, that human males in particular are totemic—they are very good at learning how to ‘think’ as if they were deer or bear or fish. Totemism will lead to magic rather than reasonable moral behavior and by ‘reasonable’, I don’t mean rational in the sense of Kant and others of an Enlightenment temperament.

[S]ome have proposed mental modules for intuitive physics, mathematics, and biology—a view that turns academic subjects into domains. An evolutionary perspective suggests that a different division of labor has evolved, one directed at solving important adaptive problems, such as attachment development, mate search, parenting, social exchange, coalition formation, and maintaining and upsetting dominance hierarchies. . . .

The idea of modules, specialized for certain adaptive problems conflicts with the compartmentalization of psychology. Today's areas of specialization are defined in terms of faculties, such as memory, thinking, decision making, intelligence, motivation, and emotion. These faculties have become institutionalized in modern university curricula and grant agencies. [page 200]

Unfortunately, they've also become institutionalized in our basic anthropologies as embedded in our theology and philosophy and history and literature. And, yet, I wouldn't fully jettison the idea that man can abstract across a range of domains to discover some rules of thought. I don't believe Gigerenzer intends to do so either, but some enthusiastic followers might forget that an analysis such as this will correct exaggerations of the importance of abstract thought by using abstract thought as a tool. A balanced view is contained in the claim:

Adaptive problems and their modern equivalents, such as foraging and dieting and social exchange and markets, demand the orchestration of these faculties [such as memory and thinking], and not their segregation. [page 200]

Before reading Gigerenzer, I'd made similar claims. If we are to have any chance of solving our problems, we have to return to our roots, to understand human nature especially in its social aspects. From there, we can enlarge our viewpoint to maybe find ways to live moral lives in our huge, cosmopolitan societies.

A couple of pages later, Gigerenzer says:

I am not arguing against axioms and rules, only against their a priori imposition as context-independent yardsticks of rationality.

In my worldview, axioms and rules—even those of mathematics—are tools set inside of factual stories. They are relationships between specific islands of order which God has raised up from an absolutely infinite ocean of facts. Ultimately, those islands are a setting for a story God is telling, the story which is this world—the universe seen in light of God's purposes. This means that even the most elegant and abstract of mathematics has a sort of ad-hoc nature which can be seen in the multitude of geometries and algebras

which seem necessary to describe the current state of the description of physical reality by mathematical physicists. See *The Road to Reality* [113] by Roger Penrose for an exploration of this universe which uses a variety of mathematical schemes for various aspects of physical reality. The real point I'd make is that the islands are important in being our homes or vacation spots but they're insignificant in many ways relative to the surrounding oceans of factual reality, that is—chaos. The truly difficult tasks of human thought and human adaption to reality deal with those oceans which are factual and, hence, seem chaotic to human eyes and human minds.

In Chapter 9, *Rationality: Why Social Context Matters*, Gigerenzer takes on the goals of rational thought as advocated by modern economists and other social thinkers (he gives Samuelson the Nobel Laureate economist as an example). He provides examples which cast doubt upon the possibility of applying consistency or maximization rules when, for example, social context makes relevant additional choices which are logically irrelevant.

One interesting aspect of decision-making, made by at least 1939 by the psychologist Brunswik, is that animals make certain types of decisions as if they were maximizing in the context of a group. Many scientists assume that because they think of laboratory rats as individuals, those over-bred rodents should act as individuals or else they're being irrational. In particular, if a rat is put in a maze where food is found with 80% probability with a left turn or 20% with a right turn, the rat will turn left only 68% of the time after learning.

The biological example given by Gigerenzer involves coloration where, say, white is usually a better camouflage color because of snow but some years have snow-less winters and black is better. The breeding population minimizes chances of being wiped out if there is always a certain percentage of individuals which have the black color though they will usually be eaten—thus modern theories of rationalization at the individual level, if used by nature, might lead more easily to the extermination of such a breeding population.

Chapter 10, *Domain Specific Reasoning: Social Contracts and Cheating Detection*, starts with a recounting of John Garcia's discovery that rats are not general purpose learning machines. They are wired, so to speak, in some fairly specific ways. His first finding was that rats didn't readily learn to avoid flavored water if it was followed by an electric shock but they did if nausea was induced, even if the nausea didn't hit until 2 hours later. It's easier for rats, and humans as well, to associate tastes with stomach upsets

than with electrical shocks.

John Garcia proved that B.F. Skinner was wrong and that our ‘conditioning’ is specific and not that of ‘stimulus equipotentiality’. Gigerenzer tells us that, for the crime of proving wrong a theory popular with the powers-that-be in the field of cognitive research, Garcia was censored from 1965 to 1979 or so. His papers were rejected by the editors of the journals of the American Psychological Association. Many of those editors were probably the sorts of yahoos who liked to joke about the closed-mindedness of those priests back in the Middle Ages. Every age has its forms of censorship which are exercised by those whose major asset is control of existing institutions. The leaders and followers in those institutions place a high priority on protecting those institutions and their positions and psychological security inside of them. In a similar vein, the historian Carroll Quigley speaks in *The Evolution of Civilizations: An Introduction to Historical Analysis* [119] of instruments forming inside a civilization to serve the needs of that civilization; over time, those instruments stagnate and become self-serving institutions.

Moving on to an example explored by the ‘evolutionary’ psychologist Leda Cosmides, Gigerenzer discusses experiments and evolutionary style reasoning that indicates that human beings confronted with a logical puzzle don’t generally reason well. I’ll not discuss the set-up of this particular experimental test, but I will say that I first let myself answer intuitively and came up with one of the ‘wrong’ possibilities and then I thought about the puzzle more explicitly and came up with the right answer—I was a math major in college and took logic courses and have done a fair amount of casual computer programming in the decades since. Tests with puzzles that imply a social contract with benefits and the possibility of cheating, reveal that human beings will reason as if to detect cheating on the part of test-givers or some third-party described in the set-up of the puzzles. We human beings are altruistic but will try to determine whether others around us are reciprocating or whether they take benefits without reciprocating. Again, this is hardly surprising on the part of social animals which do best in cooperative groups. Our cooperative relationships are far more important to us than formal reasoning—in general. This isn’t to deny the need for some abstract thinkers and for a gradual integration of their insights into the thoughts and habits of an advanced civilization. At the same time, we have to remember most human beings are capable of some degree of formal reasoning and some, such as Einstein, are capable of extraordinary

achievements in formal reasoning. We have to also remember that abstract reasoning is far more important in a complex world in which we often deal with situations or with groups of human beings which are not familiar to us.

In Chapter 11, *The Modularity of Social Intelligence*, Gigerenzer tells us, “Primates appear to manipulate social objects with more ease and sophistication than physical tools.”

In the rest of the chapter, he speculates on the ways in which a modular social intelligence could work. In particular he addresses the problem which confronts much evolutionary reasoning about complex organs or behavioral traits: how could such have arisen from selection processes? The specific answers aren't clear but it's well-known that physical or behavioral traits which originally served one purpose will often be applied to other purposes. A biochemical analogue is the body's frugal use of certain complex chemicals to help neutralize poisons often found in foods we eat and also to help regulate moods by altering brain activity. Certain 'old-fashioned' anti-depressant drugs destroy the ability of the patient's system to neutralize poisons found in aged cheeses and other foods and, thus, those who use those drugs have to avoid certain foods which are harmless to most human beings. By some sort of accidental process, a complex chemical already present in the mammal's body, probably first in the digestive system, was used for another purpose.

While I think Gigerenzer is right that our thinking evolved in 'modules' directed to solving specific problems (distinguishing between friends and enemies, finding proper mates, etc.), I think there is, in fact, a faculty in human beings that corresponds to a domain-general intelligence: our ability to construct morally purposeful narratives. It's those narratives which are the setting for domain-specific forms of intelligence in human beings. The most important question about human intelligence is not how individual modules operate but rather: is there a narrative, a morally purposeful story, both true and accessible to human minds? Is the human mind capable of reaching truths, even if only the contingent truths of this universe? Alternatively, was Pilate right in questioning if there is any truth? In that second case, our intelligence would be no more than a pragmatic and ad-hoc way of surviving and reproducing.

If we are potentially dealing with truths, it would remain true that no particular human mind could fully and truly comprehend the truths of this universe, empirical truths ordered to purposes which can't be seen clearly

unless we could see the universe in its entirety through time and space, but we know that there might well be all the sorts of moral truths in our universe which the Enlightenment thinkers and most of their Christian opponents banished and replaced with abstract truths from their favorite metaphysical systems.



## 82 A Review of *Adaptive Thinking*, Part V

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=102>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/08/06.]

In the introduction to Part IV of *Adaptive Thinking: Rationality in the Real World*, Professor Gigerenzer tells us:

The “discovery” of cognitive illusions was not the first assault on human rationality. Sigmund Freud’s attack is probably the best known: According to him, the unconscious wishes and desires of the human id are a steady source of intrapsychical conflict that manifest itself in all kinds of irrational fears, beliefs, and behavior. But the cognitive-illusion assault is stronger than the psychoanalytic one. It does not need to invoke a conflict between rational judgment and unconscious wishes and desires to explain humans’ apparent irrationality: Judgment is itself fundamentally deficient. *Homo Sapiens* appears to be a misnomer. During the last few decades, cognitive illusions have become fodder for classroom demonstrations and textbooks. Isn’t it fun to show how dumb everyone else is, and after all, aren’t they?  
[page 237]

Alas, there are political implications even to the results of these dumb tests which show how dumb people are:

Given the message that ordinary citizens are unable to estimate uncertainties and risks, one might conclude that a government

would be well advised to keep these nitwits out of important decisions regarding new technologies and environmental risks.

Given the information that always comes out of archives after the ‘criminals’ are dead, it’s doubtful that even American leaders have been so concerned with the opinions of American citizens as formal American political processes might imply. And I think there are some prominent scientists, in the stem cell research and elsewhere, who paint their opponents as being uniformly dumb people who can’t accept that men and dinosaurs didn’t live at the same time. I’m no historian but I suspect this to be a time-honored way to neutralize opponents to get one’s own way. This is very important issue and one to be dealt with in other places.

Chapter 12, *How to Make Cognitive Illusions Disappear*, is an update of a talk given by Gigerenzer at Stanford University. It’s a presentation, sometimes from a slightly different angle, of material covered in earlier chapters of this book. For example, he argues, based on good evidence and reasoning, that many of the ‘errors’ human beings make in tests of decision-making under conditions of uncertainty, are actually errors by the test-takers. There is good reason to believe that human beings are pretty good at dealing with uncertainty when the information, experiential or given in a staged test, is presented on a basis more consistent with the information we actually find in the real world. One example would be the presentation of statistics on a frequency basis and not an abstract probabilistic basis (e.g., 1 out of 10 instead of 10%). There is also reason to believe that human beings don’t apply probabilistic reasoning in judging single events and he points out that most of the highly regarded theorists of statistics and probability also don’t believe that probabilistic reasoning is valid in judging single events. Only a small, but influential, group of theorists in cognitive psychology, economics, sociology, and maybe some other fields of social science assume we should reason in that abstract way.

Gigerenzer labels much of the statistical work which appears in the papers resulting from these cognitive illusion tests, and many other papers in psychology and medical research and other fields, to be statistical rituals, the result of training students in behavior much like obsessive hand-washing. I found that out once. I helped a friend on a small consulting assignment where she had to analyze surveys from training sessions put on around the U.S. by staff from a major medical school. The participants in those sessions were a non-homogeneous lot, ranging from young technicians to

experienced doctors and nurses. Guess what? Some were bored and some felt taxed by the effort to keep up. The trainers wanted to discover what was going on by having their consultant run some specific tests, maybe t-tests—it was years ago. She asked me to help her run those tests and I returned the advice that they sit down and analyze the survey results along with the bios of the participants after maybe doing a few simpler statistic calculations (such as percentiles summarizing the scale of boredom—the students had given answers on some scale, maybe 1 to 5). The medical school staff members weren't impressed by my advice. Higher level thinking involves some sort of test of a null hypothesis and they weren't about to let any mere math major suggest that such tests are useful—at best—when some very special circumstances are met. One of those circumstances is a homogeneous population or one stratified with a significant number of entities in each cell. Since then, I've become convinced that those sorts of tests, involving null hypotheses and the like, are rarely useful, and never in any situation I'll ever be in.

One question raised in this chapter is very interesting: Is the world stable enough for statistics to be generally useful in most of our (presumably single-event) decisions?

The answer is probably, “Yes,” but the underwriter working on catastrophe coverage for earthquake damage in Los Angeles probably reads a lot of reports and articles by geologists working in that area. Those working on auto collision rates probably keep up on the work of designers in Detroit and Tokyo as well as the data collected from the cars already designed and driven. This is to say that decision-makers should first become experts in finding and understanding useful information. It's hard work to understand and quantify sources of risk or uncertainty.

Chapter 13, *The Superego, the Ego, and the Id in Statistical Reasoning* deals with the conquest of psychology by statistics, quoting Kendall, himself a statistician:

[S]tatisticians “have already overrun every branch of science with a rapidity of conquest rivaled only by Attila, Mohammed, and the Colorado beetle”. (page 267)

Gigerenzer points out that there is one peculiarity about the appearance of statistics in psychology, by which he clearly means to include all work

on human thought even if done by sociologists or economists or artificial intelligence researchers.

In psychology and in other social sciences, probability and statistics were typically not used to revise the understanding of our *subject matter* from a deterministic to some probabilistic view (as in physics, genetics, or evolutionary biology) but rather to mechanize the *experimenters'* inferences—in particular, their inferences from data to hypothesis.

At this point, I think it worthwhile to note that the philosopher Stephen Toulmin once said that biologists speaking of randomness are talking about the complex events which occur when two independent systems interact. In fact, there is an easy way for a physicist to create a series of movements which are random in the sense of being unpredictable. Simply connect the bobs of two pendulums with different periods. You end up with motions which are fully determined but unpredictable in terms of current understandings of mathematics.

Understanding the reason for a system having 'random' aspects may well be even more important than quantifying that randomness. In evolutionary terms, you might have the genes of a living creature as one system and the environment as the other system. The results are unpredictable and form a stream of facts, a natural history. In psychological terms, you have the human mind and its environment. Again the results are unpredictable and form a stream of facts as a human being moves through his life, perceiving and thinking and responding—living. In both cases, you have systems which operate independently in many important ways but they overlap because of their evolutionary history. In both cases, you will probably get better results by untangling the various strands rather than by enclosing the mess in a black box and doing some fancy calculations on what comes out.

Recently, there's been a revolution in the understanding of random numbers that began with some speculations by the great Russian mathematician Kolmogorov and the American high student Chaitin (circa 1965 in both cases). As Marc Kac, the highly regarded measure theorist from Cornell, said in the early 1970s (I quote from memory):

We now know what a random number is—a fact.

So far as the number line goes, Chaitin completed the proof around 1990 and published it as an undergraduate textbook in computer science. What did he prove?:

Every number is random—in a measure theoretic sense.

Now I'll quote from a 30 year-old memory. The professor in my introductory probability theory course told us that all of probability theory can be enfolded in a fully deterministic measure theory with no loss of content. I'll not explain that further. See Gregory Chaitin's homepage [20] for both downloadable articles and information on books by Dr. Chaitin. He and some of his early publishers have made some very good writings available for free download.

If you wish to come to some understanding of what's going on, just ask yourself what the source of random numbers could be under the naive understanding of probabilities and statistics. Oddly enough, that naive understanding is nurtured by gambling examples though it's now plausible to build a computer that could accurately predict a roulette wheel's results with a bit of data from the past results of that wheel. Add a possible visual system and you have a system that could track the movement of every card with perfect accuracy no matter how well it's shuffled. Sure, you could be fooled by a competent conman, but the principle seems clear.

Yet, unpredictability does exist, sometimes in a very nasty form when it's human life or human health on the line. Good statistical and probabilistic methods are very useful. You could say, only partly tongue-in-cheek that probability theory is measure theory motivated by gambling examples. We deal with unpredictability by using good techniques after we use our reasoning skills to properly understand the problem.

Gigerenzer tells us that it has often been hard in recent decades to publish in some of the major journals of psychology unless the paper presents the proper rituals of null-hypothesis testing and then tells us that Sir Ronald Fisher, developer of the null-hypothesis methods, felt that "significance testing was the most primitive type of argument in a hierarchy of possible statistical analyses," and goes on to state the following points of this chapter:

1. What has become institutionalized as *inferential statistics* in psychology is not Fisherian statistics. It is an incoherent mishmash of some of Fisher's ideas on the one hand and some of the ideas of Neyman and E.S. Pearson on the other. . .
2. The institutionalized hybrid carries the message that *statistics is statistics is statistics*, that is, that statistics is a

single integrated structure that speaks with a single authoritative voice. . . [page 270]

I'll leave it to the reader to follow up, if so interested, on the details of this problem. It's important to realize that this idea that there is one statistical procedure to judge hypotheses is equivalent to the assumption that human knowledge will always fit nicely into this one shape. It turns out the gurus didn't make all the big mistakes of the disciples. In fact, Gigerenzer goes on to acknowledge that Fisher in one camp, Neyman and Pearson in the other, went on to develop large toolboxes which at least allows a multiple of shapes for human knowledge. It was the disciples who developed and mandated a single hybrid method for doing statistical analyses of experiments.

The last part of the chapter creates a tongue-in-cheek Freudian analogy of the "emotional tensions associated with the hybrid logic". It's amusing and might well make it easier to understand the relationships and tensions of these statistical conflicts which apparently came frighteningly close to defining what it means to do science within several fields, including psychology and branches of economics and also certain laboratory branches of biology.

Chapter 14, *Surrogates for Theories*, deals with the ways in which academics and others can pretend to think when they're just playing various linguistic games—perhaps even believing they are thinking.

There is one obvious reason why surrogates for theories come to mind more quickly than real theories: demonstrating how a one-word explanation, a re-description, a dichotomy, or an exercise in data fitting "explains" a phenomenon demands less mental strain than developing a bold and precise theory. It takes imagination to conceive the idea that heat is caused by motion, but only little mental effort to propose that heat is caused by specific particles that have the propensity to be hot. [page 294]

If we are rational and moral creatures moving through a factual world, then it becomes incumbent upon us to perceive clearly and to think hard to understand this world and to find any useful or interesting or beautiful patterns in these facts. This is different from applying robotic statistics to data which was generated by some sort of magical randomness. And I would

remind the reader of my comments on randomness, that it is usually what is happening at the interface of two independent, deterministic systems. In this context: 'random' is the ultimate one-word explanation.

Gigerenzer also had an insight into a problem caused by the fragmentation of human knowledge.

Intellectual inbreeding can block the flow of positive metaphors from one discipline to another. Neither disciplines nor sub-disciplines are natural categories. Interdisciplinary exchange has fueled the development of some of the most influential new metaphors and theories in the sciences. . . Territorial science, in contrast, blocks the flow of metaphors and the development of new theories. Distrust and disinterest in anything outside one's subdiscipline supports surrogates for theory. [page 295]

I would suggest that this interdisciplinary borrowing should be across all human intellectual disciplines. In fact, I believe it likely that the more serious and more creative thinkers in all fields have borrowed freely from literature and philosophy and theology as well as from the various specific sciences such as physics and biology, though the lesser thinkers do so quite unconsciously.

And Professor Gigerenzer leaves us with a warning that will probably make little sense to those without knowledge of the history of human thought:

Data without theory are like babies without parents: their life expectancy is low.



## 83 Is Christian Morality a Natural Morality?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=111>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/10/04.]

I'm thinking my way towards the sort of intentional view of moral nature pioneered by St. Thomas Aquinas. There is a clear explanation of intentionality, a biological concept to match our biological natures, in *How Brains Make Up Their Minds* [35] by the neuroscientist Walter J. Freeman. Sticking strictly to the empirical aspects of this concept, Freeman provides a sharp and plausible summary of the Thomistic position on moral intention. I'll provide a somewhat lengthy quote from his book:

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

Lawyers following in the steps of Aquinas understand and use these distinctions. Psychologists commonly do not. Philoso-

phers have drastically changed the meaning of the term, using *intention* to denote the relations that a thought or a belief has to whatever it signifies in the world, but physicians and surgeons, again following Aquinas, have preserved the original sense in applying the word to the processes of growth and healing of the body from injuries, thus retaining its original biological context. I believe that animals have awareness, but not awareness of themselves, which is well developed only in humans. Self-awareness is required for volition: animals cannot volunteer.  
[page 8]

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

I don't doubt the value of natural-law reasoning. After all, much of my efforts are in the related area of natural theology. On the other hand, my efforts are regulated by God's direct revelations especially those which come from the Gospels, from the story of the incarnate Son of God. I can use mathematics and physics and biology to describe the universe as a story centered upon the Son of God, but I can't find a description of the Incarnation or the Crucifixion in the formation of a star nor in the evolutionary story of the human race. True natural law reasoning could see the importance of the instinct found in many species: don't kill a member of your own species. But that instinct isn't absolute, though awfully strong in some species such as the wolf.

I've said it before and I'll say it again: so far as honest natural-law reasoning goes, the virtuous pagans of the Roman Republic and like-minded virtuous pagans in other societies were as good as it gets. Those Romans knew abortion was murder but were willing to abort babies to solve a difficult problem. Being honest and insightful, they knew that laws—such as don't murder other human beings—were strong guidelines rather than absolutes. That's all that we get from nature and from well-developed human reason untutored by revelation – strong guidelines.

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



## 84 Pragmatism and Thomistic Existentialism

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=112>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/10/04.]

In *Meaning and Representation*, Chapter 2 of *How Brains Make Up Their Minds*, Walter J. Freeman has a perceptive and intelligent discussion of the materialist, cognitive, and pragmatic views of the mind and most especially the mind of the self-aware human being. (It's a matter of definition as to whether animals other than human beings, aware but not fully self-aware, can be said to have minds.) And, yet, something is missing in his classification. That something shows in his placing St. Thomas Aquinas in the category of pragmatist. I consider myself a Thomistic existentialist and most certainly not a pragmatist, though I think that pragmatist methods are the same as the 'first-stage' methods of Thomistic existentialism. I've criticized pragmatists, even those that I admire—such as William James or the brain-scientist Gerald Edelman because of the inadequacy of a pure pragmatist approach to understanding the universe. Their bottom-up approach is the proper 'first-stage' to understanding Creation but they refuse to admit it works only if there is a world to meet them, a world in all its unity, coherence, and completeness.

Professor Freeman speaks of our environments containing only representations and not meanings while meanings and not representations are in our minds. Fair enough as a first approximation to understanding the relationship between a human mind and its immediate environments. It can even work as a first approximation to understanding the far simpler but more ambiguous relationship between a well-developed human mind and the universe. The next step upward would be to see the world, the universe

seen in light of God's purposes and this is where the problem arises. This is odd because I'm putting the perception of the more complete entity ahead of the perception of its physical aspects.

The universe wasn't a primary concept in human intellectual history. A world, in the form of a morally ordered cosmos, was seen before Einstein provided a firm description of a universe—all that is bound by a common gravitational field. How could a world have been conjectured before there was any scientific foundation for defining a physical universe? There was only the Cosmos and that was a mess agreeable most of all to Neoplatonists and Gnostics who had romps up ladders to heavens, meeting angelic beings on every rung. (No, don't bring up Jacob's ladder. Like most of the 'strange' parts of the Hebrew scriptures, this was allegorical and not a literal description of some part of this world.)

I'll cut to the chase in this particular discussion of the pragmatic philosophy I admire so much as a great 'almost'. Against that way of thought, I'll state that there is a world and there is meaning in that world. That meaning is inherent in this world which came into being as an object of God's love.

We aren't just bottom-uppers who construct meaning by building our own personal world. We go up from our bottom and find hints of a world which give meaning even to the emptiest regions of space and time. To get best results, we should let ourselves be guided by the Bible and by the Nicene Creed which draws some of the meanings from the story of Jesus Christ and puts them into Catechetical order.

Professor Freeman tells us the world contains 'representations' and meanings are all in our necessarily isolated minds though we can struggle, with some significant success, to communicate our meanings to others and to understand the meanings that others have in their minds. There's enough truth in this that this book can be profitably read to get a clear idea of (almost) what Aquinas really believed about human nature, moral and intellectual. And there's a reason for this: both Aquinas and Freeman are clear thinkers who are willing to subjugate any preconceptions to observed facts of concrete human beings. Both move from empirical knowledge outward towards a world. Unfortunately, Freeman is true to the pragmatic tradition in refusing to acknowledge the existence of a world while borrowing a coherent framework of sorts from the intellectual traditions of the Christian West.

Aquinas believed in a world that had all the meanings put there by God

and his explorations out into that world were regulated by his Christian beliefs. He most certainly didn't believe that a Christian adoring the Body of Christ was looking at a mere representation which required him to construct a meaning. He most certainly didn't believe that every adorer of that Body necessarily had a different understanding of the meaning of that wafer of bread become the Body of Jesus Christ. The meaning is there even when it remains beyond human efforts to render it in human language or human concepts. Our problems with meanings become a struggle to develop the language and concepts to express meanings that lie beyond us—certainly a much different situation than personal meanings in the minds of isolated human beings.

There is also another aspect of the human condition which is closer to Freeman's understanding of meanings: each of us has a role to play in God's story and, thus, we can access a part of the meaning of that story which is not directly accessible by any other human being. Yet, those meanings which are personal because of our perspective are no more, and no less, than a particular part of the story God is telling, the story which is our world, that is, the physical universe seen in light of God's purposes.

Yet, there's gold in those pragmatist hills, far more gold than there is in other modern philosophical traditions. The gold is there just because the pragmatists know to identify hills with gold in them by using their minds to explore empirical reality. Most modern philosophical traditions have taught us there are principles which rise above the mere empirical world and those principles tell us the necessary properties of hills which have gold and the places where gold must necessarily lie. And too many of us follow them and end up digging in hills of sand.

An empirical method, such as that of the pragmatists, will discover the truths which lie in the things and relationships between things in this world created by God. In one sense, Freeman's categorization of Aquinas as a pragmatist is right. The better quality pragmatist thinkers, such as William James and Gerald Edelman and Walter J. Freeman, can be seen as half-blinded Thomists who leave open the eye which sees things and creaturely relationships but leave closed the eye which could see the meaning that is out there in God's story and what it contains. Not seeing the meaning that is out there, they're forced to construct meaning in their isolated human minds.



## 85 Mind: Use It or Lose It

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

Here is an interesting quote from Walter J. Freeman's *How Brains Make Up Their Minds* [35]:

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

This book had helped to form my ideas on this subject. So it's no coincidence that I've said similar things from my own perspective.



## 86 More on Pragmatism and Thomistic Existentialism

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=113>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/10/06.]

I continue reading *How Brains Make Up Their Minds* [35] and thinking about the riches to be found in that book. In particular, there is a mother-lode of profound analysis on *intentionality*, a more plausible foundation of moral freedom than the traditional idealistic (or Platonic-realist) doctrine of *free-will*.

Intentionality in the doctrine of Aquinas does not require consciousness, but it does require acting to create meaning instead of just thinking. This view is shared by the philosophers Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, J.J. Gibson, and the pragmatists. We sniff, move our eyes, cup an ear, and move our fingers to manipulate an object in order to optimize our relation to it for our immediate purpose. Merleau-Ponty called this dynamic action the search for maximum grip, which is the optimization of the relation of the self to the world by positioning the sense receptors toward the object intended. His conception is equivalent to Aquinas' assimilation. [page 28]

This is true enough, but we should take caution and remember that Aquinas was a priest who daily handled sacred objects, including the most sacred of all—the Body of Christ. To reach out into the world and accept our relationship to the Body of Christ, even to chew It and swallow It, is certainly to assimilate but the meanings which result aren't private, not as defined in modern dictionaries.

From The Collaborative International Dictionary of English v.0.48, 1913 Webster:

- private** 1. Belonging to, or concerning, an individual person, company, or interest; peculiar to one's self; unconnected with others; personal; one's own; not public; not general; separate; as, a man's private opinion; private property; a private purse; private expenses or interests; a private secretary. [1913 Webster]
2. Sequestered from company or observation; appropriated to an individual; secret; secluded; lonely; solitary; as, a private room or apartment; private prayer. [1913 Webster]

The life of Aquinas revolved around the Blessed Sacrament and the act of Communion by which the believer ingested the Body of Christ. This is not an activity of isolation but rather one of coming into a true communion with Christ and with all those others who are also coming into that communion. Meanings come from God and are shared by all those who are His in a special way.

It all begins, even on the natural level, with that active perception so well-described by Professor Freeman, that active reaching out into the world which is acting as much as seeing and hearing and smelling. That active perception leads us to start shaping our mind to correspond to our environments or even the entire universe. And those acts then lead to external responses as we adjust our behaviors to also correspond to our environments or the entire universe. It's when we refuse to act our proper and natural role as intentional beings, when we refuse to actively engage the world, that we sink into privacy as understood in the modern world. Even a non-believer who acts his proper role as an intentional creature will reach out to find a world unified and complete and coherent just because it's a phase of a Creation overflowing with the meaning which come from being an object of the Creator's love.

## 87 Perceptions and Context

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=114>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/10/11.]

As described in *How Brains Make Up Their Minds* [35], Professor Freeman and his students made an important discovery in the late 1970s: the brain response generated by the same stimulus is not always the same. They trained rabbits to respond to various odors, using sawdust twice in the experiments, once in that latter part of 1976 and then again a few months later. They were surprised at first to see a different brain response. They realized over time that context, including the passage of time, affects the ‘meaning’ drawn from a perception even when that perception seems exactly the same as one from a few months earlier.

Over the course of his text—I’m about halfway through the 150 pages, he’s pointed to indications of the private nature of meaning for any intentional animal, rabbit or man. Most of his points are valid when presented against materialistic philosophies which see simple extraction of ‘meanings’ (what can that word mean to a materialist?) and against cognitivist (mentalist or idealist) philosophies which see meanings as somehow floating about separate from substance—nowadays some idealists in the philosophy of mind speak in terms of information theory. I’m not always sure how to separate those bodies of thinkers since some materialists quickly fall, by way of software concepts, into the information theory school of thought—which is an idealism, even a dualism.

So far as I can tell, Freeman’s arguments, based on actual experimental results, will be very difficult for materialists or cognitivists to handle, if they’ve bothered to try. I wouldn’t expect either materialistic or idealistic (Realist) theories to die down no matter how good the arguments might be in favor of methodical realism, which is one descriptive term for the

general body of thought which Thomism stands upon. In fact, pragmatism of the sort advocated by Freeman and pioneered by William James pretty much falls into that general description of a methodical realism which allows biological creatures to form their minds by interaction with their environments and to maybe move up towards some sort of vision of a world, or just it's physical aspects—a universe. Since this is how our minds are actually formed, this is how we should try to understand the world. In different terms: this is how we should do philosophy.

The sort of pragmatism which follows in the footsteps of James works well at the initial stages of this process where the mind is shaped as it moves out into the world but fails at the higher level where contemplation pulls meaning from what has been learned. Meanings are not constructed in the individual mind in any absolute sense but they are constructed as efforts to discern the meanings which are part of this story being told by God. On the other hand, we do participate as God's servants in shaping the world and, hence, we do participate as God's servants in manifesting meanings in physical reality.

To return to those rabbits: if 'meanings' had to be constructed or if they came through the processes of perception and response to those perceptions, then Freeman would have to be right in his greater claim that meanings are private. Each animal, being differently situated and having different biographies, would construct or extract a meaning for itself for each situation. Any sane thinker would realize there's a lot of overlap in meanings but there would be my meanings and your meanings.

Neurological experiments would almost always indicate that meanings are private because we're characters in the story and we're probing by way of perception and then cognition, probing to discover how the world works and what the world means. It's also true that each of us as an individual has limited information, limited skills in extracting accurate perceptions, limited cognitive skills and motor skills in responding to our environments. We make mistakes in extracting meanings. We have incomplete views biased by our limited emotional and cognitive associations. We also make those sorts of mistakes, and others, when trying to extract simple quantitative information from our environments and that doesn't mean that there is no objective and unimpeachable quantitative relationships out there.

In fact, the mention of quantitative information leads me back to that source of Hellenistic metaphysics: mathematics. Different experiences – as private as they can be, and different abilities and ways of thought amongst

mathematical thinkers don't cast any doubt upon the existence of objective truths in mathematics. At first glance, the objective truths of mathematics seem different from meanings, but I've cast doubt upon that based upon modern understandings of randomness.

What we know as mathematics is an archipelago of islands raised out of an absolutely infinite sea of perfect chaos. (See *God as the Creator of Truths* 7.) Our universe is a story being told with manifestations of truths chosen by God. The meanings around us are those which lie in God's story and in our responses to God and His world. There is a strong element of the 'personal' in all of this but the meanings we discover are not truly private in the sense of being isolated from the meanings others discover. Those meanings are personal, with aspects of the private, because of our limitations and because we have to try to discover most of the meanings in what lies around us.

The world moves on and it can be considered a bit of a mystery story: the key lying on the threshold means something different after the murder of the lord of the manor but it means something different just with the passage of time. It means something different to each person who comes upon it, choosing to ignore it or maybe even failing to see it, thinking it to be damning evidence or merely a sign of the carelessness of that lord of the manor. And it may carry multiple meanings, but all of those multiple meanings are founded in the objective reality of God's one story, however many smaller stories are interlinked within it.

That rabbit which responds differently to the same stimulus, sawdust, at different times is an entity which 'knows' it's in a story. It's trying to always adjust to the flow of events rather than reliving the same events as if it were a song on a cassette tape.



## 88 Persons and Worlds

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=115>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/10/16.]

I continue to write about the insights on human nature and the philosophical system explicated in the book: *How Brains Make Up Their Minds* [35]. In that book, he tells us:

The examples of the athlete and dancer demonstrate what I consider to be the three main properties of intentionality. The first is unity. Our brains and bodies are entirely committed to the actions of projecting ourselves corporeally into the world, and our perceptions are unified across all our senses at rates faster than we can perceive. Here I distinguish between the self, which is unified, and the awareness of self that we experience as the ego, which is not unified but can be splintered like sunlight on waves. The second property is wholeness: the entirety of life's experience is brought to each moment of action. The experiences of games and dancing are generalized and continually built upon. It includes an effort, described by Aristotle and again by Goethe two centuries ago, as a blind, organic striving towards realizing our full potential within the constraints of heredity and environment. The third property of intentionality is purpose or intent, because, whether athletes and dancers are aware of it or not, their actions are directed to some end.

So perception is a continuous and mostly unconscious process that is sampled and marked intermittently by awareness, and what we remember are the samples, not the process. The fact that consciousness need not enter into the description of inten-

tionality opens a new vista. Consciousness is not a good place to start a theory of brain function. . . [page 18]

Professor Freeman’s three criteria—unity, wholeness, and purpose – correspond rather well to the three criteria I use for defining a world or a person—unity, completeness, and coherence. I borrowed these three criteria from Michael’s Oakeshote’s early work, *Experience and Its Modes* [103]. For these initial discussions, I’ll take completeness and wholeness to be the same and also coherence and purpose.

Freeman talks of these criteria as being, in some sense, the result of “a blind, organic striving towards realizing our full potential within the constraints of heredity and environment.” We move towards that full potential but I see a higher hurdle before those three criteria become realized: we become persons when we belong to Christ and are infused with the Lord’s own Being. Moreover, I don’t believe the universe can be seen as a world yet because it’s moving towards that state but can only reach it apocalyptically, so to speak. Yet, I often speak of it as a world in light of some conjectural understanding of God’s purposes for it.

Though I don’t know exactly how I’ll get there, I’m headed towards an understanding of neurobiology under two constraining assumptions:

1. As claimed by St. Thomas Aquinas, the human mind is shaped by the human being’s responses to its environment. In my interpretation of this principle given modern empirical knowledge, I conjecture that the best possible development of a human mind occurs when he at least dimly perceives something like the universe of Einstein, or at least the Cosmos of the ancients, and then is able to see that physical universe seen as ordered to God’s purposes.
2. As claimed by the Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder, we must move with the grain of the universe to become Christ-like. This is right in line with Romans 8 [141], where the universe itself is moving towards some sort of redemption, along with our bodies. This universe, this world when seen as a story God decided to tell, is our birthplace and our teacher, not our enemy nor the domain of some Enemy. (Arguably, Aquinas must have assumed this in his claim, but Yoder made it admirably explicit in stronger and more explicit terms.)

These claims are part of the same truth: we are to shape ourselves, most obviously our minds, to the revealed truths of God. First, we need to truly hear God's revelations which come to us from the Bible and from traditional Christian forms of worship and prayer. Second, we need to understand the nature of God's world, in its physical aspects and in the moral trajectory of life on earth.

God speaks to us in the most physical aspects of this phase of His Creation, though He doesn't fully explain His purposes. To talk about the 'moral trajectory', we can understand the evolution of moral nature, especially amongst social mammals, as being consistent with the messages we hear in the Sermon on the Mount and in the story of Christ's mission, suffering, death, and resurrection. Then we must see the biological development of each moral creature, mostly social mammals, as being also on that 'moral trajectory'. Without Christ, the perfection demanded in the Sermon on the Mount would have been absurd—and should still seem absurd to those who don't believe in Christ's divinity. With Christ, modern empirical knowledge about the evolution of moral behavior in rodents and primates can be seen as moving very slowly and fitfully towards that point that lies outside of this mortal world of order and disorder.



## 89 Creating Meanings

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=116>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/10/31.]

In this chapter, I continue to comment upon the insights found in Walter J. Freeman's *How Brains Make Up Their Minds* [35].

Intentionality in the doctrine of Aquinas does not require consciousness, but it does require acting to create meaning instead of just thinking. This view is shared by the philosophers Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, J.J. Gibson, and the pragmatists. We sniff, move our eyes, cup an ear, and move our fingers to manipulate an object in order to optimize our relation to it for our immediate purpose. Merleau-Ponty called this dynamic action the search for maximum grip, which is the optimization of the relation of the self to the world by positioning the sense receptors toward the object intended. His conception is equivalent to Aquinas' assimilation. [page 28]

We act "to create meanings". I go beyond that, following Niels Bohr in believing we create reality. But creaturely creation isn't true creation from nothingness. In fact, once the Almighty had brought Creation into being from nothingness, He Himself began to shape. We have far lesser powers than He has to shape, but what we do seems important to the Lord. And even our lesser powers are given to us by the Lord Almighty who knows the good or bad we shall do.

Later in the book, Professor Freeman tells us:

All that brains can know has been synthesized within themselves, in the form of hypotheses, success or failure, and the

manner of failure. This is the neurobiological basis for the solipsistic isolation that separates the qualia of each person from the experiences of everyone else, and it is the neuro-physiological confirmation of the inductive principle of unidirectionality that originated with Aquinas. [page 90]

This is true but is misleading from the Christian viewpoint simply because the world is more than a collection of objects. The objects of our universe play a role in the story which is this world, the universe seen in light of God's purposes. The clock and the approaching train in the movie *High Noon* are imbued with meaning because of the role they play in the story. The entities in our horror movies and in our real fears when we're alone in a dark wood carry meaning because of the role that certain types of predators play in this world, in God's story. Left handedness has 'sinister' connotations because most men are right-handed and have traditionally shaken hands with that right hand which can more effectively wield swords or knives or stones—a left-handed man can shake hands and still have his best weapon hand free for a devious act. The cross carries certain meanings because of the role it played in Christ's death and those meanings come primarily from Christ's free acts but secondarily from the Roman decision to execute in that way. Each object in the universe is enmeshed in the various webs of meanings which are generated as God tells His story:

- the expansion of the universe beginning with the so-called Big Bang and the consequent birth of gas clouds and stars and galaxies,
- the evolution of life on Earth,
- the evolution of the human race and the development of a brain and the mind it can make, which mind is capable of encapsulating God's world by processes first discussed by St. Thomas Aquinas and, more recently, described in biological detail by various neuroscientists including the pragmatists Gerald Edelman and Walter Freeman, and
- the incarnation of the Son of God in human flesh and His mission, suffering, crucifixion, death, and resurrection.

There's much more though the last item on my list is the most important of all: Christ's life and death and resurrection are the central purpose of

Creation. More exactly, the self-sacrifice of Christ, His ultimate act of love to the Father, is the central purpose of Creation.

In this story being told by God, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, each object is an object of divine love. But I'll retreat a little to matters of physics: Einstein told us we live in a universe. I've extended that claim: the universe becomes a world when seen in light of God's purposes. A world is unified, coherent, and complete.

The universe is one and—moving through time—becomes one story, coherent and complete in a way not possible for a mere collection of objects. We are characters in this story being told by God who is Himself the absolutely dominant character. We can't speak clearly about all of this because we don't have a way of understanding 'cause' or at least a way of speaking about 'cause' in terms that respect revealed knowledge and empirical knowledge or the speculative knowledge (mostly philosophy) that binds them together in a human system or worldview.

We have much work to do before we can find proper ways of speaking about God's world. For now, I'll remind the reader of the first line in the quote which began this posting:

Intentionality in the doctrine of Aquinas does not require consciousness, but it does require acting to create meaning instead of just thinking.

While we need intellectual understanding and coherent forms of discourse, they will emerge—if at all—along with our acts of worship and prayer, along with our acts of community-building and character formation in our selves and our children, along with our acts of feeding the poor and caring for the sick, along with our acts of exploring the world and learning how to use the things and forces of that world in proper ways. These very acts seem to me to tell us that meanings are shared.

In a sense, Freeman is right that meanings are private, just as he would be right to claim that a human mind can't understand this world in which we are born and develop. Aquinas told us that the human mind is the sort of entity which can, in principle, understand this world though any individual mind is incapable of understanding so much as a flea. In a similar way, a human being is the sort of entity which can contribute to the meanings of God's story which is this world and a human being can also, in principle, understand those meanings. The fact that there is an isolationist

aspect to our meanings is a result of the limitations of our individual selves and not a result of an inherent isolationist aspect to human nature, just as our inability to understand the world is a result of the limitations of our individual minds and not a result of an inherent inadequacy in human intellectual nature.

## 90 Shaping Our Minds to Reality

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=117>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/11/23.]

In *The Quantum World* [117], J.C. Polkinghorne speculates as both physicist and teacher:

The wavefunction is the vehicle of our understanding of the quantum world. Judged by the robust standards of classical physics it may seem a rather wraith-like entity. But it is certainly the object of quantum mechanical discourse and, for all the peculiarity of its collapse, its subtle essence may be the form that reality has to take on the atomic scale and below. Anyone who has had to teach a mathematically based subject will know the difficulties which students encounter in negotiating a new level of abstraction. They have met the idea of a vector as a crude arrow. You now explain to them that it is better thought of as an object with certain transformation properties under rotation. ‘But what is it *really*?’ they say. You implore them to believe that it is an object with certain transformation properties under rotation. They do not believe you; they think that you are holding back some secret clue that would make it all plain. Time and experience are great educators. A year later the student cannot conceive why he had such difficulty and suspicion about the nature of vectors. Perhaps we are in the midst of a similar, if much longer drawn out, process of education about the nature of quantum mechanical reality. If we are indeed in such a digestive, living-with-it, period, it would explain something which is otherwise puzzling. A great many theoretical physicists would be prepared to express some unease about

the conceptual foundations of quantum mechanics—in particular, about Copenhagen orthodoxy—but only a tiny fraction of them ever direct serious attention to such questions. Perhaps the majority are right to submit themselves to a period of subliminal absorption.

J.C. Polkinghorne was from the group of theoretical physicists at Cambridge which also included Stephen Hawking. He was a Professor, which is not the same as Professor at an American university but rather somewhat the same as a holder of an endowed professorship. Around 1980, when he was still active as a physicist, he heard God calling and entered a seminary to become an Anglican priest, returning to Cambridge as a chaplain and administrator after ordination. He's a clearheaded thinker in the domains of science and theology.

I just want to emphasize the importance of what Polkinghorne is saying from his personal experience in learning and in educating young scientists. I may well go further than he would support.

We do not come into this life with brains which are some sort of wetware general processors. We don't really process information in the way of a computer or a communications channel. We handle information by reshaping ourselves to what we find when we actively engage what lies around us. Like a totemic hunter making himself one with the bear he hunts, we shape ourselves in some substantial ways to what we find and we can only find what we seek. Learning, in the general and academic senses, is an active process and, moreover, a process in which the mind itself is altered rather than just having new content loaded in. The hunter doesn't think he can become one with the bear by imagining a bear which accords with his preconceptions. He learns how bears behave over his years as a boy and then begins to think as if he were a bear. The astrophysicist doesn't think—not for long in any case—to become one with the Milky Way by building a galaxy as if using an erector set. He studies how the universe really is for many years and shapes his mind around the reality that he perceives. When the hunter begins to understand the bear or the astrophysicist the galaxy, then he can begin to enter the story of that entity, to travel along with it through time.

It all begins with a suspension of conscious efforts, a surrender of the will to the processes of active seeking followed by response to what seems to be there. The mind partially shaped to what it tentatively found moves

again into its environments and responds again. Wash, rinse, and repeat as the cliché goes. By this sort of behavior, both active and a form of surrender, the mind is reshaped, and perhaps other parts of that human being to better accord with reality. You've got to be willing to learn the rules of the game rather than thinking you're entering some sort of game for which you have inborn knowledge of the rules as well as inborn skills that only need the developing. We have inborn knowledge of the general rules of this world, very general skills of the sort needed to function in this world. That's all.

Polkinghorne raises an issue not addressed by St. Thomas Aquinas so far as I know:

Perhaps we are in the midst of a similar, if much longer drawn out, process of education about the nature of quantum mechanical reality.

This process has already gone on for three generations or so in quantum mechanics. Is it possible that there are some reshapings of the human mind so radical that it takes generations to build the foundations before the ground floor can even rise? Or is it just that few there are willing to accept reality especially in an age where we've deluded ourselves to believe we're born as some sort of fully formed 'persons'? How can we be reshaped if we're already fully formed? How can we need reshaping to suit ourselves for lives as hunters or scientists or God-centered human beings if we're autonomous agents who merely make decisions or consume knowledge or experiences the way we think to consume toothpaste?



# 91 A Thomistic Take on Madness and Modernism

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

**schizophrenia** a psychotic disorder characterized by loss of contact with environment and by disintegration of personality. [142]

Schizophrenia is a horrible disease, one in which the victim loses contact with reality even in its most immediate form—that victim’s environment. In *Madness and Modernism* [126], the psychologist and polymath Louis A. Sass has proposed that the mental and emotional symptoms of schizophrenia bear eerie similarity to the styles of literature and art and thought in this modern era.

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

Modern art and literature and thought come from our engagement with our own thoughts and dreams as if they were some sort of higher reality which can be immediately deployed to understand and even judge what lies

outside of us, without further perception of our environments or further development of our minds. We have lost contact with our environments. We don't actively and honestly engage our environments, let alone the greater universe shown to us by modern physics and mathematics or the greater Creation shown to us by the Bible and Christian liturgy and prayer. Some Christian theologians and clergymen lessen the damage to their minds and the minds of their followers by holding to the revealed truth which is our Lord Jesus Christ, but then leave those minds stunted by inadequate formulations of that truth. They insist on adhering to ancient or Medieval statements of the revealed truth which rely on the no-longer plausible empirical knowledge and speculative knowledge of earlier centuries.

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

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

This is, of course, an idealized schema presented to understand our relationship to God and His Creation. We should be exposing ourselves and our children to 'God-thought' well before any mature understanding of modern empirical knowledge is possible. That understanding will likely come for most only after modern culture, in its popular forms, is impregnated by that knowledge and, right now, modern culture only reflects a corrupted, science-fantasy view of physical science, a morally corrupted and utilitarian view of biological science, and a view of history and literature intended to justify the assumptions and presumptions of the modern mainstream.

Given those heavy qualifications, we should still try to ascend to God through the Almighty's Creation, guided by the Lord's direct revelations, most especially that perfection of revelation Who was our Lord Jesus Christ. At all stages of this ascent, we should be allowing those perceptions to shape our minds. The biological aspects of this process are discussed, in a partially veiled way, in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas and in a way that will be more clear to modern readers in *How Brains Make Up Their Minds* [35] by the brain-scientist and philosopher Walter J. Freeman. (See Chapter 84, *Pragmatism and Thomistic Existentialism* and several succeeding chapters.) In retrospect, I can see that Louis Sass spoke much of well-developed minds by speaking of minds which failed to develop properly because they were the minds of human beings who failed to forthrightly engage their environments – because of medical problems or because of choices which deform their own minds and moral natures, even their physical selves when we see a physical human being in the context of his environment.

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

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

Brain-scientists have proven what Aquinas and some other pre-modern thinkers saw by general observation, what has been denied by the dominant thinkers of the modern world. In modern terms, the conscious regions of our brain aren't involved in our moral actions until those actions have already

begun.

Freeman has speculated quite reasonably that those conscious regions of our brain, and the conscious aspects of our minds, have the power to censor or veto action as it is beginning. I would add, and perhaps Freeman meant to imply this, that our conscious selves can help direct our future development so that we act in particular ways in the future. Moral intentions precede conscious efforts but those conscious efforts can help shape our future intentions by changing our state of being which is the true foundation of our actions.

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

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

But should we be surprised? Schizophrenics have some sort of neurochemical disorder that prevents them from engaging the world in a forthright way, the first step of shaping our minds properly—that is, shaping our minds in response to our environments first of all, then to the universe as described by the best of empirical knowledge, and then to the world which is the universe seen in light of the moral order which is the manifestation of God's purposes for this phase of Creation. God's purposes relate to His own pleasure in Creation but that pleasure mostly comes from His telling a story in which the Son accepts death as an act of love for the Father and, secondarily, a story in which companions for the Son are born and shaped.

We should be frightened and embarrassed that our minds have been shaped by exposure to art and literature and thought which arises out of the delusions of men who really didn't want to accept the reality around them, either the inadequate, but real, truth of the pagan's Nature or the plenitude of the Christian's Creation.

We are all schizophrenics now.

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



## 92 The Ascent of the Human Mind

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=132>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/02/01.]

Minutes after posting a critique of Pope Benedict in which I claimed he doesn't show a proper appreciation for modern empirical knowledge (see Chapter 18, *The Need for Respectful Criticism*), I received a newsletter from the Vatican News Service in which the Holy Father spoke in complimentary terms about the positive sciences, qualified in the usual ways about the need to consider other ways of knowing the 'being' of a human creature. Some of those ways would also fall into the general category of empirical knowledge and I would argue that all of them begin with empirical knowledge including the physical manifestations by which revelations actually reach us.

In any case, compliments are not what I'd seek in a proper appreciation of empirical knowledge. In fact, I'm more pessimistic than Pope Benedict seems to be about the actual state of the modern enterprises of empirical knowledge-gathering, perhaps because I doubt that we can police the labs to restrict practices to 'moral' techniques. If scientists are as morally disordered as other modern human beings, then powerful technology will be misused when it's profitable to do so. Seemingly decent men and women gain political power and show, or develop, the willingness to drop fire-bombs on innocent civilians to achieve some allegedly moral result. We shouldn't expect better of geneticists or nuclear physicists in this day and age.

I'm advocating a proper appreciation of empirical knowledge as a part of our God-given task of understanding Creation, a somewhat monkish view of science and history and the arts. This task of understanding Creation, even in its metaphysical aspects, begins with empirical knowledge because

of the nature of the human mind and the way in which it develops in interaction with its environments and—if things go well—with the entire universe and—if things go very well—with all of God's Creation in some meaningful sense.

In that address given the morning of 2008/01/28, Pope Benedict, in my opinion, shows a confusion about the nature of the human mind and of our world which has been common over the modern age, a confusion which could be cleared up by reading my first published book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], some of the earlier chapters of this book such as chapter 78, *A Review of Adaptive Thinking, Part I* on the human mind or Thomism or pragmatism, or the various writings of Etienne Gilson or Alasdair MacIntyre on the nature of Thomistic understandings of being, morality, or the human mind.

There is a relevant discussion in Chapter 84, *Pragmatism and Thomistic Existentialism*. The pragmatic philosophers from the field of brain-science or mind-science are particularly important and seem to understand at least some aspects of Creation better than those from other schools of thought. These philosopher/scientists include: William James, Gerald Edelman, and Walter J. Freeman. One of Professor Freeman's books, *How Brains Make Up Their Minds* [35], is worthy of serious study by anyone interested in the human mind. In that book, we learn that St. Thomas Aquinas anticipated some of the most important discoveries of modern neurosciences. Freeman is a Thomist, sort-of. He's really a pragmatist who came to understand the power of Thomistic empirical analysis of empirical entities, including man. This seems to have confirmed a pragmatic inclination to develop bottom-up view of reality which has many virtues relative to nearly all other ways of understanding reality. The problem is that it builds up into... nothing much. St. Thomas very explicitly believed that an empirical understanding of empirical things allows us to build up into a world, so to speak. We don't build a world, we build up our understanding towards an existing world. And beyond.

As Gilson points out somewhere, an interesting aspect of the Thomistic methodology is that the student follows St. Thomas in an ascent to an appreciation of Christian revelations (in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*) and then he can circle around and re-ascend with a proper understanding. In fact, we could start from the top and work down (as I believe Aquinas did in the great *Summa*), but I doubt it would make as much sense to a human thinker as the ascent through realms of empirical knowledge. The

previous statement would probably hold more strongly for a thinker from more recent centuries.

In any case, such an ascent, seen as an ascent, provides for a better grounding of the empirical knowledge-gathering enterprise. Believing in a world which the human mind can encapsulate—in principle though not in fact, he could even claim along with St. Thomas: “Things are true,” a claim which can destroy the need for any sort of dualism. This isn’t a renunciation of dualism so much as an attitude that sees no need to conjecture the existence of forms of created being beyond what is consistent with concrete being. This ascent is simultaneously the shaping of a human mind true to its God-given destiny and an effort to understand God’s story which I call a world. We have to remember that this process begins with empirical knowledge and continues to use empirical knowledge in this world and also that this is a true shaping rather than the filling of a pre-existing container. By encapsulating this world and even a greater portion of Creation, the mind leads the entire human being on the path to being a more true person—Christ-like.

Things are true, but perhaps not if they’re not part of a world, unified and coherent and complete. If the universe were merely a collection of things, then perhaps things wouldn’t be true in the Thomistic sense, but in that case we would have no reason to search for reason in that universe. It would be Sartre’s desired nightmare.

The lack of a world is itself the primary problem with pragmatism and its advocates rightly avoid too strong a claim about the truth of things but the good ones—philosophers as well as scientists, such as James and Edelman and Freeman, are forced to act as if things are true. They believe that the facts and theories of their research are true in a meaningful sense and that says something about the objects of their research. A true Thomist has to be naive, accepting the truth inherent in God’s Creation in a child-like way, but he can be conscious of his own naivete. A pragmatist who is scientist as well as philosopher has to be naive in a deeper sense, for the recognition of this assumption of truth in things would drive him closer to Thomism and further from the philosophical thought of recent centuries. To their credit, these pragmatists are already far from the various instrumentalist views of science so common in this day and age.

Things are true. I could even say: Created being is true. I could even say that the thing-like being of our universe, this phase or realm of Creation, bears the imprint of the metaphysical truths from which it was shaped.

Anything that is created by God is a manifestation of His thoughts and the thoughts of the Almighty are true. Things are true. In my writings, I've even claimed that truths as creatures know them are thing-like, that is, they're part of God's Creation and we can't pull them out to use them to construct Creation in a schematic way. We can only take Creation in its unity and coherence and completeness—including all those abstract truths of metaphysics and transfinite set theory.

This is from the press release of Pope Benedict's talk on 2008/01/28:

In our time, said the Pope, “the exact sciences, both natural and human, have made prodigious advances in their understanding of man and his universe”. However at the same time “there is a strong temptation to circumscribe human identity and enclose it with the limits of what is known. . . . In order to avoid going down this path it is important not to ignore anthropological, philosophical and theological research, which highlight and maintain the mystery of human beings, because no science can say who they are, where they come from and where they go. The knowledge of human beings is then, the most important of all forms of knowledge”.

“Human beings always stand beyond what can be scientifically seen or perceived”, the Pope affirmed. “To overlook the question of man's ‘being’ inevitably leads to refusing the possibility of research into the objective truth of being . . . and, effectively, to an incapacity to recognize the foundation upon which human dignity rests, from the embryo until natural death”.

There's a lot of truth in the claims of the Pope but there's no structure that can let us see a unified Creation, first by seeing the physical universe for what it is and then by seeing that universe as morally ordered, hence a world. The structure from the modern (non-Thomistic) Catholic tradition is provided by academic divisions.

That's not good enough and it's one reason for the lack of creativity in Catholic philosophers and theologians since Aquinas was beaten back by willful use of well-developed mental powers to damage respect for the mind.<sup>1</sup> If we wish to recover a sense of the true being of a human creature, we should speak of that being, without any sort of assumption that it can

<sup>1</sup>In the closing pages of *Medieval History: The Life and Death of a Civilization*,

be recovered by way of realms of knowledge maintained by human scholars for good and bad reasons. And we know most truly the empirical aspects of that human being because those are the foundation of a flesh-and-blood creature. The Christian tradition, even to the stories of the resurrected Christ, tell us those empirical aspects remain even when that human being has passed beyond mortal life. Moreover, the doctrine of bodily resurrection tells us the stuff of a resurrected human being is perfected matter and not some sort of soul-stuff.

We have new empirical knowledge that can allow us to speak coherently of heaven and even of resurrected human beings. Rational speech and not mystical obscurantism is the proper way of discourse for those who believe in a rational Creator. New ways of speaking about those greater possibilities must come from a truer appreciation of the modern empirical knowledge of men and their world. We can't just graft traditional understandings of some aspects of those greater possibilities onto the modern understanding of man as a biological creature of this world. New wine must be put in new wineskins and new buildings must be put on new foundations.

By way of an updated Thomistic existentialism, a human mind with a living imagination can even move beyond the boundaries of an envisioned world to see the foundations of Creation, what I call the Primordial Universe, the manifestations of metaphysical and mathematical truths from which God has created this world and the world of the resurrected. To understand a human being is to realize that man best imitates God by understanding the Almighty's work as Creator and that requires the best possible understanding of this world and all of Creation that lies beyond in terms of all sorts of knowledge about Creation, empirical and speculative and revealed. But we can't make the mistake of assuming those sorts of knowledge reflect true realms of being. In the end, there are two true realms of being: that of God's necessary Being and that of Creation. Physics and

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Norman Cantor tells the story of the war waged against Thomism and related schools of thought. This war was won by advocates of will and despisers of mind, using the tools of formal logic to destroy respect for empirical knowledge, facts and theories which both supported those facts and were supported by them. The most prominent of these philosophers and theologians were Duns Scotus and William Occam. Their importance in helping to shape modern thought can be seen by contemplation of the attitude of that adviser to an American President could claim to create reality, with no need to study existing reality. The President was George W. Bush and the adviser was said to be Karl Rove.

biology and history speak of aspects of a single concrete region in the realm of Creation.

Unlike the pragmatists, Pope Benedict sees much beyond what man's bottom-up research can discover and even beyond the rich and humane culture that is part of the very soul of a man like Gerald Edelman who was a potentially great violinist as Joseph Ratzinger is said to be a serious pianist. Recognizing the greater claims to human nature isn't enough. It's patchwork and not what's needed. We need a plausible, though contingent, Christian understanding of Creation and of that special creature—man. We need to realize that Abraham was descended from a creature also the ancestor of chimpanzees. That is, we need to read Darwin in light of the Bible and the Bible in light of Darwin. We need new understandings of God's infinity and other possible infinities enriched by the understandings of Cantor and his successors. We need new understandings of time and space and matter, new understandings of this concrete and mortal world and of possible worlds of the resurrected, which are enriched by the understandings of Einstein and Heisenberg. The language of the Holy Father concedes too much to the modern views in which, as Spinoza taught us, there are specialized realms of knowledge which represent truly separate realms of being. We need to see a world, other possible worlds for the friends of Christ, rather than interacting realms which are the subject of study for the physicists at the south end of the academic quadrangle, the historians at the east end, and the theologians who are on the other side of the concrete parking garage.

I would advocate a different viewpoint in which knowledge is specialized only for practical reasons, even theology in its study and contemplations of God's revelations of His own Being is entangled with empirical knowledge because we need to understand Jeremiah as a concrete human being if we are to understand his part of the conversation with God—the only side of that conversation we can truly know. Excluding theology, those specialized realms of knowledge are ultimately part of the knowledge of a unified world which has been shaped within a unified Creation. By knowing Creation, we know God in His freely chosen role as Creator and we can know God in His transcendent plenitude only to the extent that He tells us about Himself in His necessary Being—that's where theology is enriched beyond pantheistic possibilities. The main point in this context is this:

At some level of knowledge explicitly inaccessible but imagina-

tively accessible to the human mind in this mortal existence, Creation is one. It is unified and coherent and complete in being all that God chose to create, all that is not Him. It's unified because it's the work of a unified Creator just as it is coherent because it's the work of a rational Creator.

To know of God's purposes for this world is to know more about His creatures, the universe in its own nature and also stars and planets and men. It's not to know something completely different. To know of man's soul-like characteristics is to know something more about a creature of flesh and blood and not to know about something completely different and separate from those brain-cells and platelets.

The human mind is the only known creaturely entity capable of this task of knowing more, of encapsulating the world and much of Creation beyond this world—in principle though no actual human mind can carry out such a feat. The unity of Creation implies a unity of the human mind which reaches its richest and most complex shape in encapsulating some reasonable view of God's Creation. This doesn't mean that we have to really know the truth about Creation, only that we need to do the best we can with the small stock of revealed truths we have and with the best empirical knowledge of our day. By cooperating with the Creator in this way, we can establish a relationship in which we have access to a deeper and more contemplative knowledge of Creation. And this applies also to Wordsworth's way of knowing Creation and Mozart's way of knowing Creation. It's not only Plato and Augustine, certainly not just Cantor and Einstein, and not even just Aquinas with his more complete way, who can know Creation at the truest and highest level where wisdom can be found and where we can see hints of a more perfect form of knowledge. But all of these ways of knowing Creation ascend through empirical realms, not by way of super-adding knowledge of other realms. That is, the path which begins in the empirical realms leads us deep into the unity and coherence and completeness of Creation. More than that, the path and the knowledge of the path aren't separate.

We need to move away from Spinoza's way of knowledge in which specialized ways of knowing define actual realms of being which can communicate but are separate in a fundamental way. Moreover, Spinoza had started with the more traditional error in which knowledge is separate from what is known.

Creation is unified and coherent and complete because it's what the Almighty has brought into existence, what is not God, what He chose to love in an active way. God's acts-of-love are acts-of-being. There are acts-of-being which brought some sort of raw stuff into existence from nothing and there are acts-of-being which shape stuff into worlds – our mortal world and that of the resurrected. The various ways of knowing lead us to the Creation which is the one work of God the Creator, or else they lead nowhere. But they can lead to Creation because knowledge and what is known are one, a truth found in the Old Testament most clearly in its language of sexual intercourse—to know a woman is to bond with her in a physically intimate way though it's still more than that. To know a woman who is your wife is to know her in her own self and in the roles she's taken on. To know that woman is to be able to respond properly to her.

To know the history of ancient Rome is to shape your mind so that it achieves something of a oneness with that narrative. To know chaos theory is to shape your mind to be a model of equations sensitive to tiny changes in initial conditions and to shape your imagination to travel along orbits that never quite close, never repeat themselves.

Do we have the courage to make a truly radical change that we might return God's Creation to its primary status over knowledge defined by the limitations of the human mind? Do we have the discipline to make sense of quantum mechanics, of transfinite set theory, of the Holocaust, of the schizophrenic artistic techniques of recent centuries, in light of Christian truth? Are our imaginations flexible enough to see possibilities beyond the wildest dreams of Plato or Philo or Augustine and yet sane enough to see what God has created rather than conjuring up something less demanding?

## 93 Faith, Reason, and Reality

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=149>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/05/06.]

The usual mantra amongst Christian thinkers is faith and reason, implying that faith should be united to and disciplined by products of the human mind. The problem is that Christians are bound to believe that God was not only free to create or not, but also that—once He chose to create—He could have brought into existence any of an infinity of Creations. Creation itself is contingent and assuming that the reason appropriate to a contingent Creation is itself necessary across all possible Creations is not so good a bet as Plato might have thought. In recent centuries, we've learned that mathematics, taking a very fundamental field of reasoning, is far richer than we would have thought. Perhaps it's odd to us, but proper attention to a very particular and very concrete universe allows us to abstract to very rich and very complex levels of . . .

Dare I say that we should speak of abstract forms of created being? Dare I say we can reach those abstract forms by proper development of the human mind?

In any case, modern empirical knowledge and the experience of gaining that knowledge indicate strongly that human reason learns even absolute truths by responding properly to human environments. This is one way to make this point:

While the Greeks gave us many truths, we have to remember that their metaphysics was developed in parallel to a Greek mathematics which has proven to be true but only a small part of the mathematics which we now know. This implies that our understanding of human reason should have expanded to

a corresponding extent rather than being restricted to what was taught by Plato and Aristotle.

There is a third element which could be usefully added to faith and reason—reality. This is to say that we are made so that we can know Creation but this knowledge, including the rules for gaining that knowledge, aren't inborn. A human baby has enough inborn inclinations and skills to help her start learning how to see the world properly, enough inborn inclinations and skills to help her start learning how to hear sounds as signifying various things and carrying emotional information. Eventually, as she learns how to think, she'll also start learning language in its more uniquely human aspects.

As St. Thomas Aquinas realized: our minds form in response to our environments. William James and similar thinkers amongst brain-scientists (such as Gerald Edelman and Walter J. Freeman) have rediscovered this truth, first seen by St. Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century. In 2000, Professor Freeman published *How Brains Make Up Their Minds*. Part of this book was an explanation of Thomistic teachings on human moral nature and a related discussion of how these teachings can be used to deal with the strong evidence that human beings don't have the sort of free-will we imagine. In many experiments of simple decisions made under lab conditions, the unconscious brain regions associated with 'mere' bodily control start to move our bodies before there's any sign of activity in the regions of the brain associated with consciousness. Our feelings of moral freedom are real and so is some sort of moral freedom, but we need new ways to speak and think about that freedom. You can read how I deal with the 'loss' of free-will in Chapter 385, *Is this evidence against free-will?* or—in a larger context—in Chapter 75, *A Proper Sort of Reductionism..*

The Jamesian pragmatists have a major gap in their understanding of the formation processes for the human mind. Lacking a specific faith in this world and its rational Creator—or at least an expression of such in their theories, they think of the formation of the human mind entirely in bottom-up terms. That's not usually a practical problem in understanding specific aspects of the human mind because our minds first form by this bottom-up bootstrapping process, but there is a further process of development of the mind, one that can be seen in the life-stories of the great philosophers—pagan as well as Christian or Jewish—as well as in the development of the minds of numerous saints, scientists, novelists, musical composers, charita-

ble workers, and many others who are active, physically or mentally, to an unusual extent.

In one way or another, those thinkers and doers come to perceive, however dimly, a world in its unity and coherence and completeness. The top-down process begins with that dim perception and the formation of the corresponding mind moves into a different phase. That thinker or doer begins to perceive a world, that is—the universe seen as a morally ordered narrative. His thoughts and actions begin to move along with those purposes. He begins to move with the grain of the world. It's true that you don't need to have a detailed understanding of the structure of wood to move with its grain, but you also can't refuse to see that grain as clearly as possible. Blindness, total or partial, isn't a desirable condition.

The limited *faith and reason* view of human thought and action can lead us to be blind to our age's best empirical knowledge and this can deform our reason. Aquinas could be a great empirical thinker without knowing about genes or quarks but a modern empirical thinker has to consider them or else he slips into a sort of intellectual psychosis which leaves him imagining that he inhabits a different world than his more sane contemporaries. See Chapter 91, *A Thomistic Take on Madness and Modernism* for speculative claims that a form of psychosis has infected the modern mind.

In fact, what has happened in recent centuries is that Christians haven't enlarged their understanding of God's Creation to consider an extraordinary enriching of our understanding of mathematics and the physical foundations of this universe nor have they considered the somewhat darker enriching of our understanding of human nature which has come from history as much as from the brain-sciences and evolutionary biology.

Our mainstream culture is one of reason and reality but that reason is formed by borrowings from the Christian and pagan past and reshaped to the needs of understanding a reality seen without the eyes of faith. Many Christians, especially those over 50 and clergymen of all ages, live in a world of faith and reason but that reason is borrowed from a Christian and pagan past.

We need not *faith and reason*, but *faith, reason, and reality*.



## 94 Computer Programming and Thomistic Theories of the Mind

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=152>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/05/17.]

In Thomistic thought, the human mind begins to shape itself in response to the immediate environment of that human being. Various perceptual, mental, emotional, and social skills develop as a human being responds so that he can function well within at least his immediate environments. That human being may enter other environments to which he can respond, enriching his mind and even other components of his body. After all, many of our skills are in our fingers and our legs and not ‘just’ in our brains or minds. You can think of Vladamir Horowitz or Fred Astaire but you can also watch the typing skills and response times to screen events of many skilled programmers.

If all goes well, that developing human being may become aware of the universe, or the Aristotelian Cosmos if he was born in prior centuries. If all goes still better, he may become aware of that universe as a world, a moral narrative ordered to the purposes of God. As that shaping process matures, his mind becomes an encapsulation of that totality but still mostly functions in his specific environments.

What does this have to do with programming computers? A lot to this quite amateur programmer because I work best with computers when I’m able to play around at bottom levels, building up specific skills and tools before I move to a top-down design of one of my small and simple projects.

The experienced programmer can probably see where I’m headed – towards exploratory programming using a language with ‘functional’ aspects but more general capabilities. My favorite such language is Common Lisp

though I also do some programming in Emacs Lisp, the extension language to Emacs, which is my editor and calendar/diary/planning tool and much more. I've also programmed in Perl and other languages, beginning with card-punched FORTRAN back in the mid-1970s and going through BASIC, PL/I, APL, and SAS matrix language, before I hit GNU-Linux and found a variety of 'dynamic' languages. At that point, programming became a sometimes fun diversion.<sup>1</sup>

Recently, when I got the hang of exploratory programming, I was just working on a simple check-balancer. I had decided it would take more time to learn how to use a modern financial software package than it would to write the simple pieces I need and expand gradually as new needs arise. And those bloatware packages would force me to do things differently than I want to do them. Using this project as a learning experience and a form of mental play, I took my time in the early stages of that check-balancer project and found that the lisp experts were right. I'd soon enough written a lot of little functions to read my personal data files and to retrieve specific values on one or more records, to manipulate dates for easy comparison, to test if a record was a deposit or balance, etc. At some point, I moved to the top and found the balance functions and functions for reporting on important information were easy to write. And they had a different feel to them than earlier versions I'd written in a standard imperative style—in both Perl and Common Lisp. They were cleaner though undoubtedly not 'lispy' enough for a professional.

This was a toy program by the standards of real programmers, though I might expand it into a class-oriented program that handles a broader variety of financial information, but it's been a fun learning experience, especially since it seems to confirm my biases about the best way to develop complex mental structures, a mind or a computer software system. They aren't the same, not even the same sort of entity, but they're similar in certain interesting ways. Yet again, the experience probably has enriched my mind and what I learned has probably changed the way I think in general.

Build tools and skills from the ground up and then you'll be ready to build the more grandiose structures, whether it's a computer system, to

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<sup>1</sup>As of March, 2011, I've given up programming as a hobby and write only very short programs in a shell language or Perl—which actually is similar in some important ways to lisps. In any case, I do stand by this essay despite the change in my priorities. You might say I've decided to take up novel-writing once again as my major hobby and that crowded out other activities.

perhaps do accounting and financial analysis, or an important component of the mind, such as what I call a worldview, a specific and disciplined philosophical and theological system which attempts, within mortal limits, to provide a way of seeing a world, that is, of seeing the universe as a morally well-ordered narrative, ordered to God's purposes.

Serious software systems and serious systems of thought aren't toys. Though sometimes fun to work on and usually fun to finish, they require hard thought, creativity, and disciplined effort if they are to be worth much. If those requirements are met, even a failed effort can be worth much, leading to better results in the future, at least to the persistent programmer or philosopher.

Certainly, this movement between bottom-up construction of tools and skills and the top-down schematizing isn't just for intellectual fields. My father was a highly skilled mold-maker. When he was given a design and specs for a new mold, he would first study that paperwork and then he would start constructing jigs and other specialized tools. He would build up to the point where he could re-examine the design and specs and make his plans for the actual machining of the very expensive block of mold-quality steel.

The Thomistic view of how the human mind develops corresponds quite well to the working methods of skilled computer programmers, though not necessarily to the working methods of those poor souls who sit in warehouses blindly coding towards a goal they may not understand and aren't allowed to explore. They may not even know in a general sense what that goal is. That Thomistic view of the mind also corresponds well to the working methods of a skilled machinist, but not necessarily to those of a worker feeding stock into a computer-controlled milling machine. Nor does it correspond to the increasing number of engineers who 'understand' top-down without having any machining skills or the most rudimentary of electrical installation skills. In recent years, MIT has had remedial courses to teach their electrical and electronic engineering students the basics of wiring simple outlets and switches. Even when I was in college, 1973-1977, the mechanical engineering department at the University of Rochester had a lab to help students put together simple structures such as rigid, house-like frames. Not many decades before that, most engineering students came from farms or from families involved in blacksmithing or such fields. Those students wouldn't have needed to know how to build a box-like frame which could stand up to winds or minor settling of the ground.

Explore from the bottom, from the details, building up mental skills and

metalworking skills or animal husbandry skills, and then start to organize from the top, speculating on a worldview or a way to write programs that write programs or a way to machine a complex machine or a way to organize a self-sustaining chicken farm that treats the chickens as living creatures. Then you can return to the bottom to improve your skills and tools once you know better what is needed. At that point, you should return to the bottom and then go back to the top repeatedly as part of a dynamic way of dealing with dynamic environments and with a dynamic universe. As programmers say, following the lead of hair-stylists—lather, rinse, and repeat.

# 95 Reality Continues to Knock on the Door

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=155>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/05/21.]

See *Exploring The Mechanics Of Judgment, Beliefs: Technique Images Brain Activity When We Think Of Others* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/05/080515212112.htm> for news on another major effort to understand the physical human being in ‘scientific’ terms. I don’t put scientific in apostrophes because of any intent of misguided irony but only because we should realize that ‘science’ is disciplined intellectual effort, exploration and contemplation of the world. It includes the disciplined study of music and literature and history and many other fields of disciplined study. If we think of it in terms of discipline, all meaningful fields of study are ‘scientific’.

Yet, I wouldn’t at all slight the importance of those fields we usually call ‘science’, such as biology and physics. We’re mortal, physical creatures. What we are in these mortal bodies subject to decay tells us much of what we will be if raised in perfected bodies no longer subject to death or decay. Why not try to understand us? And we have to remember that ‘us’ is defined in context of this world of black-holes and rattlesnakes. We should try to understand this entire world if we’re to fulfill our roles in Creation, and it’s a role which allows us to develop our minds so that our understanding mirrors God’s acts of creation and shaping.

The article referenced above tells of a systematic effort to make greater sense of the ‘mind-like’ aspects of the human being by studying the underlying physical events in the brain. I gather this is intended as a more general effort, one needed eventually though only time will tell if that effort can

achieve success in this generation. By more general effort, I mean that the leading scientist apparently intends to study not just specific phenomena but rather the more total experience of 'being human'.

So far, all mental or emotional aspects of human nature which have been seriously studied have been tied back to underlying physical events so that causation is implied and not just correlation. At the same time, those not familiar with the writings in this field should know that the best thinkers warn not to limit the scope of what is studied as human nature. A greater understanding of mind should consider not only what Einstein and Melville did, it should also consider what Horowitz did at the keyboard and what Orr did on the ice. The entire physical human being, including toes and liver, will have to be understood to understand the 'mind' and to understand the various kinds or aspects of 'intelligence'.

In Chapter 8, *Staking Your Faith on Gaps in Empirical Knowledge*, I wrote of the dangers of pretending the new empirical knowledge doesn't affect our views of our selves and even the meaning of salvation. However distorted and even ideological the mainstream presentation of modern empirical knowledge often is, there is enough good stuff 'leaking' out through through magazines and the Internet and even the movies to let our children and our neighbors know when we're speaking in terms that are in conflict with modern knowledge of human evolution, human nature, human history, and even modern physics. Actually what they know is that we're speaking some sort of gibberish. (See Chapter 220, *Could Adam and Eve Have Made Christ Unnecessary*, for a Christ-centered critique of the 'usual' interpretation of that Biblical tale.)

I've also spoken in Chapter 91, *A Thomistic Take on Madness and Modernism*, about the psychotic, reality-denying, aspects of modern human thought in all fields. When we start creating separate realms of truth, living our lives by the standards of modern empirical knowledge when we wish to take advantage of medical technology and then speaking a conflicting language when we speak as Christians, we nurture in ourselves a mental condition similar to schizophrenia and produce words and lives frighteningly similar to what can be seen in modern art in its disordered worst.

Why would we do this? There's a current cliché, "Math is hard, Barbie" that communicates the idea. More generally, "All serious learning and thinking is hard" and we'd rather watch TV and pursue careers that allow us to recycle thoughts and skills than go through the difficult and unsettling effort to move creatively in a age which truly presents us with a sometimes

rapidly changing menu of problems and opportunities. Rapid change takes away all possibility of coasting.



## 96 Creating Human Worlds of Knowledge

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=156>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/05/28.]

Every so often, I'll review my own long-range goals for developing a more complete worldview. The term 'worldview' as I use it is first an empirical understanding of this physical universe and then a more complete understanding in light of God's purposes as best I can understand them in light of Christian teachings, my own readings of the Bible, prayer, and worship. If I don't review those long-range goals once in a while, I might well lose focus, perhaps because of my nearly complete intellectual and spiritual isolation as I go about a task I consider necessary for Christians to be able to understand God's world in empirical terms. So, here goes...

In the blurb he so kindly provided for my first published book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], Stanley Hauerwas (see article on Professor Hauerwas at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanley\\_Hauerwas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanley_Hauerwas)) said, "Loyd Fueston may be our Spinoza." (See article on *Benedict Spinoza* at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spinoza>.) I didn't understand that comment at the time, not having read any Spinoza and not knowing much about him, but I've discovered one reason that I might be "our Spinoza" where "our" would refer to Christians. Spinoza played a major role in breaking up the unity of human knowledge, creating the sorts of attitudes that led to our modern academic disciplines, where specialization isn't just a practical response to the limitations of the human mind and the shortness of the human life but rather a claim to a fragmented universe which is to be described only by disjoint realms of knowledge.

If human beings are truly images of God in any sense, then ultimately,

human knowledge and reality are equivalent, that is, the proper and ideal human mind is an encapsulation of the world which is a manifestation of thoughts of God, including those which are His purposes for Creation. This means that a real human mind can't actually encapsulate the world without the gift of a share in the divine life, but we are capable of sharing that divine life just because our minds are the sorts of entities which can—in principle – encapsulate God's world, understanding in imitation of His acts-of-being. (I think this tells us the way in which we can be images of God. As a child at play imitates her mother at work, we can imitate God in His contingent acts as Creator.)

Without an idea of at least a universe, the physical aspects of a world, the mind, even from the viewpoint of only empirical knowledge, is little more than a bottom-up probe of reality, which probe can't really reach any level of ultimate truth because it's blind to the very existence of truth beyond the factual truths derived from studying individual entities. At the same time, we have to remember that such a bottom-up probe, in the form of an active engagement, is the major process by which the human mind forms starting in infancy. We can see a world in a grain of sand, poets earlier than philosophers or physicists, but we have to first see that grain of sand and understand its relationship to beaches and to healthy soils and to that irritated feeling in our feet, before we can see a world in that grain of sand.

# 97 Math is Hard and Math is Lonely

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=149>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/06/09.]

The American public school system is oriented towards the socialization of students into a homogeneous body of mainstream Americans. Education beyond what's necessary to read public newspapers is quite beside the point. This socialization, brainwashing if you will, takes place in private conversations involving only students as much as in the sheer deadness of mind imposed by drill-techniques and by the use of textbooks deliberately aimed to be in the comfort zone of the typical student. The empirical results hint that such a process will lead to a constantly contracting comfort zone and a subsequent decay in standards over time. Any student who might actually learn something is going to mostly learn to hate learning, at least formal learning, in such an environment. A little thought will indicate why Albert Einstein was both a good student and a rebellious student—this is a sign of giftedness as opposed to modestly talented pliability of the sort which opens paths right to a doctorate and a professorship.

I can remember not only being lulled into a laziness—I expected to go to college and do well while continuing to not study and to sleep through classes. I can also remember being trained to be a television watcher by peer-pressure. It was difficult to participate in most conversations unless you followed pro sports (which I did willingly in those lower-key days), rock-and-roll, and the hit television shows. So I cut back on my reading and watched the *Monkees*. So I slept through classes that were little more than efforts to keep the attention of students not interested at all in reading or arithmetic and to help the students of some middling talent. So I learned

to drop my effort level and to coast in my intellectual efforts.

I learned to try to at least mimic the open socializing of the students who are more pleasant to have in modern classrooms. I can remember that the movement from classroom to classroom starting in sixth grade was upsetting because my ability to concentrate was still strong enough that sometimes, in mostly seventh grade, the teacher had to yell at me to bring me out of my contemplations of interesting matters, including often something I'd found interesting in a later section of a textbook, a section we wouldn't reach in class. That truly was one the aspects of the socializing process of the American public school system. The teaching methods and the sheer logistics of processing large herd of human cattle on the hoof leads to the destruction of concentration and intensity on any students who are so inclined.

I'll put the problem bluntly: students who are paying attention to the teacher or fellow-students aren't necessarily learning. Math is not only hard, it's also lonely for the most part. So is real history which requires immense hours of simply reading good history books and even primary sources such as the autobiography of a great man—I remember reading sections of the autobiography of Benjamin Franklin and enjoying it when I was young.

Now, scientists have verified part of this problem for school systems that want pliable students attentive to their teacher and fellow-students rather than students capable of learning difficult material. It seems that serious thought, serious digestion of difficult material requires concentration of the sort that forces the student into a temporary non-social state—see *Knowing Looks: Using Gaze Aversion To Tell When Children Are Learning* at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/06/080602103336.htm>, which is what I just said based on my personal experiences. Truly talented students, the ones who might actually be able to find solutions for some of the difficult problems on our growing list of technological and cultural disasters might well go into strange, inward-looking states for hours at a time—if they were allowed to develop their minds and their souls.

I don't wish to cast aspersions upon public-school teachers as a group because many of them are dedicated and hardworking souls who care about their students—though I think we should be more concerned to have at least some teachers who care a little about the subjects they teach. Imagine a dedicated, hardworking teacher in front of 35 students, some of them not having even basic habits of self-control and others (especially boys in younger grades) not having proper hand-control for writing legibly even if

they can read, some not having much in the way of intellectual talent and others having too much energy to sit still long enough even if they come from good homes. Is it possible that teacher won't notice that little Albert with the downcast eyes is daydreaming about deeper meanings and further possible uses of the very material being taught? Is it possible that this little Albert, unlike the more famous rebellious student, doesn't have an engineer uncle to help develop his mind by teaching him Euclidean geometry at a young age? Is it possible that this little Albert has to be disturbed so that he can move to a new classroom or pick up a new textbook, destroying his own instinctive efforts to develop the concentration that would allow him to handle difficult and important problems?



## 98 Matching Information to the Human Brain

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=168>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/07/01.]

In my reviews of Gerd Gigerenzer's *Adaptive Minds*, beginning with Chapter 78—*A Review of Adaptive Minds: Part I*, I discussed Professor Gigerenzer's analyses of the 'discoveries' in the latter half of the 20th century that human beings don't think very clearly. Economists and psychologists and others tested the common folk and supposedly discovered they don't understand uncertainty and don't deal well with it. If true, this would indicate that human beings don't know how to deal with the real-world, a surprise to be sure. Professor Gigerenzer showed that human beings generally don't deal well with uncertainty expressed as percentages but they do deal well with uncertainty expressed as frequencies (such as 6 out of 100). As he explains this is closer to the form in which experience would have presented itself – about 1 out of 2 babies are male rather than 50% are male. Percentages, ratios in general, are a relatively recent development in human thought and haven't yet fully found a home in the human mind – if they ever do.

Now we learn that miles per gallon isn't a good measurement for making decisions on car purchases or car use—see *Gallons Per Mile Would Help Car Shoppers Make Better Decisions* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/06/080619142118.htm> The explanation is:

People presented with a series of car choices in which fuel efficiency was defined in miles per gallon were not able to easily identify the choice that would result in the greatest gains in fuel efficiency.

For example, most people ranked an improvement from 34 to 50 mpg as saving more gas over 10,000 miles than an improvement from 18 to 28 mpg, even though the latter saves twice as much gas. (Going from 34 to 50 mpg saves 94 gallons; but from 18 to 28 mpg saves 198 gallons).

These mistaken impressions were corrected, however, when participants were presented with fuel efficiency expressed in gallons used per 100 miles rather than mpg. Viewed this way, 18 mpg becomes 5.5 gallons per 100 miles, and 28 mpg is 3.6 gallons per 100 miles—an \$8 difference today.

In other words, what we aim to do in a car is to get some place, to cover a certain number of miles. Our inherent thinking processes, by nature or by nurture or by both, works well in relationship to distances—distance should be the denominator. In a similar vein, we don't analyze our school budgets by considering number of students per \$10,000 but rather dollars spent per student.

It's interesting that some of our most important quantitative information has been presented wrong, in ways that lead to inconsistent and even irrational decision-making. Are there more possible examples out there? Are there also a lot of cases where qualitative information important to decisions is being presented in strange ways?

## 99 What is the Role of Philosophy in an Age of Science?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=173>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/08/05.]

Einstein, Feynman, and perhaps other major scientists have made the claim that “philosophers of science” have contributed nothing that’s useful to scientists. While not sure exactly what the contexts of their comments really were, I’d generally say in response, “Yes, and why would anyone expect anything different?” I would think philosophers of science move in the opposite direction, taking the results of specific (or specialized) sciences and putting them in a different context which might better serve the needs of metaphysicians and historians of science and educated non-specialists in general. Often this will be in the direction of abstracting from concrete results, but Newton and Einstein were known to do that as well—with a good deal of competence.

Did Einstein, Feynman, and other scientists intend to dismiss metaphysics by their statements? Knowing that Einstein was not always consistent in his statements about his own working methods and his views on philosophy, or on particular philosophers such as Mach who was also a physicist, I don’t know for sure how to interpret his remarks denying the importance of (some types of) philosophy.

It doesn’t matter much to me because I’d like to retreat to higher ground and look at metaphysics, which is defined by the 1913 Webster’s dictionary as follows:

**metaphysics** The science of real as distinguished from phenomenal being; ontology; also, the science of being, with reference to its abstract and universal conditions, as distinguished from the science of determined

or concrete being; the science of the conceptions and relations which are necessarily implied as true of every kind of being; philosophy in general; first principles, or the science of first principles.

My worldview doesn't make quite this distinction between 'real' and 'phenomenal' being. In fact, I think we need to purge our thoughts of this distinction, or retreat to a Pythagorean mysticism, if we're to account for the strange twists and turns of mathematics and physics in recent centuries. See *God as the Creator of Truths* 7 for a discussion of some aspects of my worldview which are relevant to this issue.

In general, philosophers haven't yet acknowledged that the understanding of empirical being developed by modern physical and mathematics has expanded far beyond the Pythagorean and Euclidean and Aristotelian roots of traditional metaphysics. Essentially, modern theoretical physicists and mathematicians have been using empirical (including mathematical) knowledge not yet much considered by metaphysicists to explore realms of being which traditional metaphysics reached only by way of pure speculations of nearly a dream-like sort. In fact, some of those realms of being reachable by considering modern empirical knowledge, at least in my worldview, are beyond anything which Plato or Aquinas or Kant could have dreamed of. In terms of my beliefs: God is more creative than human metaphysicians could be, and it's empirical investigators who've passed beyond traditional speculations because they're the ones paying attention to this phase of God's Creation. The interested reader can download a book in which I explain my views on knowledge: *Four Kinds of Knowledge* [43]. My basic worldview is presented in my first published book: *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41].

The most basic of all sciences, physics and mathematics, provide us with knowledge of being as we can observe it and quantitatively describe it. This quantitative analysis can include some speculative elements, but most of the speculation—whether done by scientists or philosophers or poets—is better labeled as 'philosophy'. What's important to remember is that empirical being is what we can observe. The field of 'non-empirical' knowledge most subject to verification and certainty is mathematics—but I consider even abstract mathematics to be derived from the empirical world as fully as theoretical physics is. If a metaphysical system doesn't rightly and fully consider empirical knowledge, including mathematics, there's no chance it

can get much right in trying to understand being in its more general or abstract forms.

Einstein was, in fact, inconsistent in what he stated about the role of philosophy in science, sometimes exaggerating the importance of Mach's philosophical speculations and sometimes denying the usefulness of philosophical thought. Einstein was very consistent in his own use of speculations to shape his physical theories. The general theory of relativity and Einstein's own early interpretations of it were shaped by various speculative, i.e., philosophical, assumptions, some of which proved to be right when Hubble and others collected data and others proved wrong. For example, his intuition that the 'universe' (of which he had only a vague idea in the early years of the theory) was homogeneous and isotropic proved to be quite true to a very high degree of accuracy as currently measured and it helped to guide much of the early work in finding interesting and useful solutions to the field equation of General Relativity—the equation that provides a relationship between the distribution of matter and the shape of space for an entity—perhaps a star system or perhaps the entire universe. On the other hand, Einstein accepted—without a comment—the assumption that the universe is static, not expanding. Clearly, this assumption, implicit in some of his early writings, is wrong. In any case, that erroneous assumption didn't hold up the development of physical cosmology much, if at all.

In the early stages of creative work, "right vs. wrong" isn't always so important as you might think. What was important was the courage and energy which leads to forward movement of some sort. Metaphysical speculation was important to Einstein's work even when some of his speculations were wrong.

And what about metaphysicians? What is their proper role? It's actually no mystery, at least not to those who have read *The Summa Contra Gentiles* where Aquinas told us that metaphysics uses the specific sciences. I would go further than this, as I did above, pointing out that the specific sciences tell us of the observable and measurable properties of being as we can know it in this universe. Metaphysics doesn't just use the specific sciences, it depends upon them and builds upon them—at least those specific sciences which deal with the fundamental nature of created being—physics and mathematics. Certain scientists such as Einstein engage in metaphysics in their scientific work. More recently, brain-scientists such as Gerald Edelman and Walter J. Freeman (and William James a few generations earlier) have also engaged in metaphysics. In my worldview, this is a natural result

of their interests in the human mind, as distinct from an interest in specific physical activities in the brain or even in the brain as a mere assembly of its parts.

And so I come to a partial and tentative answer to my question, “What is the Role of Philosophy in an Age of Science?”:

Philosophy, as one of its tasks, takes the results of physics and mathematics and—at least since the work of William James – neurobiology and develops them in such a way as to provide a more complete template for the formation of a human mind.

I’ve deliberately flipped things inside-out to emphasize the primary result of a better understanding of created being—a human mind shaped to encapsulate the world. This possibility of a better understanding depends upon the existence of an exterior universe which is rational and which can be the proper object of this process of shaping a human mind, a shaping which is a creation of sorts, forming a human mind upon the physical stuff of a human brain. Few think of their minds as entities that come into existence as a result of a shaping process after birth. Partly because of Christian misinterpretations of the stories in the early chapters of the book of Genesis, partly because of a wrongful canonization of perhaps misunderstood results of Platonic and Aristotelian thought, we tend to think of a human being as born with a mind of the sort which has the native abilities of abstract reasoning. All that is necessary for a strong mind to develop is to exercise those particular immaterial muscles of the mind and we get Wolfgang Goethe or Ada Lovelace. In fact, various studies of high scholarly standards have indicated that abstract thinking was itself an innovation in the development of human history. The human mind as we know it came into existence during historical times, after the foundation of human technology and the birth of human cities. So far as we know, the decay of a civilization can bring about the loss of certain aspects of the human mind rather than just a loss of specific knowledge and mental skills.

I’ve started to slowly and erratically work on a short article entry about this subject and I’ll rely on R. B. Onians’ *The Origins of European Thought About the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time, and Fate* [106] and Bruno Snell’s *The Discovery of the Mind in Greek Philosophy and Literature* [128] to provide an admittedly sketchy argument that the human mind, in the sense of an entity capable of thinking abstractly and perceiving the

wider context of its environments—a cosmos or universe or world, developed only about 2500 years ago or so.

Our minds ‘evolved’ by some sort of processes depending upon the physical brain with its DNA but this ‘evolution’ took place in some abstract realm of relationships rather than directly in the physical stuff of our brains—though I would imagine that an advanced civilization gives some reproductive advantages to those family lines with a certain (but not necessarily high) percentage of men and women who have brains capable of supporting a mind which engages in highly abstract thought. There was a strange period around the sixth century before Christ when Greek literature, philosophy, and abstract mathematics first developed and the great works of Hinduism, the books of Moses, and Chinese philosophy were collected from pre-rational sources and reshaped into sometimes strange ‘models’ of the world as perceived and conceived by mostly anonymous geniuses of various sorts. A truer history of humanity would recognize this development as being far more important than the military and political events which are so greatly emphasized in most books.

Partly because of our understanding of the influence of the Greeks, we tend to think of abstract thought as being separate from physical reality, inhabiting a separate realm of purer being or perhaps not even being describable as any form of being. Against this, I’ll make the flat claim that my mind is an entity which shapes itself as I respond to my environments and, more recently, to the universe as seen in light of God’s revelations. By way of processes poorly understood and not often studied so far as I know, a proper reshaping of a mind can influence culture so that others begin to take on that shape. Those with moderate levels of education and literacy skills will begin to show signs of assuming, if not necessarily understanding, what was seen only with a great struggle by the brightest and most flexible of thinkers in prior generations. At the same time that scientists, engineers, architects, artists, and a few others performed calculations by way of Euclidean geometric arguments that are extraordinarily difficult for all but a few modern experts, double-entry bookkeeping and the associated forms of arithmetic were considered to be skills of genius. Samuel Pepys was a man of great practical skill who helped to modernize, maintain, and manage the port of London but he found the simplest of account-books to be well beyond his ken.

The modern mind has reshaped itself. Our understanding of the universe, including the affairs of men, is founded upon different sorts of ab-

stractions than the involved Euclidean reasoning used by Newton when he first started working on the problem of gravity. If a well-educated man or woman with no college mathematics were to look through one of Einstein's more accessible articles on general relativity, let alone one of the standard works on the subject, they would be intimidated by the symbolism. Moreover, they would have some trouble believing that much of the algebraic symbolism is an encoding of very abstract geometric reasoning.

At times, it seems that the mind of the metaphysician (and that of the theologian) has remained an oasis of stability in the midst of this ongoing enhancement of our knowledge of the being of our physical world and our more abstract knowledge of mathematics. This is neither all good nor all bad. It can be good to have islands of stability during a period of chaotic creativity, however silly some think those islands to have been, but that stability develops into a problem when that creativity has produced a radically new view of God's Creation. I repeat:

If we understand the being we can perceive, the being we inhabit, we can have a chance of understanding being of more general sorts. If we don't understand being that we can touch or at least observe, being that we can subject to various sorts of tests and measurements, it would be a stretch to imagine we could understand being of more general sorts.

And this is where a major problem lies when most scientists look at the efforts of philosophers. Many schools or even entire branches of philosophy have been bastions of human tradition during a period when empirical knowledge, knowledge of the world we inhabit and perhaps a little more, has been expanding greatly. As a convert to the Catholic Church, it bothers me a lot that the philosophers and theologians of that Church have so entangled the truths of the Bible and the traditional creeds with inherited human speculations that Catholics have generally played little role in the development of this empirical knowledge in recent centuries and Catholic thinkers have so far generally not responded to the need to honestly encounter modern empirical knowledge, even though Pope Benedict XVI has been calling for such responses. See Chapter 25, *Broadening the Horizons of Reason* for a quick review of some strong signs he wishes to honestly deal with modernity and modern empirical knowledge.

# 100 Can Inadequate Formation Mimic Mental Diseases?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=181>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/09/12.]

This article, *Immaturity Of The Brain May Cause Schizophrenia* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/09/080910133341.htm>, talks about one of the possible causes of a disease which may actually be “several biologically distinct heterogeneous populations,” that is, a set of symptoms caused by various diseases. This was the case for ‘consumption’ in the 1800s—TB or lung cancer or some variety of the ‘rattles’ as miners called illnesses which might have been black lung or similar. Consumption might have been any of those or other diseases.

I’ll give two quotes from this article:

The underdevelopment of a specific region in the brain may lead to schizophrenia in individuals. According to research published today in BioMed Central’s open access journal *Molecular Brain*, dentate gyrus, which is located in the hippocampus in the brain and thought to be responsible for working memory and mood regulation, remained immature in an animal model of schizophrenia.

Despite extensive research, the brain mechanisms of schizophrenia remain largely unknown. According to Professor Miyakawa, one reason for this is that clinical diagnosis in the area of psychiatry is based solely on subjective observations and not on biologically or objectively solid criteria, “As a result of this limitation, most of the psychiatric disorders currently diagnosed as a single disorder are likely to comprise sev-

eral biologically distinct heterogeneous populations. Therefore, the identification and investigation of more reliable biomarkers that characterize a single subpopulation of a specific psychiatric disorder are essential for increasing the understanding of the pathogenesis/pathophysiology of such disorders.”

Advances in the understanding or treatment of such a horrible disease as schizophrenia are to be applauded, but my interest lies in the possibility of ‘symptoms’ of psychosis or other mental disorders appearing in a much quieter form in those who appear normal, at least in the context of modern societies. See Chapter 91, *A Thomistic Take on Madness and Modernity*, for a discussion of this issue in the context of the worldview I’m developing.

The late Professor Julian Jaynes published a controversial book, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* in 1976 “in which he argued that ancient peoples were not conscious (did not possess an introspective mind-space), but instead had their behavior directed by auditory hallucinations, which they interpreted as the voice of their chief, king, or the gods. Jaynes argued that the change from this mode of thinking (which he called the bicameral mind) to consciousness occurred over a period of centuries about three thousand years ago and was based on the development of metaphorical language and the emergence of writing.” [See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julian\\_Jaynes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julian_Jaynes) for the complete article.]

I’m still playing around with an entry proposing that the human mind matured into the form in which we know it in historical times. By human mind as we know it in historical times. By human mind as we know it, I refer to intense self-awareness and skills in abstract imagining and thinking.

There are various ways to approach the possibility that the mind is the result of some sort of development process which began—perhaps—when men began to gather in complex societies about 10,000 years ago or so. While I would have to believe in an intermediary stage, perhaps the hallucinatory state conjectured by Jaynes, I’d tend to believe that pre-urban man might have had a level and type of consciousness closer to that of chimpanzees than to modern men. In any case, I’m speculating that the process reached an important stage of maturity about 600BC or so when the Books of Moses were redacted and pulled together with the Books of the Kings and other texts during the reign of King Josiah. This was about the same time when unknown Vedic scholars of the highest creative talents

were creating the fundamental works of the Hindus and also the time when Homer's descendants were becoming the ancestors of Socrates. Thinkers in China were also stirring things up a bit.

I'm working on an entry which looks at this development of the brain by quick consideration of arguments presented by Bruno Snell in *The Discovery of the Mind in Greek Philosophy and Literature* [128] and R.B. Onians in *The Origins of European Thought About the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time, and Fate* [106]. I started thinking upon those lines after simply deciding that the mind, like any other complex attribute of a physical creature, could not have simply appeared by magic. It had to have developed by some sort of process within the general stream of biological evolution, though it might have occurred when the evolution of the human brain reached a certain point. There might be a minimum brain-complexity (to speak simplistically) as well as necessary environmental conditions supplied by that period of human history from the birth of large-scale agriculture and cities (circa 10,000BC) to the 'sudden' emergence of such phenomena as conceptual thought as seen in the pre-Socratic philosophers and poets producing complex narratives, using tools such as irony or self-deprecation (both of which are highly developed by the time of Socrates).

I've not nailed down a definition of mind from my viewpoint, but I generally consider it to be the relational aspects of a human being, including relationships to various other aspects of that human being as well as to his environment and any greater aspects of reality which he may be able to conceive on the basis of rational and imaginative efforts. I suspect this works not just because of complex brain-cell networks but also the non-local properties of those electromagnetic fields generated by the brain and not yet understood by brain-scientists—or maybe quantum fields as conjectured by thinkers such as the biophysicist William Calvin. This could account for the ethereal feel of the mind as well as for some such phenomena as the rapid collapse of multiple streams of perception into one view of the surrounding environment.

Given the complexity and the powerful but ad-hoc nature of the human mind—whatever its exact nature, there seems to be every reason to believe the mind developed by some sort of selection process after the physical foundation—a complex human brain—existed. The very existence of problems like schizophrenia point to the developmental nature of the mind and point to an instability of sorts in the 'physical' or 'relational' processes which drive the development forward, or fail to drive it forward. We must

also recognize the mind is not likely to be an entity like the heart so that it exists and functions automatically in nearly all live-birth human beings. For example, we have no reason to believe that any of those feral children, legendary or real, who were raised by wolves had human minds despite the likelihood their brains, as physical organs, might have been as healthy as those of a child in a modern literate environment.

What can develop can fail to develop and can also unwind or otherwise decay if that developing entity is a dynamic sort. Cultural decay of various sorts can perhaps lead to a society where many fail to develop well-ordered, mature human minds. Hardly a surprising suggestion, but one which can lead to richer ways of speaking of the possible problem in the context in which I've set it. It's also a suggestion that raises some very frightening questions, including some which would impact our understanding of our human selves and—to a Christian – our understandings of the possibilities and nature of salvation. We also should perhaps wonder how long it can take to recover after a period of cultural decay and whether a recovery will necessarily occur if the human mind as we know it is the result of not only individual development processes over the life of the individual but also of a development process involving communities of human beings, probably mostly family lines though not necessarily involving only closely related human beings. These sorts of developmental processes will likely be somewhat self-sustaining so long as they continue in a robust form. But those processes are contingent and their initialization might be dependent upon a variety of criteria which might not often be met.

In *Madness and Modernism: Insanity in the Light of Modern Art, Literature, and Thought* [126], Professor Louis Sass discussed the implications of the similarities between the ways of thought of schizophrenics and those of modern artists and thinkers. (See the already referenced *A Thomistic Take on Madness and Modernism* 91 for my discussion of his insights. Sass also pointed to evidence that schizophrenia is a modern disease—for example, the extensive networks of humane institutions for disturbed people which existed from the Middle Ages onwards provide no evidence of such a disease prior to the French Revolution or so. It was about that time that an alienist (psychiatrist, roughly speaking) noted the very strange symptoms of a likely schizophrenic as if he'd never imagined such a form of psychosis could exist. This is a very complex issue, especially given the growing evidence that there is no clear-cut dividing line between schizophrenia and some serious forms of depression and perhaps other sorts of mental disturbances. This

raises the possibility that our modern forms of social, political, and intellectual life are not appropriate for human beings—they lead to a greater or lesser decay of that structure we call a human mind.



# 101 New Forms of Human Mind and New Forms of Human Civilization

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

Recently, I had reason to refer to Michael Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* [116], a book which had a good deal of influence upon my thoughts, upon my views of how human beings are embodied creatures and not body-soul chimeras and also upon my views of the way that human beings are embedded in Creation. Polanyi saw with great clarity the way in which tools become parts of our bodies when we use them often and with attention. A surgeon reaches the point where the scalpel is an extension of his arm and hand rather than a fully external tool. I would go even beyond what I remember of Polanyi's ideas in proposing that this is a necessary result if the human mind is shaped by responses to its environment.

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

This implies a radically different view of what mind is, what thought is, what knowledge is, than the view that mind is some sort of software residing in wetware. I don't intend to survey theories of the mind, and haven't enough historical knowledge to do so, but I'll mention that the

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

So where does truth reside? I claim:

Things are true and truths are thing-like.

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

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

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

Let your mind be shaped by actively responding to reality.

There are problems with such a simple statement but most of them can be resolved by an understanding of the slow and painful processes of the evolution of the human race to a state where the brain had properties allowing the development of a mind which could be shaped by responses which go beyond our immediate environment and by an understanding of the roughly analogous processes by which a human mind can be shaped by responses to its environments or by responses to much more if that mind

is educated in a tradition which includes the likes of Homer, Aristotle, St. Augustine, Moses Maimonides, St. Thomas Aquinas, Gottfried Leibniz, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, William Blake, Albert Schweitzer, Albert Einstein, and so forth. And I've forgotten to mention a single musician or dancer or visual artist or athlete or statesman.

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

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

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

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

Yet, there's something far bigger going on, bigger than even our financial meltdown, bigger than the more important meltdown of a manufacturing economy that seems to assume that consumers need 10,000 square foot

houses to hold ever more television sets and clothes and shoes and refrigerators, bigger even than the moral decay caused by the Gresham's law analogue which tells us cheap and mindless entertainment will drive out community orchestras and children's dance recitals and quiet nights reading middle-brow historical novels or even demanding books of literature or science or history. We've lost our old relationship to Creation and haven't yet succeeded in forming a new relationship. We're at the cusp of a civilization change—or a possible disastrous failure to move into a new phase of Western civilization.

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

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

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

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

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

We in the West currently have various charts which don't correspond well to our current knowledge of the world. We make our plans and try to

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

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

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

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

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

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

This will be one characteristic of the new civilization:

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

In an address to philosophers given on June 7, 2008, Pope Benedict XVI spoke of modernity as demanding a “more exact understanding of the nature of man”, but that will be only a part of a more exact understanding of all of Creation which is subject to our exploration and analysis—see Chapter 25, *Broadening the Horizons of Reason*. If Western Civilization survives in an offspring or a new phase, that more exact understanding will be founded, partly, upon ways of thinking and speaking which draw upon such esoteric fields as differential geometry. We won't see the end of faith nor of literature nor of philosophy but we will see them re-founded as we are forced to view Creation as it is and not as our ancestors were viewed it in terms of their knowledge of empirical reality. Of course, we must remember that the early Hebrew prophets had to fight against the ingrained assumptions of various forms of nature-worship, as did the early Greek philosophers and scientists.

The truths that will remain unaltered are those which the transcendent God revealed about Himself, but even our relationship to that God might change as we are part of Creation and our understanding of Creation will be

changing. We may be willing to see this world as a story God is telling for His own purposes and we may be able to work for God and for our fellowmen while accepting the pittance or the great wealth which God bestows upon us.



# 102 Active Responses are Necessary for Shaping the Human Mind

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=230>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/10/09.]

In this summary article, *Psychologists Show Experience May Be The Best Teacher For Infants* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/09/080930144218.htm>, we read:

Researchers have found that infants who had an opportunity to use a plastic cane to get an out-of-reach toy were better able to understand the goal of another person's use of a similar tool than were infants who had previously only watched an adult use a cane to retrieve a toy.

This result agrees with the Thomistic position, including my truer-to-Thomas existential version and also the pragmatic version of Walter J. Freeman as discussed in Chapter 83, *Is Christian Morality a Natural Morality?* and Chapter 84, *Pragmatism and Existentialism*. We shape our minds by active responses to our environments and to greater parts of our world as we learn to think abstractly. When we're responding to an environmental need to heat our house, we learn how to use a wedge-ax to split wood with short verbal instructions from a knowledgeable relative and then a lot of practice. After several sessions of exhausting effort, we learn to better use such a tool given the action of our particular bodies and the behavior of the wedge-ax when we lift it overhead and then bring it down toward the log sitting on end. On a more abstract level, we can shape other parts of

our minds properly by, for example, reading a worthwhile book, maybe on American foreign policy under FDR, in an interactive way, pushing that non-present author to answer difficult questions and imagining ourselves in the place of Herbert Hoover or Franklin Delano Roosevelt or Chiang Kai-shek.

This is one of the problems with classroom instruction as currently practiced. It's a passive and non-effective way of learning in which the overburdened teacher is trying to push pre-processed knowledge into the heads of thirty students of varying talents and interests and levels of maturity. This is also a problem with any teaching efforts of the various science or history or religious channels on television. I know some who try to interact with the programs they watch, taking notes and writing down questions to look into or to discuss with friends, but those viewers are few and far between. This passiveness is also a problem with so much of our popular literature which doesn't engage and challenge a reader even in the way of higher-quality mind-candy such as Agatha Christie novels let alone serious works such as Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. Those who know the novel can take the term 'serious works' in the appropriate way.

## 103 New Forms of Knowledge?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=237>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/10/09.]

In Chapter 101, *New Forms of Human Mind and New Forms of Human Civilization*, I discussed the Thomistic teaching that the human mind shapes itself in active responses to its environments in the context of cultural transitions.

Recently, I was reading *Political Theory & Modernity* by William E. Connolly and his discussion of Nietzsche brought me to a slightly different way of putting the problem.

Professor Connolly tells us that Nietzsche realized that the Enlightenment vision of completing understanding and control of nature wouldn't work if our environments and the entire universe have characteristics or entire entities that don't fit into the human mind. What exists and what works can't be rationally broken down to the pre-existing categories of a pre-existing mind which works according to abstract forms of thought and some abstract knowledge which comes from somewhere by some magical process.

Nietzsche was right. That is, he was right if mind is what Enlightenment thinkers, and many of their 'modern' predecessors thought mind to be, an ethereal entity of some sort. There is no *a priori* reason to think concrete stuff will fit into the slots available in such a mind. St. Thomas Aquinas actually falsely taught we do have such an ethereal mind to handle our abstract reasoning but his mind was a non-human entity which seems to have been something of a dry-as-dust Mr. Spock intended to do certain sorts of abstract thinking.

I say: what works works. This insight leads not to some grayish, mechanical utilitarianism but rather to the realization that what exists is, and

has to be, the embodiment of truths. Things are true. I go on to claim that truths are thing-like and suddenly we are in an entirely different realm of thought. In Christians terms, what exists is the manifestation of some thoughts of God and we can shape our minds to be embodiments of the very thoughts which God manifested in Creation. I make this claim along with St. Thomas Aquinas (properly updated) and along with some modern brain-scientists. See Chapter 83, *Is Christian Morality a Natural Morality?* and Chapter 84, *Pragmatism and Existentialism* for discussion of my way of viewing the processes of shaping a human mind and also the view of the neuroscientist Walter J. Freeman.

[As of 2011/03/31, I'm thinking Aquinas, in his speculations about the immaterial 'mind' or 'soul' attached to the otherwise physical human being, was intuiting the existence of what I consider the racial or human species mind which is something largely given to us. By this I mean the inborn ways in which the human brain operates because of evolutionary developments. This means evolution has given us some preshaped ways of thinking and some which can be shaped by responding properly to our environments.]

I've been puzzling over this issue for years since reading this:

My soul [in Thomas the organ for thought] is not I; and if only souls are saved, I am not saved, nor is any man.

This is a quote from Aquinas' *Commentary to 1 Corinthians* [3] as translated by Hannah Arendt in her last major work [5]. The comment in square brackets is hers.

## 104 Four-dimensional Brains

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=295>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/11/09.]

I really don't know much about neural networks which are organized in space and certainly can't make much comment upon the discovery that they are somehow organized in time as well, yet, I'm hardly surprised. See this article, *Robots Show That Brain Activity Is Linked To Time As Well As Space* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/11/081107071820.htm>, for a summary of the research that indicates that:

even without explicit spatial hierarchical structure a functional hierarchy can self-organize through multiple timescales in neural activity. Their model was proven viable when tested with the physical body of a humanoid robot.

Results suggest that it is not only the spatial connections between neurons, but also the timescales of neural activity, that act as important mechanisms in neural systems.

Brains make up their minds by responding to their environments as a first step. As the human mind developed its higher-level abstract capabilities, starting around the 6th century BC so far as I can judge, it began to explore more sophisticated aspects of what we now know as the universe. In the past century or so, theoretical physicists and mathematicians were able to think about the universe in terms of a four-dimensional space-time structure. To do that, our brains would have to be able to encapsulate that space-time structure and that would mean the brain itself must partake in those time-like aspects of the being of that structure. Hardly a surprising proposal since we were born into that space-time and develop inside of it. I wouldn't be surprised if evidence grows that at least predators also

have brains that self-organize through time as well as space. Without some way of organizing perceptions and thoughts “through multiple timescales,” animals would likely be far more sluggish and inert than rattlesnakes or leopards prove themselves to be.

## 105 What is Reason?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=343>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/12/02.]

Reason is typically defined as if it were an object or faculty separable from the human body, much in the way that many define the soul. I don't believe in souls as being entities residing alongside or apart from our physical substance and I don't believe in reason as defined by traditional thinkers. It's not some faculty inherent to a human being nor is it some sort of mystical force which human beings can access.

Reason is an important but ill-defined set of mental activities. Usually, there's an implication of a significant degree of abstraction when we speak of reason, but the very concept of 'abstraction' is problematic as I've pointed out in some of my writings. See Chapter 165, *Ways of Speaking and True Being* for discussion of our efforts to shape our language to created being by iteration, in a manner of speaking and "manner of speaking" is the issue. I hope I've increased the problems in a fruitful way by denying that abstractions are merely descriptive and claiming instead they're real aspects of being, deeper levels closer to the stuff God created from nothingness.

Reason is certain activities of a human mind and that mind is what forms when a human animal makes more or less proper responses to his environment(s). Abstraction is inwardness or depth of being. Thing-like being is shaped from a strange form of being which is 'abstract'. The same is true of living creatures which are inhabitants of the realm of things. The concrete flesh and blood of a human being is another level of being but that human being includes also the abstractions at deeper levels of being. This isn't some sort of mystical claim, but rather an insight forced upon us when we take theoretical physics and mathematics and metaphysics seriously. So reason can be considered the movements of a human being in abstract levels

of created being. But those abstract levels of being aren't imaginary. They too are part of reality. Even when they're other and more fundamental 'phases' of Creation, they're present in this phase as well, our universe. Nor is reason imaginary or mystical or outside of Creation.

We can't see the intertwining of space and time with our eyes or hear it with our ears but we can shape our minds to encompass it, through the abstractions of differential geometry and Minkowski spaces and so forth, through novelistic adventures and poetic dreams. If we were suddenly to find ourselves at the horizon of a black-hole, we would find that some abstractions bite harder than any lion on the Plain of Serengeti. We can't perceive directly the bending of space-time but we'd know something was real if we were suddenly stretched out a mile tall as we fell into a black-hole with strong tidal forces. But those sorts of abstractions lie also at the foundation of the very substance of lions, which are also made of stuff which would cease to exist in a rather rapid and spectacular way if not for some of the oddities described by quantum mechanics.

Human reason doesn't transcend Creation, it's not alien to Creation. We're creatures of this specific Creation and reason is an activity of the human mind by which we participate in this peculiar Creation. Reason results as we try to understand abstract levels of being but also when we try to apply those understandings to the more obvious aspects of our lives in concrete levels of reality. Reason can move outwards, no, it has to do so, to encompass our fellow creatures and our entire world, but its essence is penetration into deeper levels of being.

## 106 So What if the Human Mind is a Product of Evolution?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=484>. It was finished and uploaded on 2009/05/05.]

Why do we resist changes in our beliefs about our selves, the world around us, and our relationship to God? Americans in particular, for all our claims to honesty about facts and our claims to have a hardheaded respect for reality, find it difficult to accept empirical evidence that we're not quite the creatures we think ourselves to be, that the universe isn't nearly the place our ancestors thought it to be.

Why do so many seem to recoil, for example, from the possibility that the immaterial parts of a human being are inalienable from the material parts evolving over the millions of years, evolving further over the millennial-length lifetimes of civilizations, and then developing in particular forms over lifetimes? Often, I've heard claims that it's hard to believe in such a 'materialistic' view of the human being, which seems to reduce mind-like and soul-like aspects to 'mere' material aspects. My response would be simply, "We won't understand any aspects of human nature until we understand the bodily foundations." Just acknowledge the basic facts, then learn a bit of what physicists and mathematicians have discovered about the nature of being and of abstractions. Then, we'll be able to speak intelligently about immaterial aspects of being, such as relationships. I've found no need to wave hands and speak of mysterious entities attached to human beings once I began to understand modern empirical knowledge, once I brought down my barriers against the reality of God's Creation. Aquinas told us to do that centuries ago, to learn the wisdom of God by studying the creatures of God, but even Catholics who claim to highly honor him have no real under-

standing of his basic claims, of his methodology endorsed by Pope Leo XIII in the encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, choosing instead to turn his speculative arguments into revelations of unimpeachable truths. To many Catholics, being 'Thomistic' means that we pronounce his conclusions about God's Creation, based upon empirical knowledge circa 1350, to trump any conflicting conclusions based upon somewhat more recent empirical knowledge.

Take, for example, the soul. The loss of an entity we can't see or hear or detect would seem to be little more than the loss of an entity which filled in some gaps in our knowledge. We have filled in those gaps in recent centuries with better and more complete knowledge of time and space and matter and of abstractions tied to physical reality. We have learned a lot by studying God's Creation in disciplined ways and we have learned that the stuff of this physical universe has properties which fill in those gaps in a more natural way. If you wish, you can even think of matter as being frozen 'soul-stuff', but it's better to simply acknowledge that modern science has taken the ancient idea of the 'soul' from us. Modern science has also given to us the opportunity to re-unite our mind-like or soul-like aspects with our embodied and particular natures. In other words, unlike Plato and perhaps Aristotle, unlike even Aquinas, we have ways of understanding our mind-like and soul-like aspects in terms of our human bodies. We have the possibility of seeing our human natures in a more unified way by grounding our mind-like or soul-like aspects upon our bodily natures. This opportunity is tied to the contingent nature of not only our particular universe, but also its fundamental structures of time and space and matter. We have discovered in the past century or so that it's not just life but the universe itself that has developed from a vague and chaotic state to its current specific and somewhat organized state. What we've learned about the evolution of life fits in with those more fundamental discoveries about time, space, matter, and the nature of the abstractions which form many of our thoughts. The universe is consistent across its parts, stars evolving much like chemical processes do on the surface of at least one planet, some of those processes becoming self-sustaining life and some not.

Some would hold on to traditional ideas without even daring to reconcile them with modern knowledge of God's Creation. These men take the technology and reject the knowledge underlying that technology, choosing to believe many fantastic things that were plausible in earlier centuries but no longer. They simply ignore inconvenient possibilities and even inconvenient facts of the most obvious sort and remain wedded to the ideas which

were pushed into their heads when they were young.

Others can accept the technology and also the underlying knowledge – to the extent it helps them to break free of those aspects of moral and political and social traditions which they find inconvenient. This shows in those who would use evolution and other matters of modern knowledge to attack traditional religious beliefs but can somehow miss seeing that convenient knowledge is tied to politically inconvenient knowledge about such matters as genetic differences in ethnic groups which have evolved in different environments and as a result of different responses of their ancestors to those environments.

This ability to accept only an edited version of our knowledge of reality was first noticed, so far as I know, in Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, and was also discussed by Solzhenitsyn in the forward to the abridged version of *The Gulag Archipelago*.<sup>1</sup> Various writers, such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Hermann Melville, and Ray Bradbury have also discussed forms of intellectual or moral psychosis in essays, such as Hawthorne's introduction to the first edition of *The Scarlett Letter*, or displayed such behavior in novels, such as *Moby Dick* and *The Confidence Man* by Melville and *Fahrenheit 451* by Bradbury. Like Captain Ahab from *Moby Dick*, we can say our means are sane, it's our ends – including our understanding of what it all means—which are insane. In Christian terms, we know how to confirm our opinions against all evidence but we don't know how to listen to God speaking through His Creation. Most believe that we have truth in our minds, while I believe that we have minds which can look for truth in God's Scripture and in His Creation, but only if we direct ourselves to such a task.

What seems interesting to me is my optimistic view of the possibilities of the human mind. I'm optimistic just because of my view of the human being as a peculiar sort of ape which evolved by natural processes in this physical universe. Because our minds have evolved at the species level and then have developed at the individual level, we can encapsulate knowledge—even wisdom—found in a Creation far greater than we are. We can learn to think as our Creator thinks. Our mind can be, in a sense, the entirety of Creation rather than simply what lies inside our skulls. Natural

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<sup>1</sup>I've seen a newer edition of this abridged version. The American publishing company has eliminated Solzhenitsyn's introduction with its remarks about American moral shortcomings, leaving—of course—the entirety of the main part of the book with its remarks about Russian moral shortcomings.

processes have brought about a set of mental capabilities which are retrospectively understandable and also remarkably powerful. Those mental capabilities are totemic in men who are hunters-gatherers, allowing men to put themselves in the place of the animals they hunt, imagining themselves to be fleeing human hunters and anticipating the actions of those animals. In a sense, our minds haven't changed in fundamental ways, but the modern mind has shaped itself, in some, to knowledge of a greater Creation while that early mind was shaped to knowledge of a local environment of, say, deer and blueberry bogs. While our ancestors imagined themselves to be that mammoth fleeing them, a more recent human being named Albert Einstein imagined himself to be moving along with a ray of light or traveling in various accelerating or non-accelerating elevators. The second set of imaginings were possible because Einstein's ancestors had evolved the capabilities of anticipating the actions of animals. In both cases, the human mind functioned well just because it was, so to speak, sent out to encounter a reality greater than we can find inside ourselves – until that very reality is encapsulated in our minds.

To accomplish such feats of imagination or the bodily feats of an athlete, the brain needs interfaces to the external environments and to the other parts of the same body, regions of the brain which hold those models of our bodies or models of our greater selves which exist across spans of time and space. Those mental processes have allowed a 'self' to come into being by way of brain activities which are being researched intensely.

Most of us have seen pictures of a homunculus in our brain, reflecting the nervous system resources devoted to specific bodily regions, so that fingers are outsized on that little human being in our brain, more so in a concert pianist or a watchmaker. The brain shifts resources if we lose our sight so that our hearing and touch become more important. When that happens, that cartoonish fellow in our brains loses his eyes and grows elephant ears and still larger fingers. That cartoonish fellow is our main contact with our physical environment and not just a funny drawing in books about the brain.

There's a far more complex and more mysterious process occurring in the human brain which I'll describe for now as a modeling of the self as an entity with a somewhat continuous existence in smaller or greater regions of time and space, depending upon the culture and the individual. We construct ourselves and those constructions are us to our conscious awareness because those constructions are the interfaces between our embodied selves and

other parts of reality. This isn't a doctrine of solipsism but rather one of a creature born into and adapted to a world of developmental processes, a world in which evolution of a family line and development of an individual occur as a result of lucky or unlucky, effective or ineffective, responses to opportunities and dangers. Our animal awareness and our self-awareness are interfaces between physical and cultural reality and our bodies and our more abstract selves.

See Chapter 8, *Staking Your Faith on Gaps in Empirical Knowledge*, for a short discussion of the way in which we form our sense of self in light of fairly recent discoveries that some, perhaps all, out-of-body and near-death experiences, are seemingly caused by disruptions to those systems which construct our senses of 'self'.

I'll interject a warning here, one based upon other recent discoveries about the brain which I've discussed a number of times in my blog entries. Research indicates our embodied selves often make decisions, at least certain types of easily studied decisions, before the regions of the brain associated with self-conscious regions become active. This indicates to me that our self-consciousness has little to do with our current lives. I think our self-consciousness plays a major, potentially dominant, role in shaping our greater beings and their actions for the future. That 'self-conscious' self isn't the human being, but rather a part of the human being. In a simplistic but useful way, I could say the 'self-conscious' self is a set of brain processes which serve certain needs of the human being.

The human mind evolved in specific settings, starting with that general setting we know as our immediate physical reality. Even some of the most fundamental truths built into our brains are not necessary truths but rather truths dependent upon certain contingent properties of our empirical world. For example, young infants show a strong belief in the continuity of the existence of physical objects. Such a belief has to be qualified in a scientifically advanced society. Nuclear physics, gravitational theory, quantum mechanics, evolutionary theory and various other theories of self-organizing systems and selectional processes, have all cast doubt upon the stability or even the continuity of existence of material entities or even entire classes of entities. The large degree of continuity of existence we observe is actually due to our position as short-lived, medium-sized creatures in a fairly cool but not frigid universe.

Yet, our experience of the continuity of existence is real and was real to our ancestors. Brain processes assuming such a reality us to avoid reasoning

each time about the likelihood that cliff in front of us will still be there when we return this way next year. Our belief in the continuity of existence of most things is so strong an instinct that even death was seen as something to be explained away. We think our selves must surely have existence beyond death. In early stages of the evolution of the human mind, there even seems to be a belief in some sort of life after death for the animals a hunter kills and eats. Hunters in many cultures will pray for forgiveness to the spirits of that animal.

Those beliefs in life after death weren't irrational, even if the motivations seem obscure to modern thinkers, but we need new ways of thinking about the human race, about the individual human being, about death, about the human mind, about the possibilities of life after death. We need to honestly confront the modern empirical knowledge that indicates rather strongly we humans are the result of billions of years of evolution, that the foundations of human nature are flesh and blood. We Christians in particular need to take the knowledge which comes from studying God's Creation and make sense of it in light of our Christian faith.

We can do that because our minds, being open and creative responses to at least some significant part of Creation, are not bound by the limitations of the present ideas of the human self and what it can be aware of, what it can know. If we could somehow see our ancestors walking around the plains of Africa 100,000 years ago, it'd be hard to guess from their behavior that they would give rise to creatures which could fly to the moon, could probe the secrets of nature, could travel into the abstract regions of greater and greater infinities, could explore forms of narration not strictly limited by ordinary human sense of time and space, could even become aware of a transcendent God. The facts of the matter lead to a narrative explanation in which human accomplishments are possible just because the human mind is an evolved entity which seeks the only true sort of understanding for a creature—an ability to take in the world around that creature so that fundamental aspects of reality become basic components of thought and more complex aspects are constructed from those basic truths by proper forms of reasoning. Those forms of reasoning are themselves derived from our inborn mental capabilities shaped by our responses to various sorts of experiences.

We oppose the idea that the human race has evolved and is part of a physical system of evolution and development because we wish to hold on to an idea of a more stable and more permanent self. We insist on seeing our

'true' selves as existing above the flux of events, because other possibilities, more in tune with our current empirical knowledge, are psychologically threatening to us. We want our thinking processes to have absolute validity. We want ourselves, once born, to have absolute existence. Consequently, we reject, in various ways, more reasonable understandings of the human race which indicate such views of ourselves are irrational.



# 107 The Disembodiment of Knowledge in Modern America

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

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

Much of our knowledge is embodied in the form of communities and their practices and attitudes, within political or economic marketplaces and within the parts of our lives we live in our smaller and more private communities. Our community relationships include the ways in which we entertain ourselves, the ways in which we sing or tell stories. They include our ways of raising children or caring for the elderly in our families or in our larger-scale communities. Certainly, a human being or a human community can be the very embodiment of falsehoods which can even be held strongly in the face of conflicting evidence from reality. A human being or a human community will necessarily be an incomplete or insufficiently rich embodiment of

Creation since we're finite beings exploring God's manifested thoughts, but even the simplest of human beings is a character in a complex tapestry of stories which are threads and others which are pictures formed by groups of these threads and so forth.

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

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

something like a state of spiritual and moral purity. We rise as physical beings but started high and fell as spiritual and moral beings—not very plausible.

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

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

Knowledge is embodied because we are creatures of a particular and concrete universe. What we can know truly is embodied, even the most abstract of mathematical truths is drawn from particular relationships within this world of embodiment. The processes of human knowledge-making involve eyes and hands, feet and hearts, brains most of all. Human knowledge isn't true knowledge as much as it's a dynamic movement towards true knowledge so long as we respond honestly and courageously to God's Creation. Truth is embodied and so is beauty, however much they're also incomplete

and dynamically developing towards the truths and beauties which are the end result of the story which God is telling in this concrete world. Progress is clearly not guaranteed but seems to be real on a large enough scale and there are hints of a true progress which we Christians would call the Resurrection. If there was a fall, it came as God Himself shaped unblemished abstraction into concrete and bleeding forms of being which He uses to tell a story in which we play a part, as do the stars and flu viruses and giant squids, but this is a fall with a moral purpose of creating a world which is really a story in which the main event is the self-sacrifice of the Son of God as an act of pure love for His Father, an event in which we play a subsidiary role but one in which we gain a chance for a share in divinity.

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

We're at a crisis point now, where the dominant country, the United States, seems to be actively opposed to reality, despising the embodied beauty and truth of God's Creation as not being good enough for us Americans and any others decent enough to be like us. It's been said that the United States is the first country to move directly from barbarism to decadence without passing through a state of civilization. I'd claim that Americans bypassed the state of civilization because, led by those such as Emerson who thought to create ideals more wonderful than what is embodied in this Creation, we decided to try to implement our so-called ideals rather than to study reality and to try to do better within that reality, including Western Civilization. Hermann Melville thought Emersonian thought to be a spiritualized materialism and feared many, perhaps most, Americans shared this morally diseased outlook of Emerson and Thoreau. Melville was close. Far too many Americans are deeply diseased in this way including nearly all of our political and intellectual and religious leaders going back to at least the leaders of the New England Colonies during the King Phillip's War—see Chapter 408, *The Need for Abstractions in Moral Self-understanding* for a discussion of the need to properly deal with particular and concrete realizations of human ways of life to be able to form abstract ideas of better possibilities. I would suggest one change to Melville's formulation: this Emersonian-American way of thought is not so much a spiritualized materialism as a nightmarish replacement for all that is embodied in a material world. If the world won't be what we Americans want it to be, we'll still

act as if it were truly what we want it to be. That strategy was remarkably successful in many ways for more than three centuries, but reality is now biting back.

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

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

It’s hard to imagine that a large population of a seemingly sophisticated country could be so detached from reality, so convinced that truth is found in their imaginations shaped to mirror their desires and even their career plans. Decades ago, some thinkers had predicted collapse of the Soviet Union because the all-important apparatchiks wouldn’t be able to function because of the strain caused by the conflict between reality and official Soviet views of reality – this is more plausible than the view that Reagan

brought down the Berlin Wall by planting the seeds that grew into the military bean-stalk currently reaching for the stars. Those who claimed Communism to be such a bad and inefficient system seemed to think it could conquer the world if we didn't waste our children's futures trying to get the Soviet politicians and generals to act just as stupidly.

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

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

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

We're a long way, lots of long days of work away, from a refreshed and re-energized civilization—if it comes into being, but it seems to me that it's time for men and women of moral integrity to recognize how much has been

lost and to start the various tasks of building a better future, one that will likely be seen by no one currently alive.



# 108 The Shaping of the Human Mind

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

God has shaped a thing-like world out of more basic stuff, strange abstract stuff. I've discussed this in various ways—see Chapter 159, *Negative Theology to Physics and Metaphysics* for an overview of my thoughts on abstract being as well as other issues and Chapter 163, *Not Monism and Not Dualism but Unity of Creation* for a more focused discussion on abstract being.

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

The actual situation is still more confusing. The universe is an entity with its own properties and not just a collection of stars and gases and electromagnetic fields. See Chapter 193, *A Universe is More than it Contains* for a discussion of one particular problem—though energy seems to be conserved in all 'local' situations, it's not necessarily conserved at the level of the universe. As Professor P.J.E. Peebles tells us in *Principles of Physical Cosmology* [109]:

We see that the faster decrease of [the radiation density of

a relativistic universe modeled as a gas] compared to the mass density of a nonrelativistic gas is the result of the pressure work done by the expanding radiation. However, since the volume of the universe varies as [the third power of the expansion factor of the universe], the net radiation energy in a closed [and expanding] universe decreases as [the inverse of the expansion factor of the universe] as the universe expands. Where does the lost energy go? Since there is no pressure gradient in the homogeneously distributed radiation, the pressure does not act to accelerate the expansion of the universe. (The active gravitational mass due to the pressure has the opposite effect, slowing the rate of expansion. . . .) The resolution of this apparent paradox is that while energy conservation is a good local concept . . . and can be defined more generally in the special case of an isolated system in asymptotically flat space, there is not a general global energy conservation law in general relativity theory. [page 139]

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

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

Human beings aren’t born with minds or souls attached to their bodies by some mysterious glue. Human beings are born with brains which have major regions which have the potential for abstract thinking—such as that

form of thinking which we might describe as future-oriented. Those regions are not preset to function in highly specific ways as, for example, the hippocampus is preset to form long-term memories out of short-term ones according to certain criteria. Cells in the regions of the human brain devoted to abstract thinking shape their connections to other cells in the same regions and to cells in other regions according to criteria which have been investigated by modern brain-scientists. The various writings of Gerald Edelman (see [en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Gerald\\_Edelman](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Gerald_Edelman)) provide a powerful and coherent understanding of the brain's 'shaping' processes.

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

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

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

It would seem that God doesn't feel bound to operate by the rules of either Plato or Heraclitus. We should honor them and see the insightfulness in their thoughts, for they were also characters in a sub-narrative of human history, a small but important story we could title: *The Development of the Human Mind at the Racial Level*. We now know enough to move on to a higher level of understanding, however inadequate it might eventually prove to be.

From the metaphysics of the Greeks, based upon very simple physics, to Augustine of Hippo who provided a substantial appreciation of the importance of time and the flow of events, through Aquinas who provided a deeper understanding of both the mind and also of being, through various modern philosopher-scientists who gave us brilliant understandings of the interaction of matter and of abstract mathematics—including Einstein and Planck and Dirac who enriched our understanding of time and space and matter and relationships, we come to us with our minds not so well shaped as they should be. We yet have trouble with these modern understandings of Creation at its concrete and abstract levels. See the earlier Chapter 90, *Shaping Our Minds to Reality* for a discussion of this problem and the opinion of one man, both physicist and Anglican priest, that we apparently need generations to make some ideas truly our own though those ideas seem to be out there—printed in many a textbook.

But some of us are trying and many seem at least willing to admit our confusion at trying to fit evolutionary concepts into brains shaped to consider species as ideal categories or to fit the theories of relativity into brains shaped to regard time as uniformly flowing in a way fully separable from space. And space itself? We naturally see it in ways which are somewhat comparable to a naive Euclideanism if not educated in pre-modern ways of thought still dominant in our age. If we are so educated, we might have more sophisticated Euclidean view. At the same time, we are exposed to newer ideas based on modern explorations of empirical reality, even when so many of us see these ideas in a relatively explicit form mostly in science fiction shows or the occasional science documentary which shows the Big Bang was just like a fireworks display. We read of conflicts between traditional moral rules and such new knowledge as the strong correlations between mutations and strong feelings of ‘transsexualism’ in some who are otherwise fully male in their genetic make-up. Many react by rejecting those traditional rules and the greater truths which lie behind them and others just try to hold on to those rules without rejecting the modern empirical knowledge which does so much to cure their cancers or to give us so much technology, life-enhancing and life-damaging alike. We want to have the old certainties and jet aircraft as well. And so . . .

Where is this ‘free-will’ that can overcome a creature’s own fundamental being?

Ah, the world be far more complex than the most convoluted of the sentences I've constructed in this book. We do need, in fact, new ways to speak of complex facts which overwhelm our language. We need musicians to compose in new ways consistent with Einstein's insights into space-time and poets to speak of Turing's insights into the nature of algorithmic thought.

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

Let me summarize:

1. God created things as manifestations of some of His thoughts.
2. By learning to shape our brains in response to those things, we bring into being certain states of those brains which can be truly called human minds.
3. There is also knowledge which exists at a social level and, after a recent explosion of empirical knowledge, is poorly integrated into most individual minds.

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

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



# 109 A Thought Makes It Possible to Think It

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=654>. It was finished and uploaded on 2010/05/06.]

Nearly all human beings, nearly all the time, think only thoughts which have been thought already within their sphere of knowledge, typically some level and region of a particular culture. Few and far between are the identifiable creative thinkers, though we must remember that creative thinkers are also members of specific communities which provide the raw materials of Platonic metaphysics or Shakespearean comedies. We must also remember that ideas, however vague, emerge in time without any specific originator, but often a poet or philosopher will step forward to bring such ideas into focus. I'll be ignoring those communal aspects of human thought, conformist and creative, in this article. I'll also ignore the little creative acts and thoughts which can lead to, for example, changes in the ways in which children are raised. Those sorts of changes can bring about new cultural epochs but such major changes are at least announced by those poets or philosophers, musicians or sometimes a great statesman. Because our age has problems in the foundations of our understandings of individual human natures, the purposes—if any—of Western Civilization, the relationship—if any—between God and man, we have a need for Plato-size thinkers, creative as well as profound.

There are many more good thinkers than creative thinkers. In saying this, I'm referring to those who can apply existing thoughts or even reuse existing thoughts in new ways as being good thinkers. A very crude analogy would be to an erector set where occasionally there is a need for a new structural element or a new sort of connecting device, but that need

might be unmet, even strangely unnoticed, until—maybe – the right thinker looks at the problem in a fresh way. Meanwhile, intricate and interesting structures are being built from existing components in that erector set. It seems strange at first to read a history of modern physics and to learn that even so creative and powerful a thinker as Henri Poincare can be looking at something so important as the basic insights that we know as the special theory of relativity, and he doesn't see what he should see. Creative he was, but not creative enough. An Einstein was needed to do 'no more' than make sense of what physicists already knew.

Let me put this in the context of my updated and expanded version of the Thomistic theory on the formation of the mind. Our minds form as we respond to our environments. Men can respond to multiple environments at once because of their abilities to reason abstractly, plan into the future, etc. Some men can even form their minds in response to some current and plausible understanding of the cosmos or universe. A very few, by percentage, might have minds capable of responding in some substantial sense to the entirety of God's Creation, that is, to God's Creation as we can currently understand it. Pioneers seem to be relatively few, that is, those who have minds reliable enough to come to coherent understandings but flexible enough to respond to new knowledge or new perceptions.

A literate society can make it possible for some to develop their minds to high levels and some of those with good minds will follow the paths blazed by the creative few and make far more of newly discovered regions of God's Creation than the creative thinker could have done. Yet, a good mind isn't always a creative mind. A good mind might move, more or less, in the realm of the known—with a typical mixture of truth and errors, richness and barrenness.

I'm claiming that creativity is a result of the human being moving, intellectually or morally or spiritually, in realms already created by God, realms which remain invisible to most thinkers even when we've accumulated a good body of knowledge about those realms. But there are some who are prepared, by nurture or nature or both, to move around in realms not explored or only lightly explored. Those movements might be into regions new to the human race, such as the movements of mathematical physicists in recent centuries or the truncated efforts of Beethoven to compose new forms of music near the end of his life. Those movements might be movements that allow a new look at known regions. In any case, the movements should lead to further responses to certain thoughts God has manifested

in Creation, responses which change the shape of our minds, of our entire human beings, making God's thoughts our thoughts to some extent.

Our basic mental skills are variations on the ability to respond to our environments, abstracting to more general levels of understanding at times and nearly always using the abstractions which are built into our words and the contents of our minds. I speak of 'contents of our minds' here rather than concepts to make it clear that those contents come from God's Creation, from the thoughts manifested in Creation by our Maker. Those contents aren't perfect images of the Creator's thoughts, perhaps they're fuzzy or distorted in various ways, but they are some sort of images of those divine thoughts. But those contents change the mind which initially held them uncomfortably. This process leads to the development of more refined mental skills, sometimes erasing our inborn mental skills. In the end, there is no real separation of Einstein's mind from his mathematical physics. Lest I seem to be dehumanizing the man, I'll add his love of music and his very high levels of skill on the violin and piano were just as much a part of his being as was his physics.

I'm claiming that our creativity is a response, perhaps inappropriate, to God's manifested thoughts. Ultimately, our thoughts are imitations of thoughts of God, or perhaps our twisted understanding of those thoughts of God as found in our environments. Am I attempting to eliminate or at least greatly restrict the freedom of a creative man? If such men can only imitate God in His thoughts as manifested in Creation, how can there be freedom for a person living by way of established routines? Am I proposing a form of predestination that reduces mankind to a fraudulently creative race?

No, but I don't have a definitive explanation. I am motivated to find an optimistic answer by my own experiences and those experiences provide a partial self-understanding of my creative efforts as well as something of an uplifting feeling about my freedom when I try to respond honestly and without fear to Creation and its Creator. Creativity and freedom come from God and we can share in the divine freedom by responding to Creation, or in a more personal way to God, in the way of an apprentice who perhaps does nothing more than sweep his master's workshop but is, at least in principle, sharing in the experience of being a master craftsman as he watches and tries to learn. I can also say, perhaps at the risk of boasting, that I consider myself to be a creative thinker, one deliberately trying to shape his mind and activities as responses to Creation and the Creator and I don't feel

imprisoned or enchained. I feel as if I am sharing in God's own freedom during my bursts of creative thoughts, bursts which often follow only after months of frustrations and hard work. I'll add that my self-understanding indicates that I start proposing answers to a problem, working up a little narrative of sorts and then judge if it seems to be moving with the grain of the universe, to borrow a metaphor from Stanley Hauerwas who borrowed it from John Howard Yoder. I don't like moving against the grain or even across the grain, perhaps because I suffered too often from slivers when I was young. And so it is that I keep revising my proposed answers or narrative until I detect an okay from my Maker, not necessarily enthusiastic applause. I often get a feeling that God shrugs a little and says, "Well, that's not too awfully bad, so we can go with it for now." My feelings aren't hurt as I realize Creation is an awfully complex place for a bipedal ape and, anyway, God's standards can be pretty high though He accepts lesser achievements as we're learning.

We have a desperate need in the West, indeed in all regions of the earth, for creative thought, by parents trying to raise their children in a world where so many seek to deform the minds of the young ones to make them better targets for profitable activities, by local political leaders who don't yet seem to realize that town and city governments have been enslaved by the central governments, and by novelists and philosophers who might put our entire mess in a good perspective but don't. The last group, my own group, is usually my direct concern but many of my claims are intended for more general application.

The West is living off the gains of past successes and is, more or less, under the control of bureaucrats allied with motley crews of greedy and ambitious men whose major talent is simply grasping and holding on tight to what they seized from others. The West badly needs creative responses rather than simply more gadgets or more wars or more regulation by already bloated government agencies. Most certainly, we have no need for more corporate welfare programs. Unfortunately, such societies as ours has decayed into are the least likely to welcome creativity. Such societies are likely to actively suppress creativity, seeking to make the minds of their youths as rigid as those of the teachers and other bureaucrats. This is to say that a mind formed in response to textbooks and to the methods of modern educators will be about as flexible as a steel cog formed for a specific role in a particular machine.

We should be responding to God's Creation, not just to our raw percep-

tions of nature but to the best available past responses and the open-ended responses of the modern research programs. With proper modifications, this statement will be as true of future mothers and future carpenters as it is of future poets or metaphysicians, but I'll repeat that my current interest is in the realms of creativity in abstract thought.

If my tentative answer is right, then Creation itself must be a manifestation of God's acts which are somewhat open-ended from any viewpoint inside of Creation, bringing forth possibilities and not always certainties, but they are God's possibilities and we have to find those possibilities and then respond to them. Then we can share in the creativity and freedom of God.



# 110 Intentionality and Philosophical Thinking

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=673>. It was finished and uploaded on 2010/08/08.]

I saw this quote on the Internet recently:

I keep the subject of my inquiry constantly before me, and wait till the first dawning opens gradually, by little and little, into a full and clear light. [Sir Isaac Newton]

Newton knew how to think. In Thomistic terms, serious thinking is an intentional process, that is a process of growth or development. Or both in most cases. It must be an ongoing process, working at conscious and unconscious levels.

I was intending to develop, that is—grow towards, an explanation of my work which would be more revealing than my prior explanations, by a minuscule amount, but this quote from Sir Isaac Newton explains the matter from a different angle. What's missing from Newton's quotation is a more explicit recognition that this process he was speaking of is not that of a preformed mind somehow inching towards the truth but rather a mind in formation as it learns to respond to reality and to think the truth.

If you would come to a better understanding of Creation, then be always thinking, be always revising and enriching and expanding your understanding of created being in its limited and more particular forms and of Creation in its entirety.

Keep the subject of your inquiry constantly before you.

Keep the subject of your inquiry before you when you participate in the rituals of worship and when you participate in the rituals of cooking. Keep it before you when you fish or when you contemplate the wonder of young children splashing in a pool.

And remember that the goal is to make sense of what really is. There is no transcendental realm of building-block truths which somehow come into your awareness. God is Himself transcendental but we can only know as much of His life as He chooses to tell us. The deepest truths of Creation are to be found in the most abstract regions of created being and those abstract regions are found by the sorts of inquiries I've written of, the sorts of inquiries Newton was describing. As I understand Newton's words, he was telling us that the process of getting at the truths in empirical reality is not a controllable process of applying predetermined methods to data but rather a process of living in that reality in the fullest sense and shaping your thoughts, ultimately your mind, to that reality.

# 111 So What if the Human Being's Mind is a Product of Development?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=769>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/02/19.]

I'm about 2 years late in writing a follow-up to Chapter 106, *So What if the Human Mind is a Product of Evolution?*, published on 2009/05/05. This is what I say in the first paragraph of that chapter:

Why do we resist changes in our beliefs about our selves, the world around us, and our relationship to God? Americans in particular, for all our claims to honesty about facts and for all our claims to have a hardheaded respect for reality, find it difficult to accept empirical evidence that we're not quite the creatures we think ourselves to be, that the universe isn't nearly the place our ancestors thought it to be.

We don't wish to see ourselves as developing over time, constrained and gifted in limited ways. We'd prefer to be born as some sort of higher-level creature who just is. This self-contained creature, living in the world but not inherently changed by interactions with that world, can do good if he wills. He can do evil if he wills. In either case, there is a persistent 'I' unchanged in fundamental ways by responses to reality. Along those lines, we think we can be smart without actually making the effort to acquire knowledge or to develop the intellectual talents we might have as a result of genetic inheritance or our early environments.

What are we at birth if we have no preformed mind, or—equivalently—preformed soul? We have brains which are inclined to respond to our environments and form relationships which are the beginning of those traits of our human being which we group together as the as-if- or pseudo-entity we call ‘mind’. In a sense, we’re born with what might be called a human-species brain, no one having all the raw talents which evolved over the millenia, but each one having some of those talents. (For the sake of speaking concisely, I’ll ignore those born with only small parts of a complete brain or with other severe problems.)

It’s becoming clear from modern brain research that human beings are not even born with a sense of ‘self’. That sense develops over time and is embodied in brain regions which are under very active investigation. Two related lines of research have indicated that so-called ‘near-death’ and ‘out-of-body’ experiences are due to disruptions of these brain regions which regulate our sense of self. See Chapter 8, *Staking Your Faith on Gaps in Empirical Knowledge*, for a discussion of news reports covering some of this research. One strong implication of this knowledge about our sense of self is that such a sense is unstable. At some level, we know this sense of self has developed over our lives and can develop further, in bad or good directions. But this isn’t comforting knowledge. It’s damned disturbing knowledge and we try to suppress it. Philosophers and theologians try to justify a permanent, and sometimes immortal self, by positing soul-stuff which isn’t subject to the development and decay of mere matter. Even for Christians who claim faith in an all-powerful God, an immortal soul seems a good hedge on that promise of a resurrection. Many skeptics and even some downright atheists seem to agree that some sort of a hedge is necessary even if they don’t believe in the possibility of life after death. Even most ideological Darwinists seem to write and talk as if we’re born as some entity which could be labeled ‘Person: John Smith’ and then die as the same person.

Many of my readers are likely to have read of these developmental processes in the brain which play a role in our sense of self. Many are also likely to know that the brain-regions of blind human beings adjust so that regions usually devoted to vision develop differently or even redevelop to ratchet up the capabilities of hearing or touch. We can quite plausibly conjecture that brain-regions devoted to physical movement were hyper-developed in Vladimir Horowitz, Fred Astaire, and Joe DiMaggio. The brains of mathematicians, adult musicians, and writers seem to be especially well-developed

in the language centers of the brain. Gauss was a genius in languages as a boy and was far from unusual for a mathematician. Einstein was particularly good in two subjects in those years we Americans call ‘high-school’—mathematics and Latin.

Gauss and Einstein went on to develop their minds in response to the abstract aspects of mathematics and physics. This doesn’t mean they were narrow-minded. Gauss was a very good practical businessman and Einstein was a good violinist and pianist. I’m sure that such men had other interesting and rich aspects to their total personalities. Certainly, neither was inclined to sit on a couch and wait for pre-packaged, that is—false, experiences to be presented to them.

We’re born with specific characteristics and specific talents which can be developed. We’re also born into specific environments which offer a limited number of opportunities. Within those pre-conditions and limitations, there’s a lot of room for becoming a moral creature or an immoral creature, a thinking creature or a non-thinking creature, an acting creature or a passive creature. A corrupted understanding of ‘intention’ would excuse us from our sins and failures, especially those which are comforting to us, by teaching us – falsely—that you’re a good man so long as you feel good about yourself. “My intentions are good, so I’m good even if I don’t have the courage or the faith to stick up for my professed beliefs, even if I don’t have the gumption to develop my talents as woodworker or amateur photographer or helper-of-neighbors. After all, I have television shows and DisneyWorld to fill my spare time.”

See Chapter 83, *What is Mind?: Is Christian Morality a Natural Morality?* and the next several chapters for responses to the book *How Brains Make Up Their Minds* [35], by the brain-scientist and philosopher Walter J. Freeman. In that response, I quote a couple paragraphs from that book:

I want to describe a neural basis for goal-directed actions that is common to both humans and other animals because it reflects the evolution of human mechanisms from simpler animals in which intent can operate without will. The concept of intentionality was first described by [St.] Thomas Aquinas in 1272 to denote the process by which humans and other animals act in accordance with their own growth and maturation. An intent is the directing of an action toward some future goal that is defined and chosen by the actor. It differs from a motive,

which is the reason and explanation of the action, and from a desire, which is the awareness and experience stemming from the intent. A man shoots another with the intent to kill, which is separate from why he does it and with what feeling.

Lawyers following in the steps of Aquinas understand and use these distinctions. Psychologists commonly do not. Philosophers have drastically changed the meaning of the term, using *intention* to denote the relations that a thought or a belief has to whatever it signifies in the world, but physicians and surgeons, again following Aquinas, have preserved the original sense in applying the word to the processes of growth and healing of the body from injuries, thus retaining its original biological context. I believe that animals have awareness, but not awareness of themselves, which is well developed only in humans. Self-awareness is required for volition: animals cannot volunteer. [page 8]

In fact, when you take that step towards that goal of, say, conforming of your own thoughts and those of your children to what is needed by an evil government which sends you checks and also threatens you in various ways, that step is your intention, not your not-yet suppressed desire to do what's right and certainly not your maturing justifications of your cowardly acts. You've become a slave of a sort, one enslaved—mostly—by being willingly changed to possess the behavior of a slave. And, yet, modern man with his strange belief that he is truly his consciousness, and—at convenient times—only distantly related to his body and its habits, needs to feel good. After all, modern man's not exactly intellectual in the manner of an ancient Greek philosopher-monk. His sense of self and his very self-respect is tied to that consciousness which is increasingly nurtured by a badly decayed educational system and the allied entertainment industry.

The real point within the context of this article is that we learn to think as slaves if we passively allow our brains to be shaped from the outside, even by a truly pious and intelligent master. We must respond actively to our environments to develop living and flexible minds. So far as I can tell, few human beings in this age develop living and flexible minds. In Chapter 102, *Active Responses are Necessary for Shaping the Human Mind*, I discuss research that showed that infants learn best by experience. I note that “one of the problems with classroom instruction as currently practiced [is that

it's] a passive and non-effective way of learning in which the over-burdened teacher is trying to push pre-processed knowledge into the heads of thirty students of varying talents and interests and levels of maturity." We do still worse when we put those poor students in front of television screens. I also don't think it's a very good situation for teachers who have a desire to teach and maybe even a liking, if not a love, for the subjects they teach. Such teachers would be the only active creatures in the typical classroom and they would be exhausted and frustrated by the effort to energize members of a passive and directed herd. At this point, one begins to appreciate the class clowns who display enough initiative to make jokes.

There is an interesting article on the *Scientific American* website: *Bringing Up Robots: Machines learn to walk faster, and better, if they figure out crawling first* found at <http://www.americanscientist.org/issues/pub/bringing-up-robots/1>. This article tells of indications that even mechanical learners, such as robots, can learn more sophisticated skills or behaviors if they learn by experience, by active responses to reality.

Robotics engineers have found their machines learn better by active responses to their environments as we continue a long and painful experiment of educating children by sitting them in classrooms, forcing them to learn habits of passivity, and then pushing textbook knowledge into their bored, little heads. Whatever this might accomplish, it doesn't nurture the process of developing minds in those children. We don't know how to properly develop minds because we have no plausible understanding of what a human mind is or even of what knowledge is. I've written on these subjects. Some of my comments are found in Chapter 107, *The Disembodiment of Knowledge in Modern America*. We don't know to develop our minds because we don't really know what it means to know.

Are we building a world in which robots will be active learners while human children will continue being passive, mechanical learners?



# 112 The Evolution of Language in a Rational World

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=788>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/03/17.]

There's a review, *Language and spandrels*, at <http://johnhawks.net/weblog/>, the weblog of John Hawks, which discusses the question: "How can there be one grammatical structure for all human beings if there is no known way to see selective pressures for the rules of grammar?" As the review notes, the famous linguist Noam Chomsky did a lot of work on this question. I'm going to go off on my own to deal with this question from my viewpoint, but Professor Hawks' review is well worth the read.

I think that the possibility of selective pressures might arise if evolutionary theorists were to consider the rationality of the universe, a rationality which would show less clearly in the environments of an evolving species of apes, but it would show – physicists and philosophers didn't even need to know that there is such an entity as the universe before they began to speculate about a rational all-enclosing something, cosmos or whatever. If we live in a rational universe, a universe which isn't just an as-if way of speaking of a collection of arbitrary environments, there might then be selective pressure on grammatical structure forcing it to correspond to that rationality.

In my understanding of matters, the rationality of human beings is a result of our minds being shaped in active response to that rationality which shows up in our environments. We don't bring pre-existing minds to the task of understanding our environments. Our minds are the result of actively responding to those environments as we seek to survive, prosper, and maybe understand. To develop those minds, we had to have proper brains

which I'll treat as being 'racial minds' or maybe the evolved biological foundations of mind. For those minds to be rational, that rationality had to be present in the environments to which we respond. How else can we explain it without sneaking in a dualism?

Brain-scientists, and perhaps most biologists, seem to be at least roughly describable as Jamesian pragmatists. In Chapter 84, *Pragmatism and Thomistic Existentialism*, and Chapter 86, *More on Pragmatism and Thomistic Existentialism*, I discuss this issue by way of responding to a book, *How Brains Make Up Their Minds* [35], written by the brain-scientist and philosopher Walter J. Freeman. Freeman sees the development of the human mind in terms of an organism actively responding to its environments. This modern view is essentially the view taught in the 13th century by St. Thomas Aquinas. In fact, Freeman claims Aquinas to be the major thinker who provides the best foundation for modern science. At the same time, Professor Freeman remains a pragmatist where I've expanded Thomistic ideas to consider greater possibilities for the other 'party' to selection—created being at the level of environments or the universe or even all of Creation.

In my way of making greater sense of this, there are three levels of evolution/development over which this shaping takes place: the human race as a whole, local communities, and the individual. The human 'racial mind' is shaped largely by proper responses to environments by way of natural selection, that is, those family lines were selected which had brains which could develop proper minds to carry out the abstract reasoning processes important to human survival and prosperity. There was probably no turning back for the human race once dependent upon rationality and abstract mental skills. Various evolutionary and development processes also take place at the level of communities up to the scale of civilizations as well as at the individual level.

I'm conjecturing that human grammatical structures have evolved and developed in a parallel way. It might even be proper to speak of the two processes as being two currents in the same streams of evolution and development of human organisms.

At the same time, it's clear our current actual languages are not sufficiently rich and complex to allow us to speak and write truthfully about the world in its rich and complex wholeness. We might have a subset of the greater grammatical structure which would meet the needs of discussing the rationality, not strangeness, of quantum mechanics while still being usable

to form effective political arrangements, to make profitable business deals, and to describe the joyful and innocent beauty of children at play. If my way of understanding created being is true, then this would be the case: we could find greater possibilities of speaking wider truths if we ascend from our relatively concrete languages to languages with greater capabilities for discussing abstractions in the way that mathematicians ascended from finger-countable numbers and perceptible geometrical figures to numbers greater than ordinary infinity and geometrical ‘figures’ with an infinity of dimensions. In Chapter 107, *The Disembodiment of Knowledge in Modern America*, I give a summary, in the context of a particular problem, of my background views on the nature of knowledge and of the human mind including my claim that concrete being is shaped from very strange stuff which I call abstract being—as a first step, think of this abstract being as something on the ‘other side’ of the so-called Big Bang.

So it is that an interesting question has risen: How can we expand our ways of speaking and writing to meet needs beyond those of our long-ago ancestors? Can I do more than speak vaguely about such an expansion?

In my freely downloadable novel, *The Open Independence of the Seas*[45], the protagonist tries to expand the grammatical possibilities of human language by developing grammatical structures corresponding to the elegant algebraic notation developed by the physicist Paul Dirac for working with the state vectors of quantum mechanics. The protagonist of my novel wished to speak more richly of the uncertainties as well as the realized and unrealized possibilities of human life. Take this novel as a first step into the unknown, not a serious proposal. In any case, this is a possible step only because the human mind can think and speak, however clumsily and formalistically, about empirical matters as strange as the workings of matter and energy at the level quantum physics deals with. I chose a mathematical expansion in that novel rather than one reflecting the new and poorly understood possibilities of life in densely populated and technologically advanced civilizations only because we’ve seen mathematics derived from concrete levels of experience being expanded into abstract forms quite capable of dealing with quantum mechanics and a lot more. We concrete creatures have clearly not learned how to deal with or even speak about the abstract relationships of modern social and political life.

We have to remember a strange fact: the possibilities of transfinite set theory and quantum mechanics did somehow come into existence in the human brain as our ancient ancestors were selected to have the brain com-

ponents which allowed them to count on their fingers. I suspect something similar happened in regards to human languages.

# 113 Writing Philosophy the Way that King David Wrote Psalms

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=805>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/04/11.]

King David and other ancient Semitic poets, at least those I know of from inclusion in the Bible (some of the Semitic poetry in various works of the Bible was non-Hebraic), would use repetition in various ways, not always exact duplication of the lines but perhaps providing more examples or even saying the opposite in an ironic tone. The book of Job is largely made up of three cycles of poetic conversation amongst Job, Eliaphaz, Bildad, and Zophar; it's far from clear that a modern writer, in perhaps the way of Hemingway at his worst, would have provided more than one cycle of a few points organized in the way of a high school textbook summarizing the U.S. Constitution.

The psalms, as I noted, are often made up of ascending or descending examples of God's greatness as a creator and the corresponding greatness of the Davidic monarchy. The lesser accomplishments of God or David are followed by to the greater and the greater are followed by the lesser. God is in the big picture and in the details as well. It's not clear such writings would make it past the review of a professor at a famous writing school, or perhaps another such place.

I find that I am also repetitive, sometimes cycling around in the way of a song dominated by its refrain. The theologian Stanley Hauerwas had told me my writing was repetitive at times and said it was maybe appropriate for someone teaching new ideas. I think it to be even more appropriate for one who's reshaping his own mind by his writing and is asking—or daring—his readers to do something similar. I don't expect anyone else, wouldn't want

anyone else, to reshape their minds to be the same as my moving-target mind. I do hope they will respond to my writings, to their own experiences, to the other material they decide to study or read, so that they can reshape their minds in **a way** appropriate to Creation as we modern men are coming to know it—in light of the still valid traditional knowledge and exclusive of the now invalid traditional knowledge.

Rhythms. Let the thoughts ascend to some point and then maybe descend to the valley again, maybe jump down at once, and re-ascend.

I suspect this sort of a teaching technique would better allow learning even in highly technical fields such as mathematics or computer science or chemical engineering. It may be one of the reasons behind the advice a mathematics professor once gave in one of my undergraduate classes. “I chose two textbooks of different styles for the bookstore to order, but I think you’d be better off reading each at different times and also reading other textbooks along with some of the original papers underlying this subject.” I believe it was a course in abstract algebra. Anyway, the use of multiple and varying styles of presentation and varying selections of what’s most important would lead to a rhythmic way of shaping a mind to encapsulate this sort of material. Move back and forth between different presentations. For all the various presentations of material, move between active learning and contemplation.

Get into a rhythm of thinking and learning that will allow a fairly rapid yet gentle reshaping of your mind, not a reshaping to someone else’s needs or desires but rather a reshaping to encapsulate some plausible understanding of God’s Creation.

# 114 A Speculative Framework for Understanding Mental and Emotional Illnesses

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

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

I claim, following St. Thomas Aquinas and others, that we're bodily creatures having immaterial aspects, such as mind-like aspects, which are formed of relationships to our environments and to still greater realms of created being understood properly or understood by way of delusions. I'm using some recent research results to ask if such problems as OCD (obsessive-compulsive disorder), bipolar disease (used to be manic depression), and maybe even schizophrenia are due to not being able to properly orient ourselves in our environments, not being able to move about in a coordinated manner, not being able to make flesh-and-blood contact or even just not being able to establish eye contact with our fellow-creatures, and

so forth. This isn't to deny that something can be wrong inside of us, but it is to raise the possibility that psychiatric and mood disorders can be caused by problems in the neuro-muscular or skeletal systems of our bodies and also to raise the possibility that they can be caused by simple problems of coordinating our perceptive or locomotive efforts. I believe they can also be caused by delusionary expectations about our own bodies or what lies around us. These delusionary expectations can arise from our culture or from our upbringing.

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

A mouthful and one easily distorted into literalistic forms.

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

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

Another mouthful.

Let me get to some specific examples.

## 114.1 I'm washing my hands for the fifteenth time without a break; I must be obsessed with germs

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

We can stop there for now. When we suffer from OCD, something has been disrupted in our shaping of the mind which is capable of forming the higher and more complex habits of a human being, and most likely a few other social mammals as well. We need habits. In fact, most of our behavior, including that which is labeled ‘moral’, is made up of habits—see Chapter 385, *Is this evidence against free-will?* for a discussion of evidence that our bodies start moving before there is any activity in the regions of our brain associated with abstract reasoning, planning, and other faculties related to free-will.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### 114.3 I can't position my body correctly and I'm out of sorts

Because of a more complex situation, I'm going to provide a longer quote from this article, *Bipolar Disorder and Postural Control: Mind-Body Connection Suggests New Directions for Treatment*, Research found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/05/110524111349.htm>:

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

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

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

It raises the question of whether therapies that improve motor symptoms may also help mood disorders, said Amanda R. Bolbecker, lead author of the study "Postural control in bipolar disorder: Increased sway area and decreased dynamical complexity," published last week in the Public Library of Science ONE.

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

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

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

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

## 114.4 I seem to be in a story, but it's all blooming, buzzing confusion

What of schizophrenia? Let me first refer the reader to a multi-disciplinary discussion of two parallel phenomena, modern styles of thinking and art on the one hand and schizophrenia on the other hand: *Madness and Modernism: Insanity in the Light of Modern Art, Literature, and Thought* [126] by Louis Sass, a clinical psychologist who is also quite knowledgeable in the fields of literature and art and history and more.

We modern human beings are all schizophrenics, in a manner of speaking, though most of us have lost contact with reality in its wider and more abstract respects, including its narrative aspects in this world, without being aware that something's wrong. See Chapter 348, *My Ends are Mad and Now I'm Also Stupid*, for a discussion of the fears of Melville and other great thinkers of the 1800s that Americans are morally insane, in rebellion against a world that doesn't quite meet with our approval—though most are in a cowardly sort of rebellion.

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

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

The other point I'd like to raise from *Madness and Modernism* [126] is the possibility, perhaps likelihood, that schizophrenia, as currently defined, developed in the industrial age, but I'd also like to note a seemingly con-

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

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

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

## 114.5 Conclusion

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

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

# 115 More on Madness and Modernity, and a Hint of Optimism

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=911>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/07/01.]

In several weblog entries, starting with Chapter 91, *A Thomistic Take on Madness and Modernism*, I've spoken of the insight of the psychologist and polymath Louis Sass that there is an eerie similarity between schizophrenia and modern styles of art, literature, and thought. I'd highly recommend a serious read of *Madness and Modernity: Insanity in the Light of Modern Art, Literature, and Thought* by Sass for a wealth of good historical information about schizophrenia and modern art, literature, and thought. He also includes discussion of particular cases, including the sad case of the daughter of James Joyce who was, in the analysis of Carl Jung, chained to the bottom of the river of madness that her father dived into for artistic reasons.

I'd also noted that “[s]chizophrenia is a horrible disease, one in which the victim loses contact with reality even in its most immediate form—that victim’s environment.” I’ve run into at least one man and two women suffering from this disease—just in the past 10 years and without looking for them—and, even when they were in fairly calm mental states, they seemed to be going through a constant process of inventing their own world which was sometimes just implausible but sometimes involved deeply strange ignorance about reality. Sass had noted that some who suffer from schizophrenia are aware of their strangeness and they express their madness in humorous terms instead of terms of ignorance. When one of these poor human beings

is off their meds (medicines), as they say in the business, or when their meds no longer work, they can be really strange. When their meds ‘work’, this sometimes means their personalities have been flattened and their general metabolisms slowed to a sluggish rate.

One of the questions Professor Sass raised had to do with what might be called the complex of symptoms which are displayed as schizophrenia. As a practicing—and academic—psychologist, he had no doubts about the reality and the horrors of this disease, but he noted that there is very little evidence of those particular symptoms in Europe before 1780 or so, though there were many alienists (psychiatrists, more or less) of a humane nature who were keeping diaries and other records from at least later years in the Medieval Age. Though the problems which erupt in this specific disease are real, it seems possible that the cluster of symptoms we call schizophrenia is a result of particular social conditions, those of the Industrial Age, to speak in broad-brush terms. Perhaps some of us, maybe all of us to some extent, aren’t so well-adjusted to some aspects of modern life? This doesn’t mean that modern life is bad for us, only that we have to maybe change some parts of it and to maybe shape our own selves to better deal with, for example, the modern empirical knowledge about reality which is so poorly integrated into our ways of thinking and acting. Perhaps we don’t readily expand our minds to deal with knowledge of what lies outside our direct environments? Perhaps we haven’t got this industrialization business right yet? Perhaps we need to work on our ways of living in dense regions and of forming human communities? There are many such questions we could raise.

Recently, I heard of neuroscientists who have found leads about the nature of schizophrenia which might lead to causal understandings. In the June 11, 2011 podcast of *Neuropod*<sup>1</sup> at <http://www.nature.com/neurosci/neuropod/index.html>, there’s an interesting talk about a fairly recent discovery that being born in an urban area is correlated with damage to one brain region with that damage being associated with schizophrenia. Moving to an urban area is correlated damage to another brain region with that damage also being associated with schizophrenia.

This doesn’t mean that urban living, as such, is bad, though it might be bad for some no matter what we do. Undoubtedly, rural life is also

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<sup>1</sup>Neuropod is “the neuroscience podcast from Nature, produced in association with the Dana Foundation,”

bad for some. It does mean that it's about time we, as individuals, stop accepting what we're given by governments and all their institutions and stop living with only what the commercial marketplaces offer us. It's time for us to think about what's not good in our ways of living, what might end up being even worse for our children, and to look for what we need or want. Some governments would respond morally to complaints about the way in which public services are provided or complaints that these services are provided by monopolistic institutions, though probably not the self-serving and bloated governments of this age. Free markets would definitely respond, perhaps with a fresh population of service-providers and product-providers. That's the nature of a free market. You shouldn't, for example, be satisfied by public or private schools that don't meet your children's needs. You should try to start your own or make it clear you're looking for some competent and entrepreneurial teachers for your children or for yourself. Or, if you're an autodidact, you go looking for books, lectures on tape, packaged 'experiences', etc. that meet your needs. Exercise your imagination and only limit it to being sane, that is, being responsive to reality. (See Chapter 373, *Keep the Imagination Sane* for a short discussion of Nathaniel Hawthorne's advice to this effect.)

Perhaps we modern people often mimic schizophrenia in our art and literature and thought because we're natural creatures who evolved to shape ourselves to particular sorts of environments which were mostly given to us and not made by men. We modern human beings live in artificial environments to which we're not adapted but we accept them as if they were given while not being able to shape ourselves to those environments. We aren't willing to give up all those gadgets but we don't explicitly try to make these modern environments of gadgets and dense populations and complex human communities into environments more suited to our needs.

There's a mismatch between our insides and our outsides. We imagine an external world to match our insides and there is now an observable strangeness in us. We seem oblivious to the most raw of facts when those facts conflict with those imaginary worlds. Alexis Tocqueville wrote of this strange aspect of the American character in *Democracy in America*, circa 1838.

Having dealt with our disturbing external environments, we modern human beings try hard to see ourselves as sane and well-adapted and the harder we try, the more we separate our thoughts and actions from reality. I think this is the first time I've tried to tie the American disrespect for facts

directly to the schizophrenic nature of modern art, literature, and thought. I also think we should include political and economic activities in those parts of modern life which show schizophrenic traits. Our schizophrenic traits are the result of a defensive withdrawal from environments become disturbing to us and we don't have the faith or the inspired leadership to overcome our fears of those environments and to deal with them, to shape ourselves to those environments or to change them.

The interested reader can read about my views of the American disrespect for facts in Chapter 28, *The Practical Consequences of Inattention to God's World*. You could also download and read a darkishly humorous novel I wrote about the insanity which threatens all of us modern folk: *A Man for Every Purpose* at <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/aman.pdf>.

# 116 Take Care of Your Brain, It's the Only One You'll Have

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=956>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/08/01.]

We're flooded with information on the bad things which can happen to the brain and with some advice, or at least implied advice, on how to avoid many of them. For example, we Americans are obsessed with sports in which violence has become the main point of it all. We also send a significant percentage of our young men and women into military situations (not just in battlefield units) where they risk brain injuries as we learn in the article, *Single Traumatic Brain Injury May Prompt Long-Term Neurodegeneration* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/07/110718171401.htm>.

There are other causes for neurodegeneration, including the problems leading to Alzheimer's and to other forms of dementia. In this article, *Over Half of Alzheimer's Cases May Be Preventable, Say Researchers* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/07/110719072809.htm>, we can read:

Over half of all Alzheimer's disease cases could potentially be prevented through lifestyle changes and treatment or prevention of chronic medical conditions, according to a study led by Deborah Barnes, PhD, a mental health researcher at the San Francisco VA Medical Center.

Analyzing data from studies around the world involving hundreds of thousands of participants, Barnes concluded that worldwide, the biggest modifiable risk factors for Alzheimer's disease are, in descending order of magnitude, low education, smoking,

physical inactivity, depression, mid-life hypertension, diabetes and mid-life obesity.

In the United States, Barnes found that the biggest modifiable risk factors are physical inactivity, depression, smoking, mid-life hypertension, mid-life obesity, low education and diabetes.

There is another article of interest, *Physical Activity Linked to Lower Rates of Cognitive Impairment* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/07/110719101755.htm>. Lest we miss the message, we can also about some supporting information in the article *Keeping Up Your Overall Health May Keep Dementia Away, Study Suggests* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/07/110713161824.htm>.

We're strange creatures in many ways. Rational we are, potentially, but we form habits which are in conflict with what we know or can easily learn and we don't bother to work on changing those habits.

Can we be saved by chemicals? Will the drug industry provide us with silver bullets for our cancers and cholesterol problems? Will they give us happy pills one day, turning each of us into a two-legged Golden Retriever just soaking in our own deep puddles of dopamine? Well, the brain didn't evolve to make us happy and it's unlikely that we can force it to just make us feel good all the time. After all, a lot of our problems, including much of our general feelings of—in a manner of speaking—alienation, are for real. We need to learn how to deal with them. We need to feel an energizing level of upset when it's the world which is wrong and needs changed. We need to learn how to achieve a certain wholeness which allows us to function in our physical and social environments in such a way that we can feel some sort of purpose and detect some sort of meaning in the flow of events which are our lives and the greater stories in which we're embedded.

We shouldn't be surprised to learn from the article, *Patients Who Use Anti-Depressants Are More Likely to Suffer Relapse, Researcher Finds* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/07/110719121354.htm>, that we shouldn't depend upon chemical aids, though they may help. At the same time, we should remember this is a field of incomplete knowledge to say the least and is likely to remain incomplete since man is a creature in context and that context is ever changing. In addition, we should remember there are a number of complications and possible data problems in any complex meta-analysis—

see <http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Meta-analysis> for an explanation of this form of statistical analysis. There is an art to combining the potentially incompatible data of a number of independent studies. I say we shouldn't depend upon chemical aids partly for the reasons of "moral purpose" discussed above and partly because of comments I've read in the books of serious brain scientists to the effect of: the brain is so complex and complicated that there will be no easy chemical solutions to reset a brain which is tending strongly toward a bad state. The psychologists who conducted the meta-analysis discussed in the article say much the same.

I've hit upon this general issue of brain/mind health repeatedly and I'm do so again partly because of the likelihood the West, Western Europe and Central Europe and the United States in particular, are about to pass through some rough times. In a strong sense, we have minds which are shaped to one extent or another as reflections of this world of decaying moral order, this world in which we seem to have lost purpose and meaning.

We need to remember we have some significant amount of control over the shaping of our own minds, so long as we truly intend to have such control, that is, so long as we make the long-term effort to develop our minds in the way of an organ which is part of a greater organism. In particular, we need to keep our brains healthy and use them to shape minds which can support a new phase of Western Civilization or maybe a civilization so different as to gain a new name from historians. The minds we shape will be that new civilization.



# 117 Following My Own Advice

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1010>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/09/07.]

In Chapter 110, *Intentionality as the Guide to Philosophical Thinking*, I discussed this quote:

I keep the subject of my inquiry constantly before me, and wait till the first dawning opens gradually, by little and little, into a full and clear light. [Sir Isaac Newton]

I write often about my efforts to find better ways to describe and analyze our complex and complicated selves, our human individual selves and our human communal selves. This is not simply a matter of laying out a system of thought in a book or a few papers. Even something so seemingly straightforward to us as double-entry bookkeeping was considered for centuries to be a matter to be tackled only by those who could do higher mathematics. It took time for the ideas to properly shape the minds of modern men to those accounting ideas so basic to modern economies and the theories which try to understand them. I suspect that my proposal to learn how to speak of the richness of all created being, including human nature and human communities, from the ways that modern empirical thinkers have adopted to speak of electrons and protons, gravity and electromagnetism is at least as upsetting and intimidating to modern men as double-entry bookkeeping was to our 15th century ancestors. In fact, as I've noted many a time, I think that some historians and many novelists and more than a few brain-scientists, have done much to give us richer and more complex ways to discuss and analyze human nature and human communities. But the overall view we modern men hold of ourselves and our communities is

fragmented and incomplete, not just compared to some vague idea of the perfect and full truth but in comparison to what we could do.

It takes time. We must “keep the subject of [our] inquiry constantly before [us], and wait till the first dawning opens gradually, by little and little, into a full and clear light.” We must intend to the state of fully minded creatures who can kind of, sort of, almost for just a second at a time, see and feel and think of the fullness of created being in a manner consistent with what’s known of those aspects of created being studied by modern mathematicians and physicists.

And so it was that yesterday I was walking down the street as I cooled down from a run and I found myself trying to bypass the geodesic curvature stuff and to visualize myself moving in the appropriate way to be sure I was walking a great circle. Feet pointed straight down to the center of the earth. Check. And I’m walking straight as if continuously being sliced in half by a plane connecting me and my goal and also passing through the center of the earth. This is to say, in terms of differential geometry, that the unit normal vector to the surface of the earth lies on the same plane as the principle normal to the circle implied by my journey from here to my goal. Then again I could think in terms of a zeroed-out geodesic curvature. This is the more fruitful way of thought since it leads more naturally to abstract rules for curves. And that is the point: to be a human being trying to learn how to think by responding to the ideas the Creator has manifested in Creation, that is, to keep in mind the concrete facts but to also mindfully encapsulate the underlying abstract truths. That way lies a more complete and more perfect understanding of created being and the possibility for a better understanding of the story God is telling with created being.

A simple and almost silly visualization brings the memory that Dante’s pilgrim erred by going on auto-pilot and following the straight-line, the line across an assumed Euclidean plane with no side-forces.

The line of least effort in moving forward.

The herd follows that line, the geodesic. Those who veer from mindless movement, to perform acts of good or evil, are the ones who veer from the geodesic. They are the ones who experience forces upon their innermost selves.

But we travel in community groups, though we can hope that they might someday have a character a bit different from a herd of cattle, each of them following the ass ahead. . . Who do the lead bovines follow? Maybe the herd stretches right around the great circle and the lead bovines are following

the asses at the very end of the herd?

In all seriousness, we aim to be individuals and yet members of a morally well-ordered community.

Though it be God who tells the tale in which this community, the Body of Christ, is forming, we do the work in this mortal realm to form the pilgrim Body of Christ, imperfect and incomplete and mortal. And there are some who must lead that pilgrim Body of Christ away from the great circle and towards a better path, a risky path that leads explorers into more dangerous realms. The very shape of our moral-scape is changing. The geodesic curvature is changing but we try hard to follow the path of least effort through that changing moral-scape.

And suppose the effort of trudging through our individual and community lives necessarily increases as we travel up and down slopes which suddenly appeared? We can think we're working hard to obey God's will, but maybe we're still following a least-effort and wrongful path given this hill or mountain which arose in front of us.

And so it is that I contemplate the shape of physical spacetime and the shape of moral spacetime even as I walk down the street, even as I move yard waste to a better spot, even as I read books about gravity or about past ages when men of moral character could still rise to positions of political and social leadership.

I indoctrinate myself not in what serves the purposes of the Principalities and Powers of our age and not what entertains those not interested in pursuing any sort of human excellence. I willfully and deliberately, intentionally, indoctrinate myself in what seems to me to be important and interesting.

I choose the subject of my inquiry and I choose that subject to be God's Creation as revealed in a mind and imagination shaped and disciplined by responses to the Bible and to Creation and to the Creator.

All that's left is to do it.



# 118 Your Mind Is What It Thinks It Is

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

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

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

The American citizenry did this to their collective self and their individual selves and then various sorts of predatory or exploitive men took advantage of this herd of creatures with mutilated moral characters and minds. The exploiters hijacked the process and began to direct the herd-

thought and herd-memory, the herd's understanding of history and of the world in general, towards purposes of their own, though their efforts and their visions of a desired herdview were probably not well-focused and not always consistent between the different groups of exploiters. This is to say that the American exploitive class doesn't really seem to think more effectively than the common members of the herd, though some in the exploitive class are clearheaded enough to run complex criminal conspiracies. A J.P. Morgan or a Lyndon Johnson can certainly see a well-defined opportunity and can map out a path to reach that opportunity with all due brutality.

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

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

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

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

Yet, we should remember that the Bible, and much else that testifies to the nature of human beings, testify that some of us are shepherds and some are sheep. We can speak of those who fill an official spot in a hierarchy as being shepherds and often they do fill an important role just by going through rote behavior even if they aren't active enough to be true shepherds.

Then there are those who are more natural in the role of being shepherds or at least of being sheep willing to go ahead of the flock to check out new pastures.

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

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



# 119 Would the World Be a Better Place if We'd Had Adult Entertainment These Past Few Decades?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1060>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/10/05.]

I don't mean by 'adult' the sorts of stuff once restricted to the combat zones of major cities, the sorts of stuff which wasn't to be found in most small towns but for back closets of certain stores also dealing in numbers and sports bets, the sorts of stuff once hidden in boxes under the beds of some fathers and of some sons.

My thoughts on this matter came to life in a way because of a short note written by Graham Greene as an introduction to a novel, *Loser Takes All* published in 1955, the year of my birth. In that short note, Greene writes:

Unlike some of my Catholic critics, you, I know, when reading this little story, will not mistake me for 'I', nor do I need to explain to you that this tale has not been written for the purposes of encouraging adultery, the use of pajama tops, or registry office marriages. Nor is it meant to discourage gambling. [Greene, like me, entered the Catholic Church as an adult.]

This short note combined with a thought about the turn of Hollywood, once capable of accidentally making a serious and adult movie, to movies about Flash Gordon with better special effects, recycled cartoons with human actors and better special effects, and movies in which seeming adults

show all the moral maturity of a Ferris Bueller who is now 40 and hasn't learned anything from a lot of day's off. In fact, being a 'full-fledged adult', he now feels free to act out more of his dreams and nightmares.

*Ferris Bueller's Day Off* wasn't particularly dangerous because it was about an escape day, a day of irresponsible play, for which the price had to be paid. And it wasn't presented as an ideal about how we should behave, though it was perhaps something of an ideal about how we should freely misbehave for one great day in our lives.

The rest of the stuff pumped out by Hollywood in recent decades has been aimed at the already weak American mind, shaped by the public schools, by Saturday morning cartoons, by the likes of *Leave it to Beaver*. (I did have a weakness, and still do, for *Bullwinkle and Rocky* and for various flavors of Bugs Bunny and his friends, but those were remarkable entertainment products by current standards in requiring the viewer to sometimes know something about history and culture before he understands the jokes. You could say that Bugs Bunny compared to Scooby-doo was like the Marx brothers compared to the Three Stooges.) In my youth, I preferred to spend my time reading a variety of books about nature, books about life in other countries, idealized biographies of prominent Americans, and even collections of fables and fairy-tales. As I grew up, I started trying to read mathematics and science books but floundered badly without either adult guidance or a like-minded friend of my own age. I had more success with adult historical fiction and some straight historical works. And I was probably ready for college at the age of 13 or 14 and most certainly not ready for college at the age of 18 after my enthusiasm and work-habits had been destroyed by a run-of-the-mill American high school.

I wanted to be an adult. I was ready to take on learning as my job, but the pressure was on me to stay at the level of the textbooks and the classroom instruction. I didn't have either a naturally tough or a properly nurtured moral character, didn't have the strength and courage, to move forward on the path which attracted me. It wasn't that I knew what the real issues were, only that I was attracted to being an adult, one with some talent at learning a wide variety of material and one who enjoyed doing so though I had needed some guidance to help me to develop the perseverance necessary to stick with difficult material until it's somewhat conquered. (Actually, I've since learned my ways of learning difficult material don't match up well with classroom-style instruction. Among other problems, I like making one or two false starts at serious mathematics and physics,

even difficult novels. Apparently, that prepares the soil for a more successful effort to plow ahead.)

The problems with my lack of a properly developed moral character only increased with college where I found myself free of most adult guidance and also struggling with the serious freshman courses after my high school experience had led me to believe schoolwork was easy. I was also struggling with too many opportunities to drink beer, play cards, and just toss the bull. I had learned a path to success in high school: go to class, do homework when you had no choice, and ace the course. It didn't work when I found myself in real classes with fellow-students who knew how to work.

We Americans wish to live the adolescent life from 13 to the grave and we do all we can to slow down the maturing of our youth.

What's cause-and-effect? Do we set out to remain adolescents and thus adopt an adolescent life-style, including juvenile movies and music? Do we find ourselves in a society which presents us with an adolescent life-style when we should be adults and we adopt it and continue with it as the advertisements and other forms of propaganda encourage us to remain immature? I doubt there's any clear answer when we're considering complex systems such as higher organisms—where I leave the word 'higher' loosely defined in this context.

Most modern human beings will claim to be creatures of free-will, creatures made for freedom of various sorts, when it suits their purposes. Most of those human beings seem to have entrapped themselves in ways of thought which represent false responses to God's Creation, but those ways of thought are very convenient to that loosely defined class often labeled the 'power elite'. The basic problem seems to be a seduction of willing victims corrupting themselves rather than a rape. Tocqueville was right that Americans are self-censoring and self-brainwashing creatures who would likely create what we'd call a benevolent totalitarian society. Hawthorne was right that Americans prefer promises of financial security to any true sort of freedom. Melville was right that Americans are morally insane, refusing to perceive Creation honestly and believing they can do better than the Creator. Twain was right that Americans aren't preparing themselves for any Heaven compatible with Christian beliefs – we prefer DisneyWorld with a Superbowl stadium on the grounds. Ray Bradbury was right when he wrote *Fahrenheit 451* in 1950 and predicted that television would be sufficient to push us into that totalitarian state feared by Tocqueville.

There are many others who spoke from the viewpoint of historians

seeing patterns of decay emerging in the modern world—such as Hannah Arendt and Paul Kennedy and Jacques Barzun and many others. There was Solzhenitsyn who spoke of Americans as being uniquely evil, less evil at that time, circa 1985, in acts than most powerful peoples of the modern world but seeing ourselves as morally pure because of those abilities to self-censor memories and to wash our brains of inconvenient contents.

Our public disorder has increased. We tolerate dirty language. We tolerate ill-behaved children on the streets. We tolerate the intrusions of corrupted bureaucracies and law-enforcement agencies which act in the way of police-state thugs. We tolerate constant wars against peoples who haven't harmed us, though we're willing enough to accept the most unconvincing propaganda so that the war can begin. We tolerate, no—we honor, politicians who have committed the same acts as foreigners we've hung as war-criminals.

I'd suggest that the real problem is that the Western mind has decayed. We can't establish or even maintain moral order because doing so in the complex modern world requires a good bit of knowledge and some high levels of thinking skills. And we can't even reach the level of our ancestors from the early periods of the Modern Age, when the world was growing larger and more complex and more complicated and doing so faster than could be chronicled.

In *From Dawn to Decadence*, Jacques Barzun has given us a history of the previous 500 years in the West, showing that there has been a relatively steady, certainly relentless, decline in quality literacy, that is, the mental and visual skills necessary to read serious books. I'd certainly argue that that sort of quality literacy is necessary for the abstract reasoning which is a part of the sort of advanced civilization our ancestors built and left to our irresponsible selves. In a soundbite: without Goethe, there will be no Einstein.

We have entertainment at the level of a morally perverse adolescent because that's the level we're at, the level we choose to be at. Individuals can rescue their minds and moral characters from states of decay. There are few in the modern West who have chosen to do so. It's not a matter of 'higher-level' learning but of basic learning about God's Creation, the sort of learning we were supposed to get in our schools after acquiring basic reading skills. To be sure, it helps to read a few narrative histories about any turbulent period of history. Read about World War II if you always wondered why your father couldn't speak much about what he experienced

on the front-lines in the Battle of the Bulge though he spoke about the fun they had in the latter days of boot-camp after the training had eased off. Read about the Revolutionary War or the writing of the Constitution if you want to know what's at issue in current attempts to rein in a government of men who have no limits on their desire for power over other human beings. Read about your own town or region and ask yourself, "What happened to the local tribes of Native Americans?" and maybe "Did the workers in the local factory, including Grandpa, participate in the violent wars of unionization during the 1930s?" Maybe pick up some older and more sophisticated historical novels—the so-called middle-brow novels of the pre-1970 period were often surprisingly substantial and the historical novels were often well-researched. When you have a grasp of some facts of history, return to the meta-historians I mentioned earlier: Hannah Arendt and Paul Kennedy and Jacques Barzun. Then pick up the Bible and read the books of the prophets and meta-historians Isaiah and Jeremiah to make some greater sense of the sound and fury of history.

Then you can start to go outside and see God's Creation in its most tangible form, children playing tag and trees swaying in the breeze. Learn to pray or maybe refresh any existing habits of prayer. Learn to think along with the Creator, sometimes emptying your mind that it might be better filled and sometimes trying to make sense of those playing children as being part of the same story as were the young aristocratic women beheaded upon stages during the French Revolution as the crowds cheered. Then remember the children who'd starved in prior years while those aristocrats lived well and try to find out why.

I think the world would be a better place if we'd had adult entertainment these past few decades. I think it would have been a better place if we'd had better new history books in the public libraries, or if we'd just kept the old books. I think we didn't have those better things because we weren't better people.

They say that history doesn't repeat itself but it does rhyme. I say that our literature and our arts, including music and movies, help us to find those rhymes in history and those rhymes help us to move appropriately, to move in potentially good directions and to move at proper paces. They teach us how communities form and fall apart through the ages. They teach us how to shape, first, our own souls and moral characters and, second, our communities. Who wants to shape their souls to the moral chaos of modern movies and television shows and novels? Garbage in and the garbage stays

there.

I guess I meant to say that Graham Greene wrote about sin from an adult viewpoint rather than from the viewpoint of a perverse and confused adolescent. We would benefit from more books written by adults and entertainment made by adults, even when it deals with terribly sinful adults.

# 120 There is Experience and Then There is Experience

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

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

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

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

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

...

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

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

I confess: I’m one of those men that Adam Smith had feared would develop in the prosperous, commercial societies he was seeing arise and was glorifying in many ways. I’m genial—but capable of impolite behavior when my self-respect or moral beliefs are irritated. I’m also a bit short on the toughness necessary for a true moral character—but I’m toughening up enough that I’m at least willing to force moral decisions on my part by painting myself into corners. I don’t think I’m naturally one of these hollow-chested men, as we modern men were labeled by C.S. Lewis. In many ways, I’m a bit like the tough and gruff—but self-sacrificing—Scotsmen from the older generations in my mother’s family. I also have the sort of perseverance found in my father’s family where many of the men gave themselves, as

many men did, to work such as lead-mining for the good of their families knowing they would earn better incomes than most workers and would end their lives relatively early as they struggled for each breath. That perseverance is a form of courage though a bit different than the impulsive courage found in adventurers and warriors. Despite a good inheritance of potentially tough moral character, I was shaped to be a consumer of what was offered by the modern corporations and governments rather than a man trying to choose a good life and making do with what could be honestly gained in that particular life. As Wendell Berry said somewhere, frugality isn't about saving money, it's about self-respect. It's also not about living poorly for the sake of being poor, it's about living a balanced life which can accept some luxurious goods when they can be a part of a morally well-ordered life.

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

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

We shape ourselves by our experiences but those experiences aren't entirely objective. They are always experiences lived in our understanding

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

# 121 Rooms of Memory

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1100>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/12/06.]

In Chapter 223, *Do We Survive the Major Transformations of Our Lives?*, I wrote:

In *Rewriting the Soul*, the philosopher Ian Hacking had speculated that the multiple personality phenomenon is a largely learned strategy of segregating painful memories. Is our sense of a particular individuality tied that strictly to specific memories? But our memories would not seem so separate from a specific physical body, with a specific set of organs and specific sets of genes that are activated or de-activated as needed by that body.

Our memories can be localized according to a study discussed in this short podcast from *Scientific American: Doorway to Blame for Room Amnesia* at <http://www.scientificamerican.com/podcast/episode.cfm?id=doorway-to-blame-for-room-amnesia-11-11-30>. Our memories can reside in a physical place, in a manner of speaking. I've read before of research indicating that memories can also reside in a mental or emotional or physiological state, including the state of inebriation. This doesn't argue against the unity of the human mind nor against the unity of memory seen as knowledge any more than the existence of separate physical locations, such as the surface of Mars and that of Earth, argues against the unity of the universe. But it complicates matters in a potentially interesting way and opens room – no pun intended—for speculations which could be tested though I suspect that a neurobiologist would hypothesize that the ways in

which we create realms of memory are substantially the same whether the realms are defined in terms of emotional states or physical locations.

Our knowledge of even our immediate environments is contextual because we are finite creatures with limited perceptual and mental powers, powers which are under formation. It would seem that we have to learn the proper relationships between different environments, not surprisingly—would our ancestors have survived if they assumed their meadow-knowledge was the same as their forest-knowledge? Moving from one of those environments to another was akin to moving from one universe to another.

There are hints in all of this that we modern human beings are leading lives fundamentally at odds with the goal of unity which is essential to healthy personhood. We have lives which are segregated into realms of work and regular life and weekend entertainment and summer vacation. We act as if deliberately preventing the development of the unity necessary for a true, morally-ordered personhood.

Yes, we human organisms move between different realms though they be realms of a world, even an entire Creation, which has the properties of unity, coherence, and completeness. Animals, including some noble and morally well-ordered in their limited way, live in realms, sometimes spending essentially their entire life in but one realm. Human beings who would be images of God, who would share the life of that God, have to have a greater ambition. We have to intend to become unified creatures of a sort we would regard as true persons, imitations of God, as we could see Him in His incarnate Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

To intend isn't to hold some vague and fuzzy idea about what I'd like to happen. To intend is to step forward into the future, moving in a specific direction so that I might move toward a goal, might develop into a certain sort of human being.

If you would be a morally well-ordered person, then journey towards that goal. Do what you can to avoid leading the life of distraction which is offered to us in the marketplaces of our age. Learn to read decent and worthwhile books or to make good music, perhaps the music of your Japanese grandmother or perhaps that of the great composers of Western Civilization. Learn how to garden with skill and respect for the land and what it can grow. Learn how to hunt or fish, but not with ATVs and speedboats. Learn how to machine useful products, perhaps customizing the design of your daughter's next bicycle. Learn how to walk while paying attention so that you can spot a hawk or eagle at a distance by his way of soaring and

hovering, going so long without a flap of his wings.

Learn how to be a morally well-ordered person as you move through life and you will eventually see that your kitchen is part of the same house as your living-room. More than that, you should learn that the woods which begin a few blocks away are part of the same environment as your house and yard. Come to know in your heart and mind and soul that the American government and people aren't exceptional but rather part of the same stream of history as our past governments and ancestors in the United States and those in Ireland and in Portugal and in Honduras. Our leaders can be brothers of Alfred the Great or brothers of Bismarck or brothers of Robespierre or brothers of the Medici pirates and gangster-bankers.

Begin to see and feel that unity and coherence and completeness which makes this universe a world, a morally purposeful story being told by God. Then you can begin also to reflect that unity and coherence and completeness and to be a morally well-ordered human organism, an approximation—maybe a good one—to an image of God.



## 122 Evolution Can't do What Evolution Can't Do

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1112>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/12/08.]

There's an article titled *Human Brains Unlikely to Evolve Into a 'Supermind' as Price to Pay Would Be Too High* at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/12/111207104821.htm>. This is interesting, even good to know, but I don't think it matters much so far as the future of the human race is concerned. The brains of individuals might not evolve much while still allowing a substantial amount of advancement in the minds which form and also draw upon a human intellectual community. Our communities and the 'virtual' minds—in a crude manner of speaking—which are part of those communities are far from their limits and that means our minds can advance much further even if our brains are unlikely to become so many 'superminds'. I've often quoted the historian Carroll Quigley in this context (see a general introduction to his life and thought at [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Carroll\\_Quigley](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Carroll_Quigley)):

The truth unfolds in time through a communal process.

See for example Chapter 584, *Knowing Truth in a World Where We Perceive What is Useful*, for a short discussion revolving around the modern empirical insight that we don't see colors directly but rather by way of complex brain operations, a form of thought and not a raw 'seeing' allows us to perceive that red ball as being the same color in shade or sunlight though it reflects different wavelengths of light in those two circumstances. Similar things happen in more abstract forms of thought such as those very intense forms of abstract thought we call theoretical physics and creative

literature. We directly perceive something like an Aristotelian reality which we shaped into a Newtonian reality over the past few centuries, but those 'common-sense' realities mask what we now 'know' to be a relativistic and quantum universe though we strongly suspect it to be 'really' something that remains as yet unimaginable to our best scientists and philosophers and poets. The very fact that we know this tells us we can overcome many of our biological limitations by proper use of our fleshy brains and also by way of our communal ways of knowing.

It doesn't matter if the ad-hoc processes of evolution trick us because that really means we're evolving and—in most parts of our lives—developing at one level and realm of being in which other levels and realms are implicit but invisible. We can discover the ways in which we're tricked and compensate when it matters.

In Christian terms, the mind of the Body of Christ in this mortal realm might have a lot of growth and development left in it, God willing. Much of that knowledge, truth if you will, found in that communal mind does find its way down to individual minds as we can see by the way that advanced concepts from philosophy and technology and business and politics and various 'positive' sciences have made their way into our modern minds as enriched and complexified words and concepts. We individuals can't know all that the communal mind knows but we can know enough of higher-level encoded knowledge to function as petroleum engineers or particle physicists or historians or lawyers or machinists or truck-drivers in this complex world with thousands of libraries, as well as many websites, each containing more knowledge, and vastly more partially processed information and data, than the fabled libraries of the ancient world.

## 123 Escaping Our Ruts

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1201>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/03/10.]

By most standards, I have a funny definition of creativity. We shape our minds, our entire persons, by responding actively and properly to what lies around us, below us, above us, and in us, where all prepositions—‘around’, ‘below’, ‘above’, and ‘in’—should be understood in both spatial-temporal terms and also metaphysical terms. By way of proper responses, we shape our very selves to encapsulate what lies around us, some shaping themselves to very particular environments and communities, some shape themselves to more general environments and more general communities and possibilities of communities—any shaping to imaginary views of reality which aren’t part of the narrative movement of this universe will lead us from reality and into dangerous regions indeed. We properly shape our minds, our entire human beings so that we become persons in imitation of our Lord Jesus Christ and then we share in the true creativity of God. We shape our minds and the behavior of our mortal selves to God’s acts of creating, creating from nothingness and shaping the raw and abstract forms of being into more concrete and more particular forms of being. One funny and interesting aspect of this is that reality does ratchet up in complexity and richness, as well as opportunities and problems, as our understanding also increases in complexity and richness.

So, how can we better respond to the problems and opportunities of this universe? Can we just exert our allegedly free wills and become open-minded and courageous, charge forward in an effort to understand the works of the Creator? Can we just decide to flow over with a willed faith?

No. We must intend to move forward into the future, more willing to cooperate with the true story of our world and that requires us to learn

how to respond properly to God's Creation. We must intend to enter into a communion with the Almighty such that we share His divine freedom, though we get there as students watching as He creates and shapes and imitating His acts by shaping our own selves and helping to shape other entities. We can't create from nothingness and we have limited powers to shape created beings, even our selves, but we must do our best, however humble our vocation or however great our vocation might seem by mortal standards.

However grandiose my recommendation might sound, we must shape our own selves by one small act at a time. And some of those acts might seem strange, even vaguely sin-like to some of a Puritanical viewpoint. For example, there's shots of vodka as in the article, *Vodka delivers shot of creativity* found at [http://www.sciencenews.org/view/generic/id/338406/title/Vodka\\_delivers\\_shot\\_of\\_creativity](http://www.sciencenews.org/view/generic/id/338406/title/Vodka_delivers_shot_of_creativity), where we can read:

A moderate alcoholic high loosens a person's focus of attention, making it easier to find connections among remotely related ideas, the scientists propose online January 28 [2012] in *Consciousness and Cognition*.

...

Intoxication may aid verbal creativity partly by lowering the ability to control one's thoughts, comments psychologist J. Scott Sauls of the University of Missouri in Columbia. He and his colleagues have found that alcohol reduces recall of sequences of sounds and images but leaves working memory unaffected.

My major criticism of the article would be founded upon my preference for good Bourbon whiskey rather than vodka. When I need to escape ruts—including meaningless mental activity, when I need to relax and move on in my thoughts and in my story-telling efforts, I like to end the day by sipping a double-shot while reading poetry or a novel or maybe a history book. (I can't really do this anymore because of my budget and my preference for good-quality whiskey.)

There's also a way I escape ruts by means of a minor medical problem which is certainly not under my control. I sometimes suffer attacks which seem to be caused by floods of histamine which put some parts of my brain out of commission; though disturbing at the time, this problem sometimes

clears my mind so I can make tough decisions the next day or so and to move on.

Some of our psychiatric disorders might turn out to be extreme versions of oddities in the human metabolism which serve a good purpose in the overall story of our race. A drink or two, not as many as Hemingway or Faulkner took, might break up logjams in the thoughts of anyone facing a problem which can only be solved by creative thought, outside-the-box thought. A burst of some mood-altering hormone or neurotransmitter might have the same effect in breaking some out of their ruts.

Scientists have now found some evidence for a strange way to help a generally non-creative human being to climb out of ruts and engage in creative thinking: tell that human being that it's expected for her to be an individual and to do or think out of the ordinary. This article, *Pressure to Conform Can Inspire Creativity* found at <http://www.miller-mccune.com/culture/pressure-to-conform-can-inspire-creativity-39557/>, tells us:

New research suggests less-creative people do more innovative thinking when they are told individualism is the norm, and instructed to conform.

Conform to non-conformity, much like the hippies of my youth, or the purple-haired adolescents who come and go.

I think the tentative conclusion we should take away is that there are more potentially creative human beings than you might expect but many of those need to be forced out of their ruts. Those who aren't self-motivated, who don't take the initiative to look for new ways to behave or think when the old ways don't work, might show some creativity when they take a good stiff drink or when they're told to be creative. Maybe we can see how the descendants of the resourceful pioneers of North America settled down to lives as couch potatoes?

Let me return to my unusual understanding of creativity as being a sharing in the thinking and acting of God—thinking and acting are one for Him. To me, the problem is forcing someone to look outside of their own dreams and thoughts which were put inside of them by schools and television and street-corner conversations. Most human beings settle into their comfort zones and need to be challenged to move somewhere more promising or perhaps just need a little buzz to quiet all those thoughts

pushed into their heads. As is often the case, perhaps I'm in synch in many ways, not totally for sure, with William James:

*To continue thinking unchallenged is, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, our practical substitute for knowing in the completed sense. [78] [page 116]*

We need to be forced out of our ruts, out of our comfort zones, so that we may complete our knowledge, a little, and share with God in His true creativity, the creativity which brought into existence the objects and relationships which are the subject of a truer and more complete knowledge.

# 124 Reason and Imagination Travel Hand-in-Hand

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1224>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/03/31.]

I've been reading *Serious Art* by the philosopher John Passmore. This book has inspired in me some thoughts about what might be called the imagination. I'm especially interested in the relationship of imagination to an allegedly different part of the human mind called reason. It's possible I'm interested because and not despite my efforts to write fiction, mostly novels, as well as philosophy and theology. I use the imagination when I write on topics philosophical and theological, though **maybe** in a different way than when I write fiction.

I've noticed that my ideas on those topics philosophical and theological often appear in the thoughts of a character or in the way in which events are presented in one of my novels and then appear in a more explicit form years later. Apparently, my mind seeks alternatives more freely when I'm off the grid which ties us all to communal thoughts of various sorts, desirable and not. It's not the case that I could go back to one of my novels written in the 1990s and pull out a coherent and complete version of my current ideas about being and about the relationships between God and His Creation. Yet, as a novelist, I've definitely been meandering along the road toward such an understanding and doing so in the persona of fictional characters, allowing me for some intellectual or psychological reason to travel more freely and more confidently, even to explore a few side-trails. Knowing how my lines of thought developed, I can go back to an early novel and see the early development **as if** I had been traveling consciously toward a clearly seen goal. That is no more than an illusion though modern brain-

science discoveries hints I might have been traveling somewhat steadily but unconsciously toward my current systems and narratives of thought. That sort of a possibility, of a human being acting or thinking in a rational way without being conscious of what's really happening inside of him, appears in several of my novels. In fact, I generally question the belief that we're always, or even often, conscious of our processes of reason.

I won't pretend to have a coherent and mature understanding of my imaginative movements, let alone a description which can allow me to communicate what's going on. It does seem that those movements are leaps and skips and spins and joyous runs which the serious creative thinkers can occasionally execute even as they mostly move along calmly. I doubt if Aristotle or Kant or Hume or Heidegger often moved in such playful ways, but maybe Plato couldn't keep himself from doing so nor could Augustine of Hippo and Nietzsche. I can also imagine Melville and Flannery O'Connor willingly moving along as if circus acrobats performing as they moved down the road toward an impending performance. The characters and in their stories, and mine, are often strange in appearance, often the events take on some sort of eerie aura of sorts, but there is never any real evidence of supernatural events, only testimony to a world of depths not yet explored by the human mind.

Though Melville and Flannery O'Connor never—to my knowledge – wrote of metaphysics directly outside of comments in letters, these sorts of novelistic hi-jinks seem to have helped them and definitely help me to get a better understanding of the miracles which are in in the things and events of ordinary life, not because of indwelling genies or visits by angels but because of those depths of being which I explore more directly in my nonfiction writings. That is, a human mind, whether a conveniently insane character in a novel or a befuddled observer in that same novel or in some real-world events, sees—quite correctly—strange and only indirectly accessible realms of being in the those ordinary things and events. Mystics have seen this even if I think most have misinterpreted the workings of Creation. The most hardheaded of saints and novelists of mainstream sensibility, the greatest of philosophers and scientists, have seen this and haven't known what to do with it. The best and most unbiased of observers, such as William James and some of his philosophical disciples—including the neuroscientists Gerald Edelman and Walter J. Freeman, have written of subjective 'events', qualia or purely personal experiences not sharable. I admit there are reasons for speaking this way but, at least as a matter of emphasis, I prefer to

speak of human minds being molded as encapsulations of God's acts as Creator. Something else is happening when we experience what is personal, something real but not personal in the sense of not being sharable. In fact, I've taken the position that the Body of Christ is real and under formation and will result in entities and an entity comparable to the Triune God, three Persons and yet only one God. We will retain our individuality but will be truly one Body of Christ. Even what is most personal in us is, and will be, fully shared with our communities in the world of the resurrected—if, of course, we are raised into that world.

There's a sense in which a metaphysician, possibly a physicist in his philosophical moods, can create at least an outline of an entire universe, even a sketch of a world of moral order such as I've proposed to include the universe allowing for the full spectrum of created being along with the narratives set in the realm of thing-like being, but only a few scientists, such as Einstein, work regularly in realms where it's proper to unleash the imagination and to think in terms of realms of being not directly accessible to human senses, including the amplified senses made possibly by telescopes and x-ray machines. When it's proper to his task, a scientist has to use the higher imagination in the way I'm discussing, leaping and skipping between realms of being, from concrete being to more abstract regions and back again, maybe returning with some good insights which help him to understand why, as well as how, the immune system which distinguishes between 'me' and 'other' was apparently the evolutionary source of the nervous system, including the brain. The bare facts of the relationships between immune system and nervous system will never, by themselves, be more than organized facts. The greater theories are the result of imaginative leaps.

I claim that metaphysicians and some physicists whose work borders on metaphysics (Newton and Boltzmann and Einstein come to mind) work at some primary level of creativity, that is, they try to reconstruct the more abstract levels of the Creator's work, try to understand the materials and tools He created and how He went about using them. If we understand God's act of creating from nothingness as an ontological event rather than some magical event which took place in space and time though neither had existed at the start of that event, we can see metaphysicians and some physicists trying to travel the entire road back to that ontological event and to understand the event itself to some extent by understanding the road back to it.

Most thinkers and most artists and most in more active pursuits should be traveling the roads already cleared by those few called to such a fascinating and frustrating task. There have been few called to that task, only a small percentage of even serious philosophers and theoretical physicists and mathematicians. At this time, after a century or more of explosive developments in physics and mathematics, it seems to me that the baton has, in a manner of speaking, been passed to the brain-scientists who have sometimes found themselves forced to describe an entity which seems to have evolved to encapsulate reality for reasons of successful survivability and attainment of some pleasure in life, but that evolution seems to have given the human brain the capability to travel that road. This is to say that the difficult task of understanding how the brains of Plato and Aristotle and Augustine and Aquinas and Newton and Einstein worked so that they could travel that road is the task of understanding how that road could be traveled. Though Darwin was hardly a competent metaphysical thinker, as he freely admitted, he deserves an honorable mention for truly creative thought just because of some leap into a more honest perception of the evolutionary and developmental aspects of nature. That led to much good including the modern effort to understand brain and mind and thought.

Individual human minds are pulling the human communal mind along as they explore some regions along the abstract end of the spectrum of being. Some of those regions can't yet be reached by disciplined reason—playful imagination would seem to be needed. But it doesn't appear that many serious artists are really equipped to explore such regions—it takes a man with a solid but not too solid attachment to reality as he has received it from the culture and traditions into which he was born. What I wish to emphasize here is that a solid attachment to reality has, over time, come to include a deeper understanding of abstract created being. The sort of imagination I'm speaking of is moving is being directed by opportunities offered by Creation, and those opportunities are leading us further away from being as directly and naively perceived, further into the regions of abstract being. I'm not speaking of the imagination of the businessman trying to move goods faster when demand increases nor am I talking about the more concrete imaginations of most poets and novelists, even the most serious, for—as Passmore tells us: nearly all artists, including the most serious, are tied to concrete realms. In fact, most who are called abstractionists, or similar terms of compliment or insult, are really just looking at a particular aspect of what can be, more or less, directly and naively perceived.

In this essay even more digressive than is my habit, I have to raise the question: is there truly any cleanly-defined line of demarcation between imagination and reason? I think not, but we need a way of speaking of a steady walk as opposed to leaps and bounds, some of which might land us in that briar patch or even to a very short hover over a deep gulch as happened in many a cartoon I saw during my boyhood. In real-life, such happenings result in rapid descents and painful landings. But the imagination also allows us to leap over barriers of a sort to enter fertile pastures not yet accessible by a steadier sort of gait.

Again, as my title claims: Reason and imagination travel hand-in-hand. Also again: each carries us over a different part of the journey, each does a differing amount of work depending on the road being traveled. One way of re-expressing my overall criticism of my fellow-Christian thinkers is that they rely upon a pietistic sort of imagination to travel over realms of created being which have been explored by reason on at least a tentative basis. Moreover, the imaginative acts of nearly all Christian thinkers are from a repertoire of set pieces, dance-steps, parade-ground maneuvers—call them what you will, but they are no more than canned and reflexive responses to even the most interesting and potentially fruitful of possibilities presented by Creation.

I'm exploring and not presenting firm conclusions, though I've tried to state my initial thoughts in a strong way. As I discussed, I think there are some artists, perhaps Melville and probably me in my novelist-mode, who are metaphysicians of a sort, moving through regions of abstract being more freely than what might be called 'normal' artists. The interested reader can download two of my early novels, *The Open Independence of the Seas* found at <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/open.pdf> and its tongue-in-cheekier version *Safe Harbours and Open Seas* found at <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/safe.pdf>, to see what I'm merely hinting at regarding some basic metaphysical issues. Another of my novels, *A Man for Every Purpose* downloadable at <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/aman.pdf>, tells a tale of a man shaping his mind by way of questionable responses to a poorly understood world.



# 125 The Mind and Reality: William James and Me

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1240>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/04/23.]

I've written several times about my opinion that William James held back from the full implications of his teachings or, at least, held back from a viewpoint that would have led him to a plausible conjecture of some sort of fullness of knowledge, however impossible the complete realization of that full knowledge. James saw how a human mind could build up from empirical knowledge to greater structures of knowledge but he shied away from any speculations that this process was one of growing into a world, a process of shaping the mind to encapsulate not just some bottom-up views but an entire world or even an entire Creation.

I agree with the Jamesian pragmatists that we learn about reality by studying reality and building theories from what we can perceive. Our behaviors are formed by, our concepts derived from, thing-like being and from the actions and relationships we can examine in that concrete form of being. I've written about going beyond this in terms of understanding the nature of created being, but I'm interested now in the understanding of how it is that a human creature learns from what is around it.

In *The Meaning of Truth* [78], William James gives us a rather strong hint of a general viewpoint:

*Total conflux of the mind with the reality* would be the absolute limit of truth, there could be no better or more satisfying knowledge than that. [page 156]

The 1913 Webster tells us a conflux is “a flowing together; a meeting of currents.” This leads us at least a little astray and, to make my points, I’ll assume that William James intended (in the full Thomistic sense) the error I’ll attribute to him. It would seem he took the mind as something pre-existing its activity, the mind as something pre-existing its responses to reality and its movements in light of those responses. Somehow it exists independently of reality so that it can come together with that reality. By being filled with proper knowledge? Maybe the mind could be envisioned as a pre-existing lump of clay upon which reality makes impressions of greater or lesser clarity and sharpness? There is at least something to this since there are, in a manner of speaking, three layers to the human mind:

1. the species level which has come into being over many generations by processes described by biological evolutionary theories,
2. the social/cultural level which is the result of human communities shaping their thinking- and doing-traditions over some number of generations, and
3. the individual level which is the result of an individual actively shaping his thinking and doing to his environments.

The first item comes to exist by normal biological development, being damaged mostly if the particular human being passes through a window of opportunity without the proper stimuli or with suppression of active responses. An example of such a window is the period during which the human language centers of the brain must be developed or else that human being won’t be able to use language in a human manner.

The second item is largely what came to be during the rise of human cultures and, most importantly for modern men, during the rise of those complex communities we call ‘civilizations’.

The third item can be taken naively as the raw smarts of a human being. This can be dangerous as I believe Americans are showing because powerful minds can exist as poorly formed and barely socialized. This leads to Americans engaging in rational thought about, say, the situation in Afghanistan without having learned a bit from our greater knowledge of that bloodied country and, even on the part of seemingly devout Christians, without having bothered to have learned a bit about general history or about Christian

teachings on war and politics. Don't rely on the writings of current Christian leaders or their advisers—these creatures are as intelligently ignorant as most Americans are. In other words, active and capable American minds typically work in a vacuum, making up a view of the world and then analyzing that view along with a small scattering of facts and producing the solution for similar problems in a similar, but non-existent, world.

So, what is the mind which comes into conflux with reality, which flows along with reality? I've given simple answers in my past writings because my beliefs lead me to try to deal with being at a fundamental level before moving on to more concrete matters. To be sure, my mind was quite inadequate for the task. Now I'm starting to ponder better descriptions. But I'm not yet read to settle on much. I'll move on and say that I'll start to explore better possibilities in the rest of this essay and I've got some other essays started which might lead to better answers than I've given in my writings so far. And I will say the answer I'll arrive at when my work is done will undoubtedly be a little bit of a surprise to me though not as much as would be the better answers of yet unborn thinkers.

To be able to move on, I'll return for now to writing in a more naive mode as I address the comment of William James, more explicitly sympathetic to the problems he had in speaking about something where his intuition seemed to be outrunning his explicit knowledge.

A mind isn't shaped from some raw stuff which could be labeled as mind-stuff. Then again, there are structures in the human brain which give rise to functional abilities and inclinations and which can be spoken about in an as-if manner. Our human ability to learn language looks to be language-stuff inside our skull. The problem with some as-if language is that it leads to a reification of function to be turned into stuff which can then be etherealized once it's proven that there is no physical mind-stuff, only a bunch of neurons which develop into structures rather than being a set of given structures at birth or conception or whatever. Different thinkers can stop at different points on this journey or even travel this sort of path in different order. The point is that all such journeys lead away from reality, from the empirical world and the totality of Creation in which the world is embedded.

Our brains have some serious amount of structure and a lot of developmental inclinations because of what happened over the past few billion years on earth.

The human brain gave rise to mind, as I use the term. In an upcoming

essay, I'll discuss an insight by Jacques Barzun who uses the term, 'mind', in a more general way, reminiscent to me of Neoplatonic ideas, which makes sense in the general flow of Western thought. I won't be changing my usage, though I'm not totally opposed to that other way of using 'mind'; after all, I consider all created being, including abstract being, to be manifested thoughts of God. We could talk about all of Creation as being a part of God's mind, but that sort of talk, while possibly useful, can lead to pantheism, to the total identification of God with Creation.

In any case, we can see how useful it is to talk as if there are chunks of clay in the human mind, such as it is, at birth. And there are rocks not to be reshaped though perhaps to be ground to dust. And there's at least one other sort of non-stuff, though it's arises from the activity of the human brain as it interacts with, responds to, its entire body and all that lies around it. That other, more mysterious non-stuff becomes more obvious, though no more visible, when that human being speaks and thinks complex concepts, when it tells stories and invents poetry which is sometimes a story and sometimes not. That non-stuff gets us closer to true mind as a useful concept.

The world is the stuff and non-stuff of a story which includes a huge number of characters and subplots, a huge number of props and settings. By 'non-stuff', I mean immaterial aspects such as relationships though those are still mediated through physical means. Other creatures, including human beings of lesser awareness such as children and those with damaged or poorly developed minds, act their roles as characters in these narratives and thus act as-if they had minds, but those aren't really signs of a true mind, an imitation of the divine thoughts which are manifested in created being. They are the manifested thoughts, the created being, acting according to their nature, a nature given them by the Creator by way of acts-of-being.

Physics and biology and history and other fields of empirical research and analysis work at two levels. They help us to learn about the stuff of our own human natures and of all other creaturely natures, those of stars and rattlesnakes and electromagnetic fields. They also help us to understand the movements of our own selves and our environments and the entire universe through time, that is, they help us to sketch out a variety of narratives.

There's a lot more to be said about the nature of being, concrete and abstract, which goes beyond the understanding of concrete being in its thing-like manifestations, but that's well beyond the scope of this essay. I've written about some of that lot-more before and might one day write

various overviews.<sup>1</sup>

To return to William James: it's a little surprising, given his own literary bent and that of other members of his family, that he seems to have shied away from thinking up into the story levels of greater parts of the universe, let alone Creation. And that is the more neutral way to describe this world: this universe seen as a true narrative. A narrative gives us a moral ordering of some sort, however much some narratives might repel us. In my Christian way of viewing this world, it's but a part of Creation, a part we can label concrete. This concreteness isn't for its own sake. Rocks and rabbits don't exist as mere objects. These concrete entities, things and living creatures, are part of stories which are in turn part of a complex narrative, a huge story being told by God. Relationships are primary and relationships in this universe are dynamic and lead to a huge variety and far huger number of stories.

Stuff and its fundamental physical relationships exist to participate in various stories or, rather, the stories are relationships and shape the raw stuff of this universe so entities arise to play roles in those stories. Even in an amoral or pre-moral way of speaking, that is the purpose of stuff and its relationships because, after all, that's what stuff does, though imperfectly and transiently. The purpose of life is survival, though survival is ultimately defined differently for an elk, for a virtuous pagan believing this world to be all there is, and for a Christian who believes in a greater Creation which includes the possibility of surviving on the other side of the grave. Survival of the fittest, never-ending memories (in some sense) of the most noble, survival of those best able to share the life of God. Human beings survive, or fail to, in these various senses and probably others.

There's much to be done in this area and I don't claim to have done much more than point in the general direction of some possibilities. I'd like to develop some ways of talking about stuff and relationships and how stories develop when relationships, primary in being, create stuff, secondary but still essential to our existence, and events start popping up, often to our surprise. This is very important because those all important relationships which carry moral import lead to these stories but then further develop within these stories. When we've reached this narrative level, we're in Darwin's territory (and eventually that of Homer and Moses and the Evan-

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<sup>1</sup>As of 2012/05/14, I'm working on a book about the human mind which I hope to finish before the end of the year.

gelists) rather than that of Einstein, though it has to be conceded that Einstein's work has been very useful in describing a physical universe which develops in the way of a strange story rather than being some mechanical development of given and unchanging objects.

As I've noted in Chapter 156, *A Christian's View of Einstein and Bohr's debate on the meaning of reality*, Einstein himself was inclined to see objects as existing independently of their relationships, capable of engaging in relationships but not being changed by them. Bohr saw more clearly and was the one who was closer to the ways of thought of Christian tradition—see Chapter 35, *Until We Know What Truth and Freedom Are, We Should Be More Modest In Our Claims*, for an overview of those traditions.

We need ways of talking about stuff and relationships, those coming from those realms of raw being also those secondary relationships which develop in relatively more concrete realms of being and which include what we would recognize as moral relationships. William James provided his followers with part of the vocabulary and concepts necessary to engage in such discussions but neither he, nor any of his disciples I know about, have moved on to engage in philosophical or scientific versions of the discussions that the other James brother, Henry, put into the form of moral fictions.

The best possible human knowledge shouldn't be viewed as William James did as a free-standing human mind learning to flow along with created being. A proper human mind is the physical human being as an encapsulation of this world and that requires us to encapsulate also the abstract realms of being from which things are shaped. Our minds come into being as manifestations of that perfect knowledge which James wrote about. Our minds are not entities which exist apart from that knowledge and somehow acquire it by coming together with the things of this universe.

If William James had been willing to conjecture a world, he could have seen this.

# 126 Ideas, Objects, Truth, and All That

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1243>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/04/24.]

This is the last chapter dealing with that profound and profoundly frustrating work by William James, *The Meaning of Truth* [78] where he claims:

It is *between* the idea and the object that the truth-relation is to be sought and it involves both terms. [page 165]

No, but, once again, his error carries more insight than the truest thoughts of many serious thinkers, perhaps most. He conjectures that truth lies seen in some sort of blurry space between idea and object. Blur there is, but it's a blur around and inside that object.

There are no disembodied ideas. There are no disembodied truths accessible to human beings. The same idea can, usually will, arise from more than one object. A multitude of objects can be shaped from the same truths.

Before going on, I'll make an apology of sorts to William James. He was so dedicated to a sort of agnosticism of religious and metaphysical beliefs that he was prone to not following up on his own insights but it would have been hard for a sane thinker—prior to the forced acceptance of quantum theory and the theories of relativity and the theory of transfinite numbers—to have thought of things and time and space as being shaped from abstractions, hard to have thought of the human mind as being an encapsulation of the world, in those early years of the recent explosive growth of empirical knowledge and of the abstract knowledge drawn from, feeding into, and overlapping with that empirical knowledge. It's possible

that the ancient Pythagoreans had some insights into this possibility but, if so, they quickly and prematurely concretized their insights into some sort of dogmatic and cultic form. Even, or perhaps especially, those of us who think God, or the gods, to have given us special revelations have to be careful to keep our understanding of empirical reality connected to but distinct from those revelations. Those, including likely Einstein, whose one God is Created Being itself, will naturally and legitimately intermingle any revelations and empirical knowledge.

Modern physics has probed thing-like being to find hints of ever-smaller things and also hints of the totality of concrete being we call the universe. For the most part, what they've found has been a sort of being eerily similar to the things we can see and touch but different in a way that hints quite strongly of abstraction, of being that's not quite this or that until specific concrete relationships are formed at the proper level. Similar comments can be made about a number of fields in mathematics.

That should be obscure enough for most inclined to metaphysical thought and I'll turn to critiquing the language used by James in the above quote.

An idea, in the sense of something formed in the human brain, isn't something which exists independent of created being. It's an approximation to some aspect of either abstract or concrete being. I'm pretty sure that James knew this and nearly as sure that he was trying to get at that point but by way of a reaching out into a space of sorts found between the thinker and the object. In this way of thinking, mostly the right way to think when a concrete being grapples with abstractions: an idea of a circle is an approximation of some abstract relationship captured in the various definitions of a circle, a line formed by points equidistant from a single point and now seen as a formalism or abstraction of that relationship. An idea of a tree is an approximation to some very complex relationships between family lines of organisms which are now seem as parts of narratives explored by evolutionary biologists. And so there are some very complex entanglements of abstractions out there in our world.

William James most certainly didn't think that either truths or ideas exist independently of objects or at least of objective being. Unlike me, he didn't even seem to accept truths transcendent to empirical reality, though transmitted through that empirical reality. He may have known that those objects, being involved in more or less continuous acts, are entwined in streams of activity which we can roughly label as narrations even before

we deal with purpose or with a morally purposeful Creator or morally purposeful actors or observers. Ideas are human approximations to the ‘truer’, or at least more abstract, nature of objects and of narrative actions, but even the most abstract of ideas are entangled in narrative streams. This is one of the strange lessons of the modern exploration of some very deep abstractions: no matter how abstract and useless a mathematician intends his work, some computer scientist or particle physicist will find a concrete application.

Perhaps William James should have said:

It is inside the object, often very deep inside the object, but also around the object, that the idea is to be found which is an approximation to truth. A human creature can only see the truth in the entanglement of object, the human ideas related to that object, and some prior understanding of the truths from which that object was shaped.

At least that’s what I would say, though it would be nice if I could find a more elegant expression. The careful reader will note I’ve complicated matters a little by adding in a touch of what might be called ‘Bayesian blending’, but don’t worry about that because it’s another way of talking about nurturing and reforming our intellectual inheritance and also our own minds as they grow and mature. But here’s an additional claim which might help to clarify what I mean:

Traditional Realisms or—equivalently—Idealisms have erred in seeing that things and something-like-idea have not fully independent being but even the sublime Plato himself made the mistake of confusing ideas and truths.



## 127 Intelligence vs. Intellect

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1246>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/04/25.]

I realize there are a multitude of good books out there I'll never so much as open but sometimes I feel an urge to re-read a particularly good book. So it is that I've picked up *The House of Intellect* [7] copyrighted by Jacques Barzun in 1959. In the first essay, he makes a nice distinction between intelligence and intellect. He draws his specific examples from the United States but is speaking of the entire modern West when he says, on page 4: "Intellect is despised and neglected." But he'll tell us on that same page:

We [in the United States] have in fact intelligence in plenty and we use it perhaps more widely than other nations, for we apply it with praiseworthy innocence to parts of life elsewhere ruled by custom or routine. [page 4]

Professor Barzun has his take on a problem similar to one I've discussed in some essays, though my terms are different, being those of a Thomism updated to consider modern empirical knowledge. Barzun is perhaps the prime example of a well-educated and highly cultured academic who was born at the end of a period of creative ferment which is hard to even grasp and who lived through a period of consolidation of that creativity which seems to have prematurely turned to a period of decay and increasing moral disorder.

Near the bottom of that same page 4 so dense in insight, Barzun tells us:

Intellect is the capitalized and communal form of live intelligence; it is intelligence stored up and made into habits of

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

Ah, now we see. Barzun is in the tradition of the mainstream of Christian thought in the West. He would probably agree with Quigley's claim that "Truth unfolds in time through a communal process." He might disagree with some of the terms because Christian thought, despite the misunderstanding of most historians and most philosophers, theologians, etc., isn't a specific metaphysical viewpoint in the sense of having a pre-existing schema to used to understand what's out there. It's an empirical viewpoint, a baby metaphysics of sorts which can grow so long as we don't deform it with the oddly shaped clothing of Platonism or Neoplatonism or Kantianism or British Empiricism or Liberalism (in political and economic domains). Creation is the work of a God of power and wisdom and freedom. He created what He wished to create and He can bring us along so that this Creation unfolds to our viewpoint in a variety of ways. To have any chance of understanding reality, we need to suspend unconfirmed aspects of our personal or inherited beliefs in the nature of the being which we observe in the pretty little girl growing toward womanhood or the star imploding into a black hole. We need to study what is, to contemplate its meaning, and to make sense of it in terms available to us, terms developed by prior generations supplemented by our discoveries and insights. There is, of course a danger: past generations could have headed in the wrong direction and we'd then likely be in a position where it would take some number of generations to make it back to the proper path, the proper understanding of God's work which is Creation.

The understanding of Creation which we start out with is that intellect of which Barzun speaks, "the capitalized and communal form of live intelligence." I think that there are diseases which can affect intellect, the capitalized intelligence of some significant community, which are similar to diseases of the individual and his intelligence, such as schizophrenia and various sorts of distortions to perceptions. A healthy intellect, however imperfect it proves to be in some ways, however incomplete it necessarily is,

gives us an understanding of our world and a corresponding understanding of the meaning of the created all. An immature intellect can leave us with a distorted understanding of Creation and the corresponding lives not meaningful beyond the animal level. We could then say that we would have diseased intellects.

As Barzun has noted, there is plenty of active intelligence in the modern world. It's pretty common for me to be in strange conversations with men and sometimes women who have shown good moral order in the ways they've led their lives, holding down responsible jobs and maybe responsible positions in a parish or a town government or other public organization. They reason pretty well, I must admit, but they come to strange conclusions about the various messes in southwestern Asia or in our relationships with Russia or the current problems between church (or Church) and state (or Union in Lincoln's idolatrous terms). I sneaked in that last parenthetical expression to exhibit an idea which may or may not be partially or fully true but it isn't likely to come to anyone who hasn't read any works in some particularly important lines of dissident thought in these United States of America.

I've read revisionist historians of various sorts, the Southern Agrarian viewpoint being a bit raw but still my favorite but I've also done some reading in the Old-Right tradition and the more straightforward libertarian tradition, various leftist traditions and some thinkers who draw from various specific traditions. What's important is the fact that all of these thinkers were serious and morally well-ordered men and women, drawing themselves upon the traditions of (mostly) the West. Works of historical and cultural criticism are one good food for building up intellect, as are works of poetry and fictional narratives, of science and mathematics, of philosophy and gardening. Good books, good apprenticeship programs – even if just in the form of going into the fields as a friend of a master birdwatcher, provide the stuff of intellect but also the habits and customary usages of that stuff. It teaches us how to identify good wood but also how to make a roll-top desk from it.

As I said, I also often find myself in strange conversations with my fellow-Americans where they pronounce, as if experts on the topic, and then draw conclusions which would be reasonable if what they think they knew were true. The Internet, and maybe a good history or even travel book from the local library would raise the level of their intellects to a level more appropriate to the high level of their intelligence. It would take serious

effort for even most Americans with higher degrees to raise their intellects to a level appropriate to the decisions we've already made by allowing self-serving scoundrels to control our government and the tremendous firepower of our military.

There are a number of military and intelligence professionals, some are both, who will testify to the rationality and even reasonableness of the Iranians and some will testify to the corruption of American foreign policy to suit the purposes of American domestic politics. American political operatives have made many collateral corpses in Iraq to win elections and now threaten to make Iran glow in the dark because those Iranians can't be trusted with nuclear weapons, but those American political operators also seem intelligent enough, sometimes even giving some hints of moral intelligence, but only in a very limited sphere, the sphere of individual actors.

As a country, we've utterly failed to develop an intellect, that is a morally well-ordered understanding of our world. We don't really even seem to have done much to take the small, educational steps of developing a rational understanding of our relationships to Mexico or Cuba or even Canada. We're too smart and too proud to admit we're poorly educated adolescents—at best. In the sense of individual intelligence, we're as smart as we think we are, but we're pretty dumb and very ignorant in the sense of that intellect, that capitalized and communal intelligence, so important to being morally responsible members of these modern communities, so large and complex.

We've created those large and complex communities in various realms of human life, political and economic and cultural, but those communities are poorly founded—which is, at least for this discussion, the same as saying we haven't developed any understanding, any intellect or communal and capitalized intelligence adequate to the tasks of running such complex communities.

# 128 Should We Read Words or Sentences, Essays or an Opus, Cities or Civilizations?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1376>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/08/18.]

Some write down scales or perhaps compose etudes. Some write simple tunes or even multi-part tunes. Others compose concertos and sonatas and symphonies which can't be fully understood unless fully held in mind, if only for an instant. A section in the third movement might well play off a section in the first movement. Of course, at all levels of complexity, simple tunes or symphonies, there might well be references to matters of Scottish or Czech culture or the work of another musician, perhaps even one from an ancient civilization.

There is, of course, a correlation between the complexity of a tradition of music and that of the encompassing civilization, between the discipline necessary to compose music of a certain standard and the discipline necessary to allow oneself to be properly entertained or enlightened by that music. Yet, can they truly be separated? Or even put back together?

In this way, meaningful texts are no different from musical compositions.

I imagine myself to write symphonies. I'm driven to so write or else I wouldn't since there is not much to be gained in writing symphonies in an age when the desire and capability is for receiving teen-aged ballads and mood music where the mood is increasingly one of moral emptiness or outright sickness. Would I be overstepping a boundary if I noted at this point the irony of my analogy?: music of a high quality, even opera!, has survived and has somewhat prospered in an age when poets and novelists

are selected by publishers for their ability to produce texts which allow American readers to stay within their comfort-zones, to use no more brain-power or heart-power or hand-power than if they were watching bullets going through the body of a good Samaritan on the streets of an Asian city or watching a monkey crapping at the zoo.

Flannery O'Connor once wrote that Americans were neither compassionate nor moral, only squeamish. We're being trained out of our squeamishness when it comes to the other and being trained to be still more squeamish when it comes to fears of what the other might do to us.

Can we catch a scan of this phenomenon, an image of an evil grin on the skulls hiding underneath our skin? Can we design a non-biased survey which will tell us if Americans place little value on the other other beyond the other's willingness to submit to our charity, exercised at the point of a gun or under the rule of graduates of Harvard Business School or perhaps under the beatific smile of a 22 year-old social-worker, recently graduated from Notre Dame or Radcliffe and so eager to make the world a better place?

I've developed thoughts along this line before, not the moral critique as substance but the moral critique or other commentary as substance and style which are entangled and each as complex as the other and still more complex when held as one line of thinking and feeling and doing. I was encouraged to revive these efforts when I recently read Jacob Neusner's books *Judaism in the Matrix of Christianity* [97] and *Christian Faith and the Bible of Judaism* [98]. Some months back, I had reread Rabbi Neusner's *Confronting Creation: How Judaism Reads Genesis* [100].

Neusner writes of sages who were as little impressed by the usual rules of prose as I am. Some of them wrote stuff that seems to make little sense and others assemble the nonsense in such a way that we can see great wisdom. But then we see the nonsense is something different than what we thought it to be. Maybe we also see the wisdom as questionable.

You see, there are commentators and there are redactors who assemble comments as if they were no more than steel beams. It's not clear if those redactors bothered to use rivets. Perhaps their efforts are untrustworthy and ready to fall at a breath from the big bad wolf?

Let me try to get back on track.

Neusner differentiates between the redactors of major works and the writers of the short 'conversations' which are commentaries upon Scripture or ideas related to Scripture—the sages didn't always quote Scripture be-

fore developing important ideas, nor did they always proof-text as they were carrying out that development, nor, as he powerfully points out, did they always end a story with a proof-text as did the authors of the Gospel of Matthew. The individual commentators created short texts and the redactors arranged them to make points more strongly or to make points which couldn't be made in short texts and maybe couldn't be made explicitly—there is no bulls-eye and Hermann Melville knew this as well as did the redacting author of the book of Job. In a sense, and this is my analogy, the redactors were writing poetry where the individual lines were quoted from the works of others. Some modern poets, most famously T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, wrote poetry in which substantial parts were quotes from classic texts or allusions of the sort which were nearly quotes. The meaning is in the ensemble, in the greater structures of the textual symphony. Baudelaire didn't always make sense either but Eliot quoted him in such a way as to elucidate why lighting candles and praying novenas with the pious old ladies might be better than teaching that the tradition is glorious in a way which is less convincing than whining that the tradition is beyond the reach of modern gossipers. In any case, the two were connected by a fascination with cats which context remained unstatably invisible to those not having a small acquaintance with the greater body of works.

Sometimes, it's better to write a simple text, or a simple piece of music. Bach was particularly wide-ranging in his musical efforts, writing or sometimes collecting little snippets. Hayden also seems to have been such a collector since snippets sometimes pop up in the midst of a symphony. Beethoven made his living partly by setting popular ballads to music and went on to die in the midst of a possible effort to enlarge our ideas of what music is—and no one has taken up his unfinished task, unless it's happening as we otherwise finish boring our Western selves into submission to our home-grown parasites. Yet, it's at least arguable that others followed him and managed to write some symphonies as great as one or two of his. Perhaps the uncompleted efforts of Beethoven could be seen in some greater gathering of works he was able to complete? Perhaps.

But I'm writing about texts and perhaps should stick more to the topic.

We often think of texts, say the writings of great historians, as being in conflict in such a way that one of them "tells the truth" and the others are more or less false depending upon how close they are to that truth. Sometimes, it's better to think of the historians or poets or political philosophers as being in some sort of very complex musical interplay, even across

academic department lines of demarcation. This is not because there are multiple truths nor because there is no truth as such nor even because universities are as useless as they've made themselves to be. We often find it beyond difficult to reach a convincing view of matters and should be a little modest about tossing around words such as 'truth', but the problem is something different.

We're digging down toward a treasure and sometimes Tom tosses dirt to a spot where Dick later works and he might toss it toward Harry's spot or back at Tom.

We're feeling up an elephant and sometimes come to a part which we perhaps shouldn't be touching in such a way and sometimes we come to a part which we falsely think to be private to the elephant or at least embarrassing to the touch of someone not trained in the veterinarian sciences.

We're dissecting a long-dead mammoth which has recently emerged from the frozen tundra of Siberia and suddenly we come to understand some of those parts of a modern elephant.

We read the Bible to find that David was a God-centered man and we have then to wonder what god he served when he was in business as a soldier-for-hire.

We learn of Wittgenstein spending years studying the logic which some would use to provide firm foundations for mathematics, a much shorter time demonstrating that those foundations were built upon sand, and then went on to small-scale fame as an orderly who wrote short collections of aphorisms which sometimes make little sense except when you step back a little and forget the words.

We read of the Christian faith of the Founding Fathers of these United States and politely try not to notice how few of them raised their children to be orthodox Christians by any reasonable definition. We look away, fearful that we who have failed in the same way may also have little in the way of true faith to pass on.

On that note, I end because I'll soon be writing upon that topic and I'll be claiming that we do pass on our faith, as did most of those Founding Fathers. How very sad.

# 129 Have Scientists Found Mind or Part of It?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1443>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/11/26.]

Years ago, I proposed that the immaterial feel of our minds might be the result of fields playing a major role in our thinking. An article, *Neurons Talk Without Synapses* found at <http://www.the-scientist.com/?articles.view/articleNo/33350/title/Neurons-Talk-Without-Synapses/>, discusses recent work that shows neurons ‘talk’ to each other by way of changes in electromagnetic fields and not just by direct electrochemical contact.

I think there may well be similar effects due to quantum fields, meaning there may well be quantum effects coordinating the activities of specialized cells, which means that there would be quantum effects at the level of certain cells. There might well be cells which will change state as a result of the transition of an individual electron to a different level of energy. At the same time, I strongly disbelieve in any quantum magic that provides us with ‘consciousness’ or ‘freedom’. If we look for freedom where it’s not to be found, then we may convince ourselves there is no freedom.

As one example of the ‘survival usefulness’ of quantum effects, they would allow animals to be unpredictable black-boxes from the viewpoint of predators. Otherwise, a specific family-line of creatures might develop a tendency to go right more often than not when trying to escape a dangerous predator. In fact, there are cells involved in motor control which are so finely balanced in their electrochemical states that the transition of a single electron in one of those cells might be sufficient to put it in a new state. Of course, it’s very conjectural to write about a capability which might be useful to the survival of creatures in a world of dangerous predators. We

should be careful when engaging in such potentially ill-disciplined speculations. Evolutionary theory is the most empirical, fact-based, of all branches of scientific thought, but it's a part of the world which has proven to be part of a realm of created being which has abstract regions which can only be understood by corresponding ways of thought, with those ways of thought be our ways of shaping our minds to those abstract regions rather than being ways adopted by some pre-existing mind which can somehow think in occultist ways, ways transcendental to the regions of being in which the human being himself is to be found.

We should be clear about the nature of reality and of the abstract regions from which our world is shaped and about the ways in which our minds are formed as we respond to concrete and abstract regions of created being. Some of those abstract regions are manifested in our minds as mathematical systems. What evolutionary biologists study isn't just some sort of 'after-the-fact' factual results of some mystical randomness but rather a true factuality being played out, a narrative-based factuality.

Most modern human beings seem to think of 'randomness' in terms of something coming out of an occult dimension, not so glorious as the transcendental regions from which our minds and best thoughts originate but still better than the mundane stuff of earthly life. Even some otherwise sophisticated thinkers from various fields of science accept this strange mysticism as being hardheaded realism. This occultist view of randomness is a literalization of formal definitions from so-called probability theory, itself more a pedagogic tool easily folded into a fully-deterministic measure theory.

We modern men truly possess that perverse literacy and the resulting invincible ignorance which Thomas Jefferson saw in his fellow-Americans in the early 1800s. See Chapter 380, *The Size of Human Freedom* for a discussion of the nature of randomness.

# 130 Human Wisdom Should be Dynamic and Not Static

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1502>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/01/21.]

I repeat myself to a lesser or greater extent in many of my essays. I don't do so to annoy or bore readers but rather in an effort to gain a new perspective which might bring new insights, if only a whisper, and might reach new ears and maybe inspire new thinkers. After all, I seem to be involved in a conversation which includes whispered hints by God but no words written or spoken by human beings other than myself. I try to supply what is lacking and is needed to refine my own ways of thought. I'm trying to get human thinkers moving toward the deep reform of our decaying Christian civilization, the West, or toward the building of foundations for a new Christian civilization. It's not sufficient for me to toss out messages in a bottle and hope some thinkers in a future generation will find those bottles. It's not sufficient for me to accept the relatively high probability of a century or so of darkness, of violence and stupidity and disease and slavery, much like the period which disrupted Western Civilization after the collapse of the High Middle Ages. I don't accept the need for such an ugly and pain-filled age. I think we can build a short bridge to a age still better than the one ending, but it'll require a better understanding of Creation, of the story God is telling and in which we can participate fully and intelligently only if we actively pursue such an understanding.

In this essay, I try to re-summarize in few words an old conclusion and find myself proposing what is to me a different way of seeing the reasons why so many Catholic traditionalists, and other traditionalists in a similar way, are so ineffective in opposing the destruction of respect for truths beyond

the manipulation of power-seeking and wealth-seeking and comfort-seeking men. We need also to construct a narrative of Creation in light of our small stock of revealed truths which is more plausible and more coherent than the narrative we've inherited, a narrative developed from understandings of more limited regions of Creation. We modern men have progressed in our understanding of concrete, empirical realms of created being and also in our ability to reach more deeply into abstract realms of created being, though we certainly haven't progressed in such ways as moral order of our individual or communal selves.

And so, I return to the human understanding of Creation, emphasizing the story of the loss of a plausible Catholic understanding over the past two or three centuries. Yet, it is the story of Western Civilization in the Modern Age and applies, in a form only somewhat modified, to Calvinist intellectuals and Lutheran intellectuals and even those who are virtuous pagans (in which category I place the more admirable atheists). All major lines of thought, including those of self-labeled traditionalists or even those of self-labeled Catholic traditionalists, have come to include mistakes produced by our failure to truly see that the best of human wisdom is only an approximation to the perfect knowledge of God but also of failing to see that we're constantly learning more of the thoughts God manifested in Creation and, thus, failing to move our wisdom, our fumbling substitute for perfect knowledge, toward a more perfect and more complete state.

In fact, those who would defend the higher truths revealed by God or gained by past human responses to God's Creation have retreated from a courageous and faith-filled exploration of Creation and an equally courageous and faith-filled response. We're living off the wealth left to us by long-dead theologians and philosophers and poets and so forth. Only thinkers in the most fact-disciplined of empirical sciences have made much true progress in understanding some important regions of Creation. Few there are in the fields of creative writing or philosophy or theology who've realized the importance of radically new understandings of space and time and matter and the history of this universe and the history of life in general and human family-lines in particular.

As Etienne Gilson told the story, Catholic intellectuals led the Church into an intellectual ghetto of sorts around 1800 when they had failed to provide any good, Christian answers to the legitimate questions raised by modern thinkers. I think that other groups of intellectuals have created their own ghettos in the years since, even those from schools of thought

which profess a respect tending to worship for the goodness of an open mind ranging freely over... whatever.

In terms of the ongoing development of my thought, I can raise an additional complaint against not just Catholic intellectuals but against nearly all who, then and since, have claimed to be protecting traditional thought against Enlightenment thought. In fact, it turned that much of the defense raised by traditionalists was against the growing evidence that the traditions of Western men had been pretty good but no longer could speak accurately or beautifully of God's Creation. Most traditionalists over the previous two centuries or so have been defending increasingly implausible human ways of understanding God's Creation as empirical investigators, historians as well as physicists and biologists, were piling up evidence that God's Creation is different from what it had seemed to those before the development of modern instrumentation and empirical research methods. They chose their human traditions in preference to God and His Creation.

Modern traditionalists have been defending not absolute truths but human wisdom, that fumbling substitute for perfect knowledge. They have refused to acknowledge the near certainty of men of faith and courage being able to make at least incremental and maybe large-scale improvements in that wisdom, bringing it somewhat closer to the thoughts God manifested as Creation.

If you wish to read a more detailed discussion of the issue of knowledge, you can download my book *Four Kinds of Knowledge* [43] where I explain why there are only two kinds of knowledge, that of God in His transcendence and that of God in His freely chosen role as Creator of this highly specific Creation.

For a more detailed discussion of my understanding of being, see Chapter 169, *From Abstract Being to Concrete Being and Narratives*. In that understanding, I propose that we can move towards more abstract forms of being by way of physics and then move down to see how that abstract being enters into, say, political relationships. This doesn't mean that physics is inherently superior to the human knowledge of other aspects of our world, only that physics is a fundamental body of human knowledge and it has advanced more rapidly than other bodies of human knowledge in recent centuries. I'm also not claiming we can use the specific mathematics from physics and similar fields because the equations of general relativity are themselves particularized from more general relationships, particularized for the shaping of this physical world. It also doesn't mean that the 'softer'

sciences are always dependent upon the ‘harder’ sciences for advancements in the understanding of abstract being. In fact, the insights of modern physics and mathematics lead quickly into abstract regions more qualitative than quantitative. I suspect the borrowing will be soon going back and forth between the modern sciences of complexity and chaos and the sciences of narrative arts, history and archeology and evolutionary biology and so forth.

I’ll return to the main stream of my discussion to ask: At what level of thought and feeling and action should traditionalism be defined? I’ve asked this question before in less explicit ways. It is the question which is important because I can’t dictate how my fellow thinkers, wannabe traditionalists and others, define ‘traditionalist’. In fact, I don’t really care much. If traditionalism is wrongly defined by my ways of understanding God’s Creation, especially its moral order, I’ll simply stop referring to myself as a traditionalist.

Let me explain the question, “At what level of thought and feeling and action should traditionalism be defined?” by using two extremes.

First, we could define traditionalism as most human thinkers do, as a commitment to a specific way of understanding men and human communities in terms of thought and feeling and action. This common way of defining traditionalism, and channeling traditionalist instincts and desires, tends too often to swallow whole the concretely embodied ways of thought and feeling and actions of specific human communities which are localized in time and place and culture, including religious cult as well as agriculture and literary culture. I sympathize with this viewpoint and think it to be the foundation of a more complete and more perfect way of shaping ourselves to the truths embodied in Creation and the more particular forms of being and of narrative which we find in our world, but swallowed whole it can choke and even suffocate us.

See Chapter 275, *We Prefer to Cooperate With Those Like Ourselves*, which deals with the reality of human nature and how we build our communities, starting with concrete attachments to those ‘like ourselves,’ for a little more detail of my sympathy for this attachment to our concrete physical and social environments, an attachment dealt with in a powerful way by such Southern thinkers as Andrew Lytle and Melvin Bradford and in a more problematic way by Nathaniel Hawthorne during the early years when New England communities still had a chance of becoming true centers of culture rather than so many volcanoes vomiting forth self-righteousness while mak-

ing much money over the years by way of the slave-trade, drug-smuggling in Asia, the weapons industry, and—more recently—harvesting parts of lab-grown human babies and the like. The Puritanical tradition was never, in my opinion, overly promising but it had some good aspects which apparently didn't interest most of the children of that tradition, children increasingly liberal and pagan over the years. New Englanders, early on, chose certain streams of human tradition over the God-centered or Creation-centered streams which might have led to better and more truthful understandings of man and the world and all of Creation.

Traditions aren't that much different from technology in being ephemeral, imperfect and incomplete manifestations of something to be found only in the Body of Christ on the other side of the grave. Our technology still contains understandings of the building technologies used by the Egyptians in raising the pyramids and those used by Herod in pouring concrete structures underwater as well as many other ancient and Medieval technologies. Our traditions also need to carry forward what was good in the legal and moral teachings codified by Hammurabi, the narrative techniques of Homer and those differing techniques of the Yahwist and the Deuteronomist, and so on. We need also to consider that traditions can be inclined toward regions of moral corruption or moral weakness. They can also be supportive of political and military strength while having little to offer the human race in the realms of theology or philosophy, literature or arts both practical and 'decorative'.

Traditions of a more admirable sort, as Edmund Burke saw in a somewhat cloudy way, should be ways of understanding, in the total sense of mind and heart and hands, some more abstract view of the truths underlying concrete being, relationships, narratives in this world. At times when an overburdened and inadequately capable civilization is decaying—I write of Western and Christian civilization—it should be possible, at least for devout Christians or even higher pagans to see the higher and more abstract forms of being which show when the concrete is eroding.

Most will not be capable of these imaginative acts of seeing that more abstract being clearly, even amongst the dwindling population of knowledgeable and intellectually competent thinkers in the West. Since greater abstraction corresponds to less particular and less ephemeral, this means that most cannot see anything which could be truly labeled 'the permanent things', certainly few thinkers I know of who like to use that term. Perhaps I'm unfair, but I would claim most of those thinkers are little more than

fuddy-duddies who like to imagine they have some magical control over reality, being able to understand and judge God's story by way of very imperfect and muchly incomplete criteria which seems to often correspond to some odd stew of Protestant neo-Scholasticism, the worldly prudence of the Glorious Revolution, and an attachment to literary traditions which seem to come from some never-existing Shakespeare without the imagination or the soft-porn sense of humor. Odd stuff which I have read and enjoyed greatly during some of my stages of restoring health to my mind, but odd stuff indeed once a thinker advances to a deeper and broader, a more powerful and more insightful, understanding of created being and of the story and stories which God is telling with that created being. I admit to now finding that odd stuff to be as unreadable as some of the less insightful classics of philosophy which are little more than explorations of categories imposed upon created being with little appreciation of the, shall we say, lack of proper fit. (Some of the Southerners loosely attached to that 'permanent things' school are more interesting and might have better parts to play in human thought. The same can be said of some mainstream philosophers, but mostly I enjoy and learn from those who are critics of the mainstream, such as Nietzsche and Richard Rorty, to choose two very different thinkers.)

Permanent Things. That's the problem. Things aren't permanent in this world and were never intended to be so by our Maker. The very phrase, used as more than a pointer to 'things' we see only obscurely, is a poison to the human mind. To speak or write or think in such ways is to take Einstein's side in his famous, and greatly misunderstood, debate with Bohr about the meaning of reality—see Chapter 156, *Einstein and Bohr's Debate on the Meaning of Reality*, for a short discussion of what's at issue based upon insights of the German philosopher of science Kurt Hubner. Basically, Einstein believed in permanent things and Bohr, like St. John the Apostle, believed things weren't a primary form of being and could be created or re-shaped by relationships—this only hints of the more complex understanding of created being which I've proposed. I dealt with a closely related aspect of the debate between Einstein and Bohr in Chapter 13, *Einstein and Bohr: Don't tell God what to do!*

Created things aren't inherently permanent, nor are most of the relationships and other forms of abstract being we can recognize. We have trouble seeing, in any sense, the most abstract forms of being, those closest, strangely enough, to that most particular and concrete form of being—God. We are too far away, in some sense of distance, from the raw stuff of

Creation—the truths God manifested as sufficient for the story and stories He is telling. Far too many human beings, perhaps especially those who call themselves traditionalists, are prone to thinking they are very close to those truths God chose for this Creation when they see, often truly, some of that truth manifested in the concrete form of a highly particular literature or political system or economic system.



# 131 Modern Thinkers Aren't Nearly So Smart as They Think

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1526>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/02/11.]

We modern human beings have separated our minds and hearts from reality, our hands not nearly so much. We're strange creatures who believe the Christian Creeds long enough to recite them at a Catholic or Orthodox Mass or to keep some of the creedal teachings in mind at other sorts of Christian worship services and then, for the rest of Sunday and for the next six days, we believe in the limited and constrained understanding of created being as can be derived from literalistic interpretation of some portion of scientific knowledge, usually as fed to us by mass media not known for deep understanding of stars or the human mind, nor for profound understanding of created being in general. Or we believe that created being is still what it seemed to be before Darwin and Einstein and Heisenberg.

Modern thinkers have no coherent concept of created being and yet think to be able to tell us how to organize our governments, our systems of government, our economies, our cultural institutions, and so forth as if we lived in some transcendental realm only loosely connected to the world of rocks and flesh. They are akin to architects who don't know the properties of steel or steel beams, of concrete, and yet design skyscrapers and massive factory buildings. The results are fascinatingly ugly and lead to rapid collapse or slower processes of decay. There are some modern thinkers who do at least realize the situation we've created for our selves and our communities and our children. In *The Liberal Mind* [95], Kenneth Minogue wrote:

One cannot organize a work of art; nor write poetry to rule.

The man who sets out quite deliberately to maximize his own happiness is likely to fail. Whilst one may, perhaps, be able to create vast pools of technicians at will, one cannot create political stability or a nation of mystics. There are many things in the world which we cannot attain simply because we want them; and some are beyond our grasp precisely because we want them too much. [page 157]

That's the problem. They don't even have a coherent understanding of the nature of created being, of matter and space and time, of human nature and narratives, and they think they can understand what we need in literature and in education and in spiritual activities. By relying on tradition, some think they've not made the mistake described by Minogue, but by not responding freely to Creation as it's forcing us to see that tradition as mistaken or incomplete, traditionalists end up in a similar sort of make-believe mindscape, a little better connected to reality than the imaginary realms of the progressives but not nearly good enough.

In a sentence: Modern thinkers, in general, aren't nearly so smart as they think. Rather than seeing that the reality created by God should rule our minds, they think to use some imaginary pre-existing mind to rule over reality. This is to say, they think they have minds that can be used to grab truths from transcendental regions and then use those truths to construct ideals about individual and communal human being, as well as created being in general. The most obvious surface symptom is the modern reliance upon textbook forms of knowledge, textbook forms of reasoning, and the dedication of modern thinkers to rewriting existing textbooks as if it were a useful activity.

Because of metaphysical incompetence on the part of many modern thinkers—traditionalists and progressives alike, and willful metaphysical blindness on the part of others, because of similar incompetence and blindness regarding the nature and the accomplishments of modern empirical scientific enterprises, modern thinkers have walked away from the central, guiding Christian insight into the nature of creatures in realms of created being:

The truth emerges in time through a communal process.

So we were told decades ago by Carroll Quigley.

Christian philosophers and theologians have paved the way, starting with William of Ockham and the other Oxford radicals, in denying the Thomistic view in which the mind is primary, not because it comes directly from transcendental regions of truth but because it shapes itself in response to these concrete regions of being and can work its way toward transcendental truths by proper use of concrete being. Even traditionalists who seem at first to have a better understanding of the importance of mind will simply assume that created being, and the mind which can be shaped in response to that created being, are simply givens. Whatever their formal beliefs, they think as if created being and mind are pre-existing entities subject to metaphysical analyses. In fact, they are contingent entities, products of a Creator who acted with total freedom in bringing Creation to exist where there was nothing and with great freedom in shaping that Creation to form at least this world which is a story occurring in a realm of concrete, thing-like being. More than that, our knowledge of that Creation is emerging in time and then becomes a true understanding by processes taking still more time.

Let me try to explain by expanding on the quote from Carroll Quigley a bit:

The truth emerges in time as human individual and communal beings respond, with some success, to problems and opportunities posed by Creation. The ultimate goal of this process, even when it occurs in non-Christian or anti-Christian communities, is the perfection of human knowledge and the completion of human understanding in the Body of Christ, indeed, the formation of the Body of Christ. This can't happen in this mortal realm but only in the world of the resurrected when the Body is fully joined to its head, Jesus Christ, and all the mortal members, individual and communal, of that Body are sharing the life of God with its perfect knowledge and complete understanding. The job of intellectuals and others who claim to be helping us to know and to understand is to move along with the natural revelation of Creation and to turn those revelations into good human knowledge and understandings; we are to act as if perfection of knowledge and completion of understanding is possible for the pilgrim Body of Christ in this mortal realm.

This process of bringing the truth into the human realm isn't separable from the communal lives of intellectuals and others. It's a major part of the growth of that community, legitimate communities developing in such a way that they're contributing to the Body of Christ, even if a particular community isn't likely to become a member of that Body. Better knowledge of Creation and a better understanding of what it is and what God's purposes are will shape the human community into a form more perfect and more complete and may lead to the entry of even some non-Christian communities into the Body of Christ. This process is richest and most active in certain individuals gifted with both strong minds and curiosity and also called to participation. Unfortunately, my experiences indicate that creative thinkers are still likely to be forced into isolation, except in some fields of physical or mathematical sciences. Others in these communities have powerful minds but little in the way of inclination or talent to creatively develop new understandings of created being. Those individuals, including scholars and teachers and clergymen and other leaders, must follow along as John Henry Newman and Charles Darwin each play their roles in leading us forward toward greater knowledge and understanding of truth. It is unfortunate that exactly those with powerful minds, or at least good minds, but no creative talents are likely to control access to cultural or other resources and most likely to refuse to acknowledge the need for creative thinkers. It would deny their claims to be bearers and arbiters of truth.

Tradition is a body containing a substantial store of still plausible knowledge and understandings. Even that which is no longer plausible can help us to rebuild a good store of knowledge and understanding. Though our human minds, individual and communal, are rooted in tradition, the shaping of those minds is a dynamic process. With the phenomenal growth of human knowledge of Creation in recent centuries, the process has to be very dynamic indeed or it will die, overwhelmed by Zen understandings of quantum physics or deterministic understandings of genes or magical illusions of control over political and economic systems. By definition, the effort to know and understand the contingent acts of God, the manifestation of some of His free thoughts, can't be a controllable process just as the corresponding acts and feelings of men aren't controllable processes.

All of this is another way of making my claim that the human mind isn't something pre-existing which accesses transcendental truths and uses them to make sense of a this world of concrete, thing-like being. The human mind

forms in response to various realms of created being so as to shape that mind to created being which is made up of manifested thoughts of God. Hearts and hands are also being shaped by these processes. The truth emerges, the human individual mind—live intelligence in Jacques Barzun’s terms and the human communal mind—intellect in Barzun’s terms, form as we shape ourselves in imitation of the acts of God in His freely chosen role as Creator of this particular Creation. We are not born as static images of God but rather as entities capable of shaping ourselves to be images of the Creator as He goes about His work of creating and shaping and sustaining.

Aquinas got some important details wrong and didn’t have so complete an understanding of this process of human self-shaping, but he got some of the most important pieces right. He understood the nature of being as a manifestation of an active process of creating and sustaining by God and shaping by God and creatures. He understood the human moral character forms by a growth process centered around active responses to our environments, defined in a limited way by Medieval knowledge or a greatly expanded way as is made possible by modern knowledge. (For technical reasons not valid given modern knowledge of the brain, Aquinas himself posited a ‘mind’ or component of the ‘mind’ which was non-human and separable from the human body, but we do better by following his understanding of human moral nature and applying that understanding to all parts and aspects of human animal nature.)

In the 750 years or so since Aquinas died, human thinkers—other than possibly me—have failed to further develop what was good in his thoughts and to correct his errors as seen in light of more recent knowledge of created being. They have, in fact, followed Ockham and others in denigrating the importance of the mind and misinterpreting what has been happening as the human mind, individual but mostly communal, has been enriched and complexified almost beyond the understanding of that mind. But, outside of physical and mathematical sciences, the process seems to have largely halted and the mind, individual and communal, as it existed in its largest and richest form, perhaps around 1800, is in a state rapid decay in this year of 2013.

See Chapter 90, *Shaping Our Minds to Reality*, for some interesting insight into this issue by the physicist and Anglican priest, John Polkinghorne, or Chapter 291, *More About Our Inadequate Understanding of Created Being*, for my more recent take on this issue, a take which includes Polkinghorne’s insights.

Modern thinkers don't seem to be cooperating with this process of shaping our minds to created being, starting with the concrete realms of created being which we can perceive and explore most directly. They start with the wrongful belief they have minds that can somehow gather in data or knowledge and work with it the way a computer works with input information. Those who deny the analogy between human mind and computers still think as if the human mind were some bit of technological wizardly wired up to the human body. This means that those biased toward tradition try to work with data or knowledge with their minds actually shaped to understanding some part of our cultural heritage made up largely of outmoded knowledge. This does give modern traditionalists a certain amount of ballast which might at least keep them sane as individuals. Those biased toward progressivism try to discard any knowledge which is in conflict with their—warning of hyperbole—belief that the world is to be made anew by their own brilliant and insightful selves, reaching completion and perfection because of their efforts. See Chapter 459, *Progressives Kill Progress in Future Generations*, for a short discussion of the ways in which progressives can “trap future generations in one specific way of life or one way of solving problems.”

The main point, as always in my thought, is that this world is a realm in a greater Creation and it is also a great story set in a still greater story. Like all interesting and meaningful stories, it is morally well-ordered even if evil drives along some of the events. This world and other realms of Creation are regions of development and—sometimes—evolution. No part of Creation is a static structure describable by a manual forever valid. The characters, the landscape, the entire world are all evolving and developing. In addition, we start with inadequate rules of thinking for dealing with all of this.

As physicists have explored certain realms of created being, concrete and abstract, they've learned to reshape their minds, although much inherited knowledge remains valid at least for pedagogical purposes and the corresponding regions of mind are to be somehow retained. Physicists have had to develop new concepts which didn't fit into the minds they brought to the task. Rather than throw away the new concepts demanded by honest responses to created being, reality, they struggled to reshape their minds. If we examine individual scientists, we find many who didn't really try to reshape their minds and many more who failed in their efforts. Failure is allowed in God's Creation, but lack of honest and faith-filled response to

Creation, to God's thoughts as manifested in created being, isn't going to get you through the Pearly Gates in any sense. It's impious in a deep sense, sometimes even a form of the Satanic, "I will not serve."

We're going through a period when we've learned as much about human beings as we have about the nature of space and time, but political and theological traditionalists have, with few exceptions, acted the parts of physicists who proved themselves not defenders of truth but rather men determined to remain on familiar ground even as the ghetto walls went up around them. Even such great scientists as Henri Poincare ended up as marginal characters in the events dominated by Einstein and Planck and Bohr.

The progressives have acted the parts of perhaps the New-ager physicists and popularizers who threw as much of the old overboard as they could and began to explain all of reality by way of strange interpretations of the rigorously defined mathematics of quantum mechanics and by way of exotic distortions of the equally rigorous but less well-defined geometries of general relativity. At that, the very nature of physics forced even the most would-be radical physicist to keep some of the knowledge he'd inherited.

Once the mind floats free of reality, it can be trimmed or enlarged as one wishes until the separation from reality becomes so severe as to allow, for example, politicians and social-workers and Christian leaders to think that creating a peaceful mixed-race and mixed-culture society is as easy as throwing everyone together and taxing the stable working population to pay for it all. We also think to help women along, in the midst of a terrible problem of rapes and other abuses in the military, by placing women in combat and other situations where they are still more vulnerable to enemy soldiers and also to a population of American men increasingly disordered in their habits and attitudes. We try to educate a population of children with short attention spans and not even the most basic skills of literacy by putting them in front of computers or perhaps placing in their hands textbooks with ever more distracting color-plates.

Reality has no inclination to shape itself to our prejudices, to shape itself to our minds formed in response to ancient systems of thought or to fleeting fancies or even to brilliant schemes of all of reality.

It's our God-given duty to shape our minds, indeed, our entire human beings, individual and communal in response to reality.

The entire modern project, even in some of its successful cultural endeavors, seems to be largely a response by traditionalists and progressives

to shape reality to what we want it to be or are indoctrinated to believe it to be, whether that might be a vision of alleged beauty from a midsummer night's dream or a vision of order from an idealization of past societies which might well have been better ordered than are most human societies as of 2013.

# 132 Progressives as Typical Modern Thinkers

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1529>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/02/12.]

Progressives have often founded and supported eugenics movements. This article by Tiffany Jones Miller, *Progressivism, and the “German Idea of the State”* found at <http://www.libertylawsite.org/2013/01/31/eugenics-american-progressivism-and-the-german-idea-of-the-state/>, begins with this disturbing sentence:

In 1923, Fritz Lenz, a German physician and geneticist advocate of forced sterilization—a man who became one of the leading advocates of the Nazi’s “racial hygiene” program—criticized his countrymen for lagging behind the United States in the enactment of sterilization laws.

This should be disturbing to Americans, that our progressive ‘reformers’ were ahead of the 20th century pack in sterilizing human beings judged as inferior, because of race or because of cognitive problems, or because of membership in families sunk in poverty for generations or because of syphilis infections or many other reasons.

Progressivists do have a major problem, of sorts. They jumped on the Darwinian bandwagon early on, though the heart of a progressive isn’t really in the principle that better entities slowly form by responding over generations, through genetic variations in individuals and social experimentation in communities amongst other ways, to their environments. Darwinism

might be fine as a way of destroying traditions, especially Christian traditions, but the progressives know they can derive a few good principles and go on to make the processes of evolution and development more rational and a lot more rapid.

The tendency to apply predetermined principles to reality, rather than learning from reality, holds for most modern thinkers, including those opposed to progressivist distortions of reality. Self-labeled conservatives and traditionalists simply have their own distortions of reality as I pointed out in Chapter 131, *Modern Thinkers Aren't Nearly So Smart as They Think*, the main point of which is not that I have any *a priori* knowledge or pre-existing mental skills to judge other thinkers but rather that God is the smart one and we should learn how to think by shaping our own minds, even our greater selves, in response to the thoughts God has manifested in Creation. We are only born as clever apes but we can become smart in the way of God, however incompletely and imperfectly, by learning to imitate God as He goes about His work as Creator and Sustainer and Shaper of created being.

So progressivists see Darwinian processes as subject to the sort of analyses which allow us to understand by way of *a priori* mental schemes, not to understand by letting our own minds develop as God tells His story. The Darwinian processes might have traveled contingent pathways in the biological past, but the smart guys can understand how evolution really should work and what the goals are. If modern human communities seem to have created a problem by allowing the survival of inferior human beings, defective family-lines as well as individuals from otherwise good family-lines, then we simply prevent them from reproducing. At least in the initial stages of such policies, sterilization in medical facilities is used rather than gas chambers. Death by medical experimentation might occur or even death by lack of medical care as syphilis or other diseases are observed, but no large-scale murder, yet. We modern peoples are humane enough to allow resources to be wasted on defective human beings so long as we can prevent them from producing the next generation of banjo-picking idiots. (See the movie *Deliverance*.)

Improvement of our race seemingly can't happen if nature's axe is put away, so men have to eliminate those born defective and those rendered defective by undisciplined sexual activity or alcohol abuse.

Progressivists give the rest of us a chance, but we better make good on it and please them in ways that seem to change over time. Once supporters of

a rather conventional middle-class morality, they have supported child-labor laws, various consumer safety laws, and the like. In more recent decades, they've supported major medical research programs for AIDS, same-sex marriage, and continued the 200 year-old battle to destroy the traditional family. They've had allies to be sure. The neo-Marxist Horkheimer once noted that true, honest radicals owe a big favor to the oh-so progressive businessmen of our Modern Age who've shown they can more effectively destroy that traditional family than can the smartest and most vicious of radical dictators. This is frighteningly plausible and forces me to wonder why most traditionalists have been so ready to see politicians as enemies while thinking businessmen are merely the Christian church producing for the marketplaces. To be sure, some such as Pat Buchanan have been more skeptical of at least the executives of large corporations as well as Wall Street, but such traditionalists are in a minority.

The attitudes of progressivists can be contradictory for sure. I know some who support the elimination of AIDS so that Americans can engage more safely and freely in all sorts of sex and also condemn Mother Teresa of Calcutta for all she did to save the wretched poor of Calcutta and other cities around the globe. Apparently, Americans who don't act according prudently for their own survival and reproduction are still superior to sub-Americans.

In that same article, *Progressivism, and the "German Idea of the State"* found at <http://www.libertylawsite.org/2013/01/31/eugenics-american-progressivism-and-the-german-idea-of-the-state/>, Ms. Miller also writes:

The Progressives, at least, understood that their approach to reform was animated by a new conception of government or, more precisely, "the State." Importantly, this idea, the "German idea of the State," departs from the American Founders' understanding of government in a couple of key respects, both of which help explain the Progressives' enthusiasm for eugenics.

For the Progressives, to begin, the power of government is NOT limited in principle to securing the natural or "inalienable" rights of man, as the *Declaration of Independence* has it. "It is not admitted that there are no limits to the action of the state," as the German-trained progressive political scientist and

future New Dealer Charles Merriam concludes in a 1903 survey of progressive thinking,

...

But the Progressives did not advocate an indiscriminate exercise of power; rather, in their view, the ultimate aim of "the State," the "good" or objective whose pursuit determined the need for government action, was a particular conception of human excellence or "perfection." The guiding object of ethics, and hence the State, Ely explains, is the "ethical ideal," the idea, that is, that individuals are entitled to the "most perfect development of all human faculties [physical, mental, moral, aesthetic, etc.] . . . which can be attained[.]" In short, the guiding principle of the Progressives' domestic reforms, the aim that guided their assessment of existing social conditions, was a felt obligation to improve the relative level of physical, mental and moral development in America.

...

The very labor reforms which softened the "law of competition" seemed to enable "defective" individuals—including the "feeble-minded" and "paupers," as well as persons afflicted with syphilis, gonorrhoea, epilepsy or tuberculosis—to survive in higher numbers and thereby generate "an enfeebled progeny." To counteract this, and to perfect the relatively indiscriminate and otherwise stultifying effects of "natural selection" (or "competition"), Ely urges embrace of "man's selection." In a passage which reads like a pithy, but chilling, distillation of Ely's conception of reform, he likens "man's selection" to the role humans play in propagating plants and animals

The State, or state if you prefer, doesn't seem to have been desired by progressives for its own sake but because it was a concentrated form of power which could be used to reshape human communities at various levels and scales to the ideals of those intellectuals who considered themselves progressive. Nor, as Miss Miller sees matters, did they worship power for its own sake but only for its uses in pursuing some misguided idea of human excellence. By the way, this is a specific point where true traditionalists could have raised a strong objection from their knowledge of history, assuming such exists and is reliable. As Lord Acton told us from his profound under-

standing of history, powerful and centralized governments attract men with the moral character of gangsters. I think he would not have objected to someone pointing out that such gangster types could probably out-compete do-gooder intellectuals in the struggle to control powerful and wealthy institutions. The reader should be thinking of highly intelligent gangsters such as Genghis Khan and Caesar Borgia rather than street criminals or even most of the publicly acknowledged drug-lords.

You could say that the strong ties between the State and certain forms of power make the State itself, at least in the eyes of some of its admirers and enemies, no more than an entity which holds and exercises sovereign power which can't be limited by any power on earth but another sovereign state. Modern history seems to teach us that revolutionaries can grab hold of the State or they can destroy the State and much that it holds power over, but reform of the State into something better, an entity which respects its individual and communal members while exercising power responsibly, isn't possible. Not all revolutionaries are good at holding power but almost all are far better at gaining and holding power than are men humble enough to wish to limit the exercise of governmental power. The gangster Stalin grabbed power and killed the dedicated Communists in the ranks of the Bolshevik party. Gangsters, revolutionaries and snakes in the traditionalist grasslands, outdo both true radicals and morally well-ordered leaders in gaining and holding onto power.

It is also the case that the United States has provided some serious evidence that you can't change a foreign state into some preconceived form, even when the would-be reformers include at least a goodly number of men and women with seemingly noble motives. On this general topic, see Chapter 415, *Why We Can't Build or Rebuild the Countries of Other Peoples*, where I discuss the problem in the context of American efforts to help the Haitians, legitimate efforts as well as imperialistic.

Kenneth Minogue, most certainly not a fan of power-abusers, had a more subtle statement regarding the nature of the State in *The Liberal Mind* [95]:

The State is not an aspect of society; it is the only unity that society can lay claim to. [page 131]

Unity can be something good, especially for those of us who believe this world is the story of the formation of the Body of Christ. But the evolutionary and developmental processes of this world can be ugly and

bloody, and—to put it bluntly—we don't know how to develop a centralized government which will remain morally well-ordered and will exercise only power proper to its true responsibilities, especially if the realm of that government becomes large and prosperous. In Chapter 453, *Can the State be Limited?*, I discussed this problem: how to move toward a State which can do its job without being taken over by men with the moral characters of gangsters, the very sorts of men that Lord Acton claimed to be attracted to centralized and powerful governments—though he, like me, thought better is possible and might someday be done.

What has gone wrong with the state, or State, is related to what was wrong with the progressive, and classical liberal, projects from the start. We took the State, an entity evolving and developing in time, and decided we could plan its perfection and control it on a path of development toward that perfection. Instead, we created a great prize to be won by various sorts of political and military and financial gangsters. To be fair, conservatives and traditionalists made the less dangerous error of thinking it possible and desirable to have frozen the American government as it was in its early stages of development. It might have grown into a more attractive and morally better ordered adolescent but it's rather silly to think it would have been better, or possible, for the American government to have remained at a stage of development comparable to a human two year-old.

Now I can mount my hobbyhorse and start talking about created being and the modern reluctance to produce an understanding of created being which accounts for modern empirical knowledge and some set of beliefs which provide some serious understanding of our world and the human mind which would encapsulate that world and, indeed, all of Creation. Progressive thinkers might feel good about their own Enlightened selves, but they aren't very rational, at least not in the sense of being in synch with empirical reality. In a phrase I've used in my writings, progressive thinkers haven't made peace with empirical reality. To support change and improvement as a general policy is to assume you can do more than is possible in a world which is driven forward by evolutionary and developmental processes which we can influence but not plan and control as McNamara thought he could plan and control the war in Vietnam, as Bush II thought he could plan and control the conquest of Iraq, as central bankers think they can plan and control the decaying economies in 2013.

Let us turn to Creation and return to the true tradition of Christianity, methodical realism, which provides a good meta-understanding by which

we learn how to think by exploring God's Creation and shaping our minds to the manifested thoughts of the Creator.



# 133 Christians Should Shape Their Minds to God's Creation

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1598>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/04/20.]

God's Creation can be described in terms of 'mystery' when we speak in certain modes, poetic or spiritual, but that's not the truest way for a Christian to speak. It's not the truest way because Christians, of all human beings, should be faithful to the Creator and open to what He's telling us through this world and all that lies within it. This is the proper attitude because this world and all the creatures it contains—indeed, all of Creation and the creatures it contains—are manifested thoughts of God.

There is an analogy in the history of modern geometry for what I'm trying to get across. Einstein's general theory of relativity deals with gravity and teaches us to consider space and time as a single geometric object, spacetime. There are a number of peculiarities to this theory from an ordinary human viewpoint. For example, the concept of 'shortest distance' is generalized, a curved line rather than the straight line of Euclidean geometry. And I've just pointed to a major problem. To most modern human beings, including those who enjoy science fiction movies with black-holes, general relativity is a mystery, but only because we insist on trying to put a greater creature inside a smaller creature, a more abstract geometry inside of Euclidean geometry. It's not at all a mystery for those who have the mathematical sophistication along with the necessary time to study this more abstract geometry. After such a study, the mind is reshaped, shaped properly to deal with that more abstract geometry, capable of dealing with the concepts of general relativity. The mysterious has become part of the common sense of a human being who has reshaped his mind in such a way.

We Christians, indeed all modern human beings, need to go through such a process to learn how to view this world in light of all that we have learned about it in modern times. What some call ‘mystery’ is part of God’s way of thinking in His role as Creator; we need to make that mystery part of our way of thinking if we are to be better images of God in the same way that modern scientists and engineers have made more abstract geometries part of their ways of thinking.

If it were true that the answers which we would give the world, the answers which would allow us to make sense of the world and move on to build a new and greater civilization, are beyond our knowledge and beyond our reach even in principle, then Christianity has nothing to tell the world, nothing to help us better order our lives, individual and communal. In this case, a religion which speaks of a savior both man and God, of a Creator immanent in His own work, would be no more than a lie, a set of delusions organized under some grand delusion.

By speaking of ‘mystery’ when we should be reshaping our minds to God’s way of thinking, we show ourselves lacking faith in the Creator and in Jesus Christ, true God and true man. This language of ‘mystery’ often arises when dealing with the modern questions, questions which have received some halfway decent answers, such as the words of the *Declaration of Independence* or the American *Constitution*, but often those questions have led to the guillotine or concentration camps or to battlefields more gory than anything even Genghis Khan could have imagined.

We shy away from the questions raised in the modern world despite the clear evidence to those with open eyes and firm faith in the Creator that all this modern empirical knowledge is telling us much that is important about the work of God in His role as Creator. We are duty-bound as Christians to deal with these questions for they are raised by human exploration of God’s Creation, of thoughts He manifested. We are all duty-bound in our communal being and some are duty-bound by their individual callings in intellectual or spiritual realms of life.

Yet, we continue the language of ‘mystery’ as if we were still nomads gathered around a stone altar. We have no good answers to those modern questions, about pain and suffering, which tie back to ancient questions and we have no good answers to interestingly rich versions of these difficult questions which have arisen in our days. I’m pointing to such questions as:

- What greater, moral sense can we make of human life in a world

of evolutionary and developmental processes which are bloody and seemingly morally chaotic?

- What sense can we make of the physical stuff of Creation in light of the discovery that even matter and energy are contingent things, not categorical entities, and that they have evolved and developed from more abstract forms of being?

We have no good answers to these and many other important questions, because we've not shown the faith and courage to deal with these questions in their modern or ancient formulations.

I think I've come up with a pretty good way of dealing with these and other questions which have arisen in our age. There is no doubt that we need answers which allow us to talk of Jesus Christ being the incarnate Son of God, of our salvation and resurrection into a life shared with God, of God as being the true Creator of all that is not Him, of His purposes in creating this world so chaotic and disordered at times.

I'll give a very quick overview of what I've developed, the sort of complete Christian worldview which is needed though someone might produce a better one. I invite anyone to try. I don't pretend to have the final answers and even if mine prove to be good enough for now, they'll prove to be inadequate eventually, and eventually might be just the next generation.

First, we need a good understanding of being, of the stuff of which our bodies are made as well as the bodies of other creatures. I've proposed, consistent with both the school of St. John the Apostle and quantum mechanics, that relationships are primary, that stuff comes into existence and can be shaped or reshaped by relationships such as love. I've also proposed, consistent with modern understandings of the nature of spacetime and mass and energy, as developed in cosmological physics and particles physics, that being lies on a spectrum ranging from the abstract to the concrete with the concrete being shaped from, made more particular than, more abstract forms of being which are still present in the concrete stuff of this particular world. A marketing slogan: concrete things are frozen soul-stuff. (Judging by modern physics, more abstract forms of being are 'hotter', higher in energy.)

Second, we need to understand the human mind and human being in a more complete sense. My book *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53], which deals with this issue in a way which is certainly prelim-

inary but—at least in my opinion—far closer to the truth than any other such understanding of human being. Based upon modern neurosciences and evolutionary biology as well as my understanding of our relationship to our Creator, I’ve developed the idea that our minds are the result of that very complex organ, the human brain, shaping itself in response to the surrounding environments right up to the level of all of Creation. This shaping takes place on the species level over vast amounts of time, on the cultural level over generations, and on the personal level over our lifetimes. Furthermore, man can be viewed as mind and heart and hands with the strong qualification that our being becomes unified, in a God-like way, as we become true persons and as we prepare to share the life of God. Beyond even that, based upon the Church’s own admission that She is not omniscient and upon my limited understanding of history and politics and sociology, I’ve reinterpreted our understanding of the Body of Christ to be more inclusive of human nature and worthwhile human activities rather than limiting it to ‘churchy’ aspects of human nature. Download and read the book for more.

Third, we have to return to the Biblical understanding, shared with history and literature and even cosmological physics, that we live in a story which has many contingent aspects, even a certain amount of freedom suitable to our creaturely beings—greater freedom comes as we begin to share God’s life.

Fourth, we need to see and to truly live the purpose of Creation: the birth and maturing of the mortal manifestation of the Body of Christ.

The above, if fleshed out properly, will give a good Christian understanding of our world as a concrete level of Creation, but a level in which the more abstract levels, mathematical and metaphysical, can be seen present in the concrete. Such an understanding would allow a more coherent, more plausible, way of speaking with and dealing with such difficult issues as abortion, birth-control, stem-cell technology, waging of wars, capital punishment, and the organization of our political and economic communities. As things stand, we tend to confront these issues by opposing our assertions to the assertions of those holding different, but even more incoherent, views of reality.

This article by William B. Hurlbut, *St. Francis, Christian Love, and the Biotechnological Future* at <http://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/st-francis-christian-love-and-the-biotechnological-future>,

was written by a medical doctor who apparently does research in the neurosciences. He's trying to deal with our moral confusions as they specifically impact the biotechnological issues and has many good things to say, largely from the viewpoint of a Christian with deep respect for the ways in which St. Francis of Assisi viewed Creation and dealt with matters of human life in that Creation. There's good stuff here but confusion as well. Professor Hurlbut first errs by engaging in that original sin of Christian moral theology, theodicy or the effort to vindicate an all-good and all-knowing and all-powerful God in light of the natural and moral evil in this world—as defined by human creatures. Professor Hurlbut tells us:

How, within the creation of an omnipotent and beneficent God, there can be both suffering and love remains a mystery. But clearly for Francis, that creation was simultaneously material and spiritual—sacramental through and through.

Why is this a mystery? Because many thinkers over the century have imposed their own schemes upon a reality far richer than anything which might fit in their heads. Because many thinkers have thought to judge God's work without having a good handle on God's purposes in creating us.

Years ago, the Calvinist philosopher, Alvin Platinga, who works in a modern analytic framework, presented serious arguments that any such questions presume we can know enough to judge God, that we can judge whether the good which God is to accomplish in this world justifies all the pain and suffering and moral corruption and so forth. Professor Hurlbut has asked questions which imply we can evaluate God's Creation in this way but he also proposes near the end of his essay the position more compatible with Christian beliefs:

All of creation, and its evolutionary ascent to mind and moral awareness, may be recognized as a kind of living language in an epic tale of the deepest spiritual significance. Through the eyes of faith, the entire cosmic order of time and space and material being may be seen as an arena for the revelation of Love, for the creation of a creature capable of ascending to an apprehension of its Creator; but more profoundly, for the reaching down, the compassionate condescension of Love Himself.

We've moved from theodicy into the dynamic realm of narratives. That's good and proper. It's what the Bible teaches us to do. Christ didn't present Himself as a problem to be solved, nor did St. Francis view life as a problem to be solved. To be sure, I've spent a large amount of energy upon the metaphysical problems of being, "What is stuff and relationships and so on?" but I did so on my way to understanding this world which is stuff engaged in a story being told by God. As soon as we have a handle on the nature of matter and energy and spacetime, a handle on relationships and things or love and stuff, we can move to the main task of understanding all of that in the context of the story God is telling.

The questions remain but they become measurements of the gap between what we are and what we are to be if we are to share God's thoughts and even His life.

# 134 The Dis-Unity of Knowledge and the Mis-Formation of the Modern Mind, Part 1

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1630>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/06/18.]

Donald Kagan was the Sterling Professor of Classics and History at Yale University and a recipient of the National Humanities Medal in 2002. At his retirement in May, he gave a valedictory lecture which was slightly rewritten for publication as an essay: *Ave atque vale* at <http://www.newcriterion.com/articles.cfm/Ave-atque-vale-7653>. After describing the goals of a liberal education, more or less constant over the centuries: to learn how to live as a free man, he tells us:

Servants were ignorant and parochial, so free men must be learned and cosmopolitan; servants were ruled by others, so free men must take part in their own government; servants specialized to become competent at some specific and limited task, so free men must know something of everything and understand general principles without yielding to the narrowness of expertise. The Romans' recommended course of study was literature, history, philosophy, and rhetoric.

Education in the liberal arts was intended to teach men how to be free. The understanding of what was needed to be free changed over the centuries and seems to have become itself somewhat instrumentalist in recent centuries in the Anglo-American countries. This is a possible good since, at least in my way of looking at being, the 'ideal' and the 'instrumental', soul

and body if you wish, are different aspects of created being and not different realms or different substances. For the past couple centuries, there has been a growing and now dominant consensus that freedom is best secured by the sociability which once allowed the landed families and merchant bankers and politicians of Georgian England to hold or gain or expand their power and wealth and now allows young men and women to acquire the styles and opinions of the strangely fluid ruling classes of the 20th and 21st centuries—to be a bit over-simplistic. For the most part, a liberal education has not been some sort of solitary, scholarly search for truth, partly because most in the West prior to the 19th century believed truth was known and what was left to be discovered was, roughly, in the nature of the accidental as understood by philosophers. We supposedly had the rules of Creation and had only to play the game out.

By the eighteenth century, a liberal arts education in England had come to mean the socialization of the young men from the ruling classes of English society; I think this was partly true in the North American colonies but tempered by the need of even landed Virginian gentlemen to scramble for a living. Was that shaping of an English or American gentleman truly the formation of a free man? We should remember always what even the most liberal advocates of liberal arts often seem to forget, what Aristotle learned in a sense as his young student, Prince Alexander of Macedonia, went off to a short life as a brutal and exploitive conqueror: you might be able to teach someone how to make good bricks, you might be able to teach a willing student how to make an aesthetically pleasing and sturdy dining-room table, you might even be able to teach the law well enough for a student to go on to worthwhile work in helping to settle marriage or real estate problems. . . But you can't teach someone to be wise or free. This means you also can't teach someone to be creative, to find good solutions to serious problems. That aesthetically pleasing table would have likely been some sort of copy of an existing style and not creative in a deeper sense.

Even those with the capacity for wisdom or freedom have to **learn** how to live a good life, have to learn enough about created being and its Creator and have to learn how to form the proper relationships to their Creator and to that being including human being both individual and communal. I think it better on the whole to speak of the shaping of a human being by his active and proper responses to created being, concrete and abstract, and to the Creator. I've written much on that viewpoint in the past and I'll try to summarize some of my thoughts. (I'll ignore the complication that

stable societies, which we no longer have in the West, can prosper with large ruling classes dominated by those who don't have the ability or inclination for true learning, self-started and self-directed learning though always best done with guidance from a master of learning.)

There is much which is interesting and stimulating in Kagan's essay. There is much that tells us about the changes over time of the 'traditions' of education in the liberal arts. I will note a more recent tradition, one championed by John Henry Newman and one I tend to follow in my personal goals as I try to learn much about Creation and understand that in some depth. Kagan tells us of this viewpoint:

Liberal education must become general education, including languages, literature, history, and the natural sciences. In the words of one writer, "A man of the highest education ought to know something of everything, and everything of something."

Some even seemed to aim for the stars:

The answer of some was "universal knowledge." They urged a broadening of the field of learning to include all that was known and an attempt to synthesize and integrate the information collected by discovering the philosophical principles that underlay it all. As one Victorian put it, "The summit of a liberal education . . . is Philosophy—meaning by Philosophy the sustained effort . . . to frame a complete and reasoned synthesis of the facts of the universe."

But, as Kagan tells us with perhaps a little sadness, "Newman was an intellectual, an academic, and an Aristotelian and he defended the ancient idea of the value of learning and knowledge for their own sake at a time when the tide was running against it, as it usually does." And a seemingly serious problem arose:

In the last decades of the century, Newman's idea of knowledge for its own sake and the whole concept of universal knowledge for the purpose of philosophical understanding were swept away by a great tidal wave from across the channel, whose chief source was Germany. All the educational ideas we had considered to this point had this in common: They regarded knowledge

as something that existed already. There was little thought of discovering anything true that had not previously been known.

From the viewpoint of those who loved the universities and the established fields of knowledge, most strongly—established truths, all hell had broken loose, though I found myself in this seeming hell about 25 or 30 years ago and after a disturbing few years began to enjoy it greatly.

Kagan finishes his essay by an assessment of the goals of a liberal arts education as defined in the modern world, concluding it to be very close to the socializing goals of liberal arts education in eighteenth century England, the setting which so frustrated Adam Smith who sought a serious education and decided to skip the worthless formal education and to spend his time educating himself, an unscrupulous opportunist set loose in the libraries of Oxford. Adam Smith became a solitary pirate of sorts in the midst of those who went on to throw away so many opportunities to forge an earlier and greater Commonwealth.

Kagan provides my cue when he writes: “The search for general, universal knowledge and for the philosophical principles on which it may be based has long since been abandoned. In truth, I think it never had much hope or support.” We need thinkers with the courage and faith and wide knowledge to make sense of spacetime and matter and the moral complexities of human communities grown immensely larger and more complex than anything considered in the existing traditions of the West. We need to make sense of human nature in light of modern history and of evolutionary theory and genetics. As a Christian responding to what we now know of God’s Creation, I believe this world is the story of the birth and development of the Body of Christ; understanding the thoughts God manifested in Creation can be seen as the development of the mind of that Body. Since God is telling the story, I’m optimistic that this process will go forward, though not necessarily smoothly or at a pace we can detect during a single lifetime.

# 135 The Dis-Unity of Knowledge and the Mis-Formation of the Modern Mind, Part 2

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1638>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/06/25.]

The essay, *Defending the Humanities* at [http://www.weeklystandard.com/articles/defending-humanities\\_733960.html](http://www.weeklystandard.com/articles/defending-humanities_733960.html), written by Peter Augustine Lawler starts:

Leon Wieseltier, literary editor of the *New Republic*, gave by far the most thoughtful and combative commencement address this year, at Brandeis. He defended the humanities as our genuine counterculture. His defense of the humanities was intellectual—*à*—a defense of philosophers, theologians, poets, novelists, artists, and so forth, as knowers. In short, he defends “the reason of the philosophers” against the merely “instrumental reason” of technologism.

As Lawler and Wieseltier freely admit, many scientists and engineers including many of the most prominent ones are not technologists in the sense of the above quoted paragraph. Einstein thought his way to concepts before even looking for the proper mathematical tools to use those concepts in physical theories; he was no manipulator. He was also a very serious musician said to be very competent on both violin and piano. Einstein isn’t so unusual in this regard. When I went to college, I was surprised at the number of physics professors who were serious musicians.

It's hard to the point of near impossibility to be a truly civilized man in the 21st century for the simple reason that you can't be truly civilized apart from a living civilization and there doesn't seem to be any such entity, only rubble and artifacts and some functioning infrastructure from Western Civilization, including that built in non-Western regions in imitation of the West.

Nowadays, we barbarian children have managed to keep the machinery going better than might have been expected and this is a major reason for the seeming power of instrumentalists and technologists and scientific thinkers. The children look at our medical systems in that sense, as ways of solving those problems which can be solved by way of CAT scans and chemotherapy. Since those are the problems for which they are offered solutions, the confused masses see those problems and try to forget about the problems which are still more important but for which we are promised no solutions or even a good formulation of our situation. Even the most naive of the Left or Right have learned that American Imperialists have no more to offer than Maoist Leapers or Soviet Planners when it comes to the basic issues of meaning and of the dropping morals and morale of the younger generations. The only answers, to questions we mostly didn't ask, are provided by those medical buildings going up where once stood factories and decent inner-city housing for working class families. There are also the answers provided by wifi and cell-phones with more computing power than IBM big-iron machines of the 1960s, though most of us can't imagine what the questions might be.

The serious arts, musical and literary and visual, are the domain of many who call themselves humanists and the common man is often pointed toward artistic confusion of meaning and attacks on what he was taught to value. I consider that confusion to be necessary in an age in which the future has been fading as fast as it was announced by one avant-garde or another, but I wouldn't expect such an attitude on the part of a retired machinist looking at his never-employed 20 year-old grandson and longing for the days of John Wayne and Donna Reed and Joe DiMaggio. His other grandson, 25 with a freshly printed Ph.D. in history or literature or philosophy or mathematics, might well be as lost as his never-employed cousin.

To this point, art has been as useless as politics and religion and philosophy in the great task of re-establishing meaning in a world which seems less a world and more a collection of interacting but unrelated entities. I dealt with the failure of even a good thinker to see the need for a world

and not just a mostly coherent collection of entities in Chapter 189, *Henri Bergson: Almost Seeing a World*, I claimed:

Bergson had many profound insights into reality... Oddly enough, while seeing much that lay outside of the playing field of pragmatists, such as William James, he also didn't see even a universe let alone a world or the greater Creation of which this universe is only a phase.

Lawler tells us “for the philosophers, reason opens each of us to the truth about all things, including who we are, and there’s a lot we can comprehend that we can’t and would never want to control. Reason, for the philosophers, has a moral dimension—it’s about knowing and doing good, and knowing and avoiding evil.” He’s right and I’m trying to do exactly this by first coming to understand Creation in its entirety, by way of a Christian understanding of our physical world seen as morally ordered, in my terms: seen as a world. More than that, I try to provide a framework for understanding our human being and the being of this world at the level of complex entities which participate in narratives but this framework also opens up this world as an entity shaped from various realms of being, the more concrete being shaped from the more abstract though the abstract remains present in the most concrete, most thing-like of entities. My original motive wasn’t metaphysical—in fact, I was in an anti-metaphysical and highly empirical stage at the time I began to develop what I call a ‘worldview’, a disparaged term in Lawler’s circles—for good reasons; I was warned it was often used for scientistic and other wrongful understandings of reality.

My worldview rests upon an abstract realm of being, that which is the raw stuff of Creation, the manifestation of the fundamental truths God judged sufficient for the purposes of forming various realms of being, of shaping complex entities in this concrete realm, and of telling certain stories. All the truths we can know are found in that raw stuff in some sense, the truths of transfinite set theory and those of possible moral relationships between and among created beings of all types. My worldview is not your scientistic Grandfather’s worldview. While the scientistic worldview is “a comprehensive, one-dimensional explanatory scheme of all that exists,” my worldview is an open explanation of how our concrete universe came to be and then became the setting for morally purposeful stories being told by

God, stories lived by various sorts of complex and simple entities including some moral creatures called human beings. And my worldview would crush all dualisms, not in the interest of any form of reductionism but rather in the interest of ‘created being’; I have written, only partly tongue-in-cheek, of matter being ‘frozen soul’.

Maybe some don’t think my worldview coheres or maybe they don’t like it for other reasons. Fine. In this essay, I’m merely advocating that philosophers, at least as communities, should now be in the business of making greater sense of what we’ve learned, even making sense at the level of all contingent being. No scientists, scientific or humanistic, are stopping us from this great work. In an age such as our own, cheap and ‘simple’ ideas can drive good ideas out of the public squares and even out of the libraries, but good ideas win eventually. Good ideas can not only point us in the direction of meanings and truths but they are also interesting, good food for minds which would be strong. As Jacques Barzun told us at the end of *From Dawn to Decadence* [9], we pull ourselves up from barbarism when such minds discover the good ideas of the past; true civilizations come to life or back to life when those minds grow strong enough to produce good, new ideas. I’ve claimed in my writings that we can—at least in principle—shorten the barbarian period by courageously and consciously working toward those good, new ideas even as much of our civilization is still decaying.

If humanists wish to be seen as more than keepers of collections of books and artifacts, then they should set to work, or find students to educate who will be capable of one day setting to work at this great task. Men of faith and courage are needed to tell us how to make sense of the alleged wisdom found in all of that traditional knowledge as well as all of modern empirical knowledge. The world has been suddenly revealed by historical events as well as evolutionary biology to be richer and more complex than Aristotle or Augustine or Maimonides or Newton had ever anticipated. More commentaries on Edmund Burke’s political ideas and more efforts to recover the original versions of serious works of literature are worthwhile. It would be still better for new thinkers to propose fresh political concepts for understanding human communities far more complex than Burke could have imagined. We need new Melvilles rather than a new attempt to recreate *Pierre* before those frantic hours of drastic rewrite to meet the demands of the publisher. We need to produce thinkers and artists and doers worthy of study by future generations.

Lawler writes wisely when he tells us:

We can see neuroscience, evolutionary psychology, and economics as both science and scientism today. Neuroscience becomes scientism when neuroscientists really believe and aggressively claim that what they know can displace theology, philosophy, poetry, and so forth. Evolutionary psychologists succumb to scientism when they believe and aggressively teach that there's a readily comprehensible evolutionary or genetic explanation for all we say and do, and that human behavior can be explained pretty much the way the behavior of members of the other "eusocial" species can.

Still, there is too much negativity in those words. Rather than writing much about the scientistic attitudes of some neuroscientists and evolutionary psychologists, why have humanists not succeeded in producing an understanding of our world, not the world as it could have been plausibly understood in 1513 or 1713, let alone 13, but the world as it can be plausibly understood in 2013? We have those interesting but dangerous scans of brains as simple decisions are made; typically, the 'doing' regions of the brain are active and movement begins before the 'thinking' regions are active. What does this mean? Perhaps—as I've proposed in my writings, we do most of our moral thinking by forming habits for those future activities? Perhaps creatures such as ourselves, living in such a world as this, don't typically have the time to ponder the screams of fear and pain coming from that burning building or the unexpected gunfire to the rear of our rifle company? Propose something different if you wish, but don't merely complain the neuroscientists don't respect human moral freedom for they truly have discovered some facts which don't agree with most traditional moral philosophies.

Humanists have to be realistic and have to acknowledge the 'specific sciences' (as St. Thomas called them) currently have a dominant role in setting the agenda for modern thought. This shouldn't be at all surprising or upsetting. It's largely true that Augustine of Hippo began the long project of building Western Civilization when he discovered history in the modern sense. We entered the modern age on the shoulders of those thinkers who wrote philosophical books and novels obsessed with making sense of new political realities and barely imaginable political possibilities.

Literature and art and music and even philosophy aren't much good at navel-gazing; they need stuff to work with. It's not at all surprising or upsetting that our generation and a few to come might be downright obsessed with making sense of black-holes and multiple levels of infinity and genes. Are the concepts of broken symmetries less worthy of artistic attention than were the ways in which Henry V helped to forge a sense of England as a true nation?

I consider this dominance of science to be no more than an accident of history, using 'accident' somewhat in its philosophical sense. It seems true to me that, for various reasons, including the sheer fecundity of modern empirical knowledge-seeking enterprises, many of the interesting problems of the modern world, even those which are strongly 'man-centered' are stated in terms more 'scientific' than not. Someday, we'll have poets who will use those terms to speak truths as beautiful as any found in the writings of Virgil or his apprentice Danté. The problem isn't that we have instrumentalists denying truths or scientific thinkers squeezing those truths out of those terms but rather that the successors to Danté haven't yet arisen. Or maybe they have arisen and the humanists in the universities and publishing firms aren't looking or aren't capable of seeing something in front of them if it doesn't fit into well-documented schools of thought.

During this modern age, we have gathered mountains of empirical data, some of which has been turned into information, a bit less into knowledge, little into wisdom. In a meaningful sense, we've processed our modern empirical knowledge into forms hinting of a new understanding of what we Christians would call Creation but we've destroyed the integrity of our inherited understandings, though certainly not all of the parts of those understandings. We have no blueprint for building a new civilization or reforming Western Civilization—choose your favorite and remember that historians will sort it out in 500 years or so. In any case, many stand around claiming that our old home doesn't meet our current needs and is in bad shape. Others complain that we don't pay proper respect to that home. I see no reason to believe that anyone other than me has proposed a way of moving forward to building a new home which will meet our current needs while including what is good in that old home, though perhaps on the shelves of the library or in the niches devoted to serious art or interesting artifacts.

# 136 The Dis-Unity of Knowledge and the Mis-Formation of the Modern Mind, Part 3

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1641>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/07/04.]

Modern-day humanists, literary men and philosophers and theologians and historians and others are devoted to passing on a tradition allied with the moral goodness, including freedom, of Western Civilization but they don't seem to notice that the tradition is itself a phase of Western Civilization which reflects earlier understandings of the explorable, empirical realms of created being. We men of the West inhabit a great work become a lie and we haven't yet shown the courage and the faith to speak the deeper and richer truths we now see in created being, the thoughts God manifested as sufficient for the story He's telling.

There are important questions to asked and at least tentatively answered before we can evaluate the tradition of the West and decide how to integrate it into our world which is separated by at least a couple of centuries from many of the political teachings of that tradition, is also separated in more than historical time from older understandings of human being and the nature of empirical reality, and is growing apart from many other aspects of that tradition.

Let's ask a few of those questions, many under more active investigation by those opposed or indifferent to Western traditions than by those who claim to be defenders of those traditions.

What is the human mind? How can we nurture a properly ordered mind? What is the result of our current ways of living, of educating our

children and continuing to learn about a complex world when we ourselves become adults, of governing ourselves and earning our livings, of entertaining ourselves and forming our communities of worship. If we are to do all of this and to do it right, we need values, which means we need a story which gives purpose to our individual lives and the lives of our communities.

I've written much on this general topic and have recently published an overview of my current understanding of human nature, individual and communal, in the freely downloadable book: *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53]. This book is part of my efforts to help in re-forming the Christian civilization of the West or perhaps in building the foundations of a new Christian Civilization if we aren't able to rescue the West which seems to be so rapidly decaying.

So far as I can understand our current situation, I would strongly criticize even the best of the advocates of liberal arts education for the same reason that I criticized the New England colonists for the way they mishandled their relationships with the natives, a mishandling that helped lead to the war known as *King Phillip's War*, see [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/King\\_Phillips\\_War](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/King_Phillips_War), a war waged by some of the Indian tribes against the European settlers and some Indian allies. (See Chapter 408, *The Need for Abstractions in Moral Self-understanding*, for some more discussion on the issues.) The humanists of recent history have a concrete civilization which they understand in so many ways but they haven't abstracted properly to a level where they can see greater possibilities and also the current need for something far richer and far more complex than what we have inherited.

I would emphasize the best overview of my current understanding of human nature, individual and communal is found in the freely downloadable book: *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53], but the interested reader can start with the individual essays found in other chapters of this book:

- Chapter 127, *Intelligence vs. Intellect*;
- Chapter 282, *Do We Need Heart and Hands as Well as Mind to Understand Reality?*; and
- Chapter 178, *Are Communities a Form of Created Being?*.

On the most basic level, the problem I have with the defenses humanists make of their way of forming human minds, of viewing reality, of seeking

that which is qualitative to accompany the quantitative sought by technologists, is that they are defending a way of organizing and passing on major realms of human knowledge and not dealing directly with the underlying being, the true reality. The great books are simply dust-collectors if not used in ongoing efforts to develop the currently best understanding of Creation. It would seem, certainly to me, that we have learned a lot in recent centuries about this universe, a world in my terms when seen as ordered to God's purposes, and about the abstract realms of being from which concrete being is shaped, about various aspects and parts of being in this world, such as energy and matter and fields and life and communities. We've learned immense amounts about various entities including chimpanzees and tarantulas and men and stars and interstellar gas clouds and the universe itself seen as an entity. This much that we've learned hasn't yet shown up in much of the writings of serious novelists and historians and literary scholars; it has shown up in distorted form in various scientific works, some written by serious scientists who suffer from narrowness of vision but some written by scientists of wider vision, such as E.O. Wilson and David Bohm, as parts of honest efforts to develop more 'exact' understandings of human being or of being in general. Keep the word 'exact' in mind, I'll be explaining what it means in this context.

The interested reader can browse Chapter 193, *A Universe is More than it Contains*, to see a way in which metaphysics can be altered by a careful analysis even of equations in physics; this principle can also be seen in the claim that a man is more than his physical parts. In other words, it's not necessarily true that a man needs immaterial parts to be more than 'merely' flesh and blood; physicists have provided us with a possible example where all the parts and regions of a universe can obey the so-called law of the conservation of energy but the universe as a whole doesn't. The universe is itself an entity not fully defined by its 'parts'. (This particular result rises or falls with general relativity which allows a dissipation of radiative energy which is 'faster' than the expansion of space.)

There are a large number of questions which have been raised by modern explorers of empirical reality including historians and creative writers who, if their explorations of reality are valid, have expanded the ways and objects of human thought and feeling. Until we've entered the process of forming and answering questions, we won't really know even what questions we'll answer in the process of building a new civilization or at least as we enter a new phase of Western Civilization. Here are a few good possibilities which

I've dealt with in my writings, philosophical and theological and novelistic:

- What is mind?
- Can we speak as if there were a first man or were there some 'apish' creatures of doubtful status? Were Eve's mother and father subject to divine judgment?
- Can we speak of a first man who had a truly human mind or human moral nature?
- If we lose our faith in categorical thinking, as implied in the above two questions, can we develop new forms of moral reasoning that leave us capable of speaking old truths?
- What can it possibly mean to talk as if the beginning of this expansionary phase of the universe were some sort of true genesis, a true creation, even a creation from nothingness?
- Is there a meaningful way to talk about the beginning of Creation?
- Is there any reason to even want to talk about the beginning of Creation?
- Is randomness really a type of factuality?

These questions, and many more, are more tightly focused than versions from prior centuries. There is a great openness, even a looseness, in the writings of Plato which has disappeared in the writings of modern thinkers. Compare one of Plato's dialogues to essays by Lord Acton, let alone the writings of Stephen Toulmin or Gregory Chaitin or E.O. Wilson, and we see those modern works as possessing a density of empirical knowledge and a multiplicity of reasoning processes which would probably confuse the ancient thinkers. To be sure, there is great wisdom and insight into various aspects of being in Plato but we need to integrate that wisdom and insight into a world far richer and more complex than Plato could have anticipated, that is, into a greater body of wisdom and insight.

In its understanding of 'where' God is, the world of Aquinas was much different from that of Augustine, let alone that of the Pre-Socratic philosophers. Thousands of years before even those early Greek thinkers, there

were intelligent and high-achieving human beings manufacturing weapons and tools and starting to found a complex community at Jericho. Could they have understood that the realm of stars was made up of regions, places? Could they have understood that the realm of stars and of the earth beneath their feet lie within some sort of contingent entity, itself having properties rather than being just the sum total of star-regions and earth-regions? Did they have the same minds as we have, merely missing a body of facts and understandings to fill the empty bins of their minds? Or is it the case that a body of facts and understandings is itself a good part of what we mean by 'mind'? Was the mind of Goethe an assembly in which lived the ghosts of Virgil and Shakespeare, Plato and Grotius?

Mathematical reasoning applied to more general realms isn't just so many silly attempts to quantify what makes a good book or to predict who will win the next election. From the beginning, mathematical reasoning was part of the development of the human mind, most of which development has necessarily occurred in the intellect or communal mind. Euclid, or rather the ideas he organized so brilliantly (and may have added to in the conventional way but certainly in the act of organizing), was an important part of Greek thought, of Greek culture. Euclid wasn't a separate part; his ways of viewing space and possibilities for movement most certainly affected all of our ways of talking about human development, even moral development. As I've said often, created being is created being and even our greatest truths and most abstract concepts are created being at least in the sense that we would not know them if the Creator had not somehow manifested them in such a way as to be accessible to bipedal, featherless creatures.

Is it a coincidence that the human race has developed more abstract ways of viewing spaces than Euclid could have dreamed of just when human communities have grown to immense sizes and to complexities which we can't yet describe? I think not. The technological development which allowed such an expansion of total human population, including such local communities as Beijing and Mexico City, such expansions of relationships as can be seen in our current political and economic marketplaces, necessarily came with the development of non-Euclidean geometries and other such ways of thought. Many of these fields of mathematics can be used, have to be used in some physical problems, to provide qualitative descriptions when quantification is impossible or difficult or simply beside the point. Created being is created being and our complex and often abstract novels are of a

piece with quantum theory and the fresh-water system of New York City. As many have noted in various ways, we have problems made greater by the uneven advancement of various fields of human knowledge and human practice and we shouldn't ignore the fact that our human feelings seem a little better adjusted to our technology than to our complex and disordered politics. This is a developmental problem not so much different from the boy who grows legs too long for the rest of him on his way to a powerful, athletic build.

Even when quantification is possible and desirable, our problems in greater understandings by way of the humanities, including the sciences in their philosophical activities, can't be solved before they're stated in a clear way, even an 'exact' way. The entities involved, or at least their relationships, and their greater context must be understood and perhaps all described in that clear way. The human minds, individual and communal, must be focused more tightly upon the problems currently tearing apart our communities far more complex than we can currently describe and containing entities and relationships which we also can't describe, at least not so that the various parties can clearly see they are describing the same world and the same species of bipedal hominoids.

We need a tighter focusing because empirical reality tells us much about constraints on the concrete being we associate with the physical world while also opening up a greater infinity of possibilities for abstract being and for narratives, including a great diversity of evolutionary and developmental processes. (I remind the reader that concrete forms of being are shaped from more abstract forms of being in my way of thinking.) Along these lines, Pope Benedict XVI wrote of a need for a "more exact understanding of human nature." (See Chapter 25, *Broadening the Horizons of Reason* for the context of his remarks and my response.) He was himself a humanist who had learned much about modern biological and medical sciences during his years of trying to deal with the moral aspects of sexuality and reproduction; even those who disagree with his beliefs might take his general attitude as one worth considering: be open to new meanings brought by new knowledge but don't jump until you know where you'll land. He was confident, as am I, that we'll find the solid landing-spots will leave us in a world describable in terms consistent with Christian faith of a Catholic sort, a sacramental form of Christianity. But faith is faith and the Christian faith tells us a few things, gives us ways to evaluate proposed understandings, and leaves us confident that the world is the work of the God of Jesus Christ and is

a good place, though only an embryonic version of a complete and perfect place.

By itself, faith can't reach exact understandings of human nature or of Creation. Also, as Flannery O'Connor warned, faith can be accompanied by Pious Crap.

Faith doesn't tell us if Augustine was right in adopting the "fall from a state of grace" understanding of the origins of the human race and in rejecting the idea that we arose within the natural world. Yet, the Christian faith has been entangled with such an understanding become mostly Pious Crap. Science tells us that Augustine was wrong in rejecting a natural origin for the human race. If Augustine was right in seeing those ideas, "fall from a state of grace" and "natural origin," as being in conflict—at least in a world where natural origin means that moral natures also have evolved and are still evolving—then we should reject the usual understanding of the story of Adam and Eve.

Faith, Catholic or Jewish or Islamic or any other, needs to make peace with empirical reality. We need to establish a rich and complex understanding of Creation, an understanding which will tell us how to see moral order in our greater communal efforts though we as individuals will still need to struggle to find our own ways inside those greater structures of order. The changes can be great. For example, a world in which sexual natures and sexual desires are shaped, at least partly, by developmental processes wouldn't be best described by reasoning based upon strict categories, such as MALE and FEMALE. It would seem that MAle and FeMAIE and Male-fE are also possible as well as cases in which some are missing some of the characteristics of mature masculinity or femininity. This doesn't force us into regions of moral relativism, but it does force us into new understandings of human nature and, even if the old rules prove valid, force us to find new ways of loving and tolerating those who don't fall into the old categories. There are other, far more radical, possibilities which lie open to a courageous exploration of God's Creation and an honest response to what we discover. What matters most to Christians who have faith that Creation is the work of a all-loving and all-powerful and all-knowing God is that we have to remain open to what that Almighty Lord has done. If God has created a world in which some human beings cannot be strictly categorized as fully male or fully female, then we should deal with this aspect of God's Providence, though it doesn't seem so providential to many of us, including many of those who don't quite fit in the two standard categories.

What is important in these sorts of discussions is the loss of the communal mind of the greatest of all civilizations to date, Western Civilization, built largely upon the foundations of Semitic and Hellenistic and Roman Civilizations to purposes and uses largely set by Christian beliefs. But it no longer works. We know too much that cannot be reconciled to our traditional understanding of reality, or at least no one has carried out any such reconciliation. Our individual minds have no acceptable communal mind which would be that understanding of reality, of Creation, which reconciles such seemingly abstruse matters as infinities of different sizes, as matter which is also waves of some strange sort, as space and time bound up into a single geometrical structure, as sexual natures not fully male or female, as the commission of crimes up to genocide by way of the technology and administration of a Christian country.

Christians, in particular, are prone to believe, or at least pretend to believe, the traditional story of our journey through this vale of tears while believing, at least implicitly, a different story when receiving medical treatments developed under a different story. (See Chapter 582, *Taking the Fresh Fruits and Giving God the Leftovers*, which is a commentary, sort of, on one of the poems of Emily Dickinson.) Until we have that one story which can be believed during our worship as Christians, or as Jews, and also believed during our hours as workers and voters and patients and students, we can't regain morally coherent states of our human being, individual or communal. If we leave behind the Christian story when we enter the hospital, we won't just think, for example, the Catholic Church and some other churches are wrong in condemning artificial contraception; we'll not think of our Catholic beliefs at all. We've been trained, by Church as well as by political and economic institutions, to think in different moral ways in different contexts. They may not have realized they were doing this, but they were.

Let me wrap up this rather digressive essay by first noting a wise insight by Professor Kagan (see the article, *Ave atque vale*, at "<http://www.newcriterion.com/articles.cfm/Ave-atque-vale-7653>):

Because of the cultural vacuum in their earlier education and because of the informal education they receive from the communications media, which both shape and reflect the larger society, today's liberal arts students come to college, it seems to me, bearing a sort of relativism verging on nihilism, a kind

of individualism that is really isolation from community. The education they receive in college these days, I believe, is more likely to reinforce this condition than to change it. In this way, too, it fails in its liberating function, in its responsibility to shape free men and women.

But, as I've argued in this and other essays, those young students couldn't possibly develop into morally well-ordered states because their elders, including those calling themselves 'humanists', haven't done their job of providing those stories and other forms of understandings which would situate those young people in a world of moral-order, a Creation in Christian terms. Adjust the language to Jewish or Moslem or secular-liberal understandings, but the criticism remains the same.



# 137 Empirical Knowledge Also Needs a Framework of Understanding

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1654>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/07/26.]

We should be very careful in how we reason from even the best of facts by way of the most sincere respect for empirical reality even if we have proper respect for plausibly conjectured abstract realms of being. We all carry in our heads and hearts and even in our ways of behavior something that could be labeled a ‘framework’ of interpretation or, in a more complete form, a worldview which gives overall meaning to what we consider to be ‘reality’. That worldview or framework might be a full-blown narrative which makes sense of our empirical knowledge within a context of an overarching theological creed as I hold in the form of traditional, Catholic faith or it might be a fairly simple, nearly pantheistic, faith in reason as Einstein held.

I was reading Bishop Butler’s *The Analogy of Religion* and found that a man reputed to have a great share of common sense did, in fact, understand our dependence upon our senses for what we know—though he didn’t seem nearly so clear about the issue as Aquinas who had lived about four centuries earlier. What’s remarkable to modern sensibilities is the way Butler was able to argue from a sense-based understanding of human knowledge to idealistic and dualistic conclusions.

A particular example comes from the observation that tools, even a walking stick used for probing ground, can become a true extension of our arm. From this observation, knowing about how the brain builds a map of

my body and its interaction with tools and other creatures, I conclude—originally following Michael Polanyi’s analyses of his own experiences as a surgeon—that an oft-used tool can become as if a part of our body. Not knowing that our bodily sense, and the various aspects of our selves, arise as the brain builds such a map, and probably thinking of the brain as being a static entity in its structure, Bishop Burton goes the other way from me and concludes my own body is only nominally and by custom a part of ‘me’: the true ‘me’ is immaterial, residing inside the brain, but in the way of a ghost residing inside a house. Rather than seeing the self as something which can expand into the material world, he restricts my self to an immaterial entity somehow located inside my head.

Why such radically different conclusions from two thinkers, Bishop Butler in the 17th century and Loyd Fueston in the 21st century, who both accept that we know by way of our senses, by way of eye and ear and nose and so on? Butler was born after Galileo and Newton had done their scientific work and perhaps knew of the growing trend to think in terms of a universe of concrete being and not in terms of a place in which I could travel, in principle, with Dante and Virgil from Hell to Purgatory to Heaven, a place in which “matter” from Earth and “spirit” from Heaven met in some never-explained way. There’s a strangeness about the human adjustment to these sorts of changes in our worldviews and this can be seen in the fact that some cosmological speculations would allow universes with radically different properties in different regions but nearly all physicists and philosophers working on cosmological problems would reject the idea of radically different regions in the same universe, more or less by definition, equally because of belief in uniform mathematical models. (This doesn’t mean that it’s impossible to have a pasted-together universe under current understandings of concrete, contingent being, only that it lies outside nearly all ‘scientific’ worldviews in the post-Einsteinian world, with some interesting exceptions one of which I’ll discuss below.)

Butler lived in a transitional phase during which philosophers as well as scientists were also moving more strongly toward the analysis of physical systems in terms of mathematically describable cause-and-effect relationships rather than the more anthropomorphic ‘tendencies’, almost ‘desires’, which were assumed by Aristotle and some other thinkers of the ancient world. This belief in cause-and-effect was tightly connected with the faith in certain modes of mathematical thinking advocated by Galileo; Newton made possible a more consistent mathematical way of thinking about real-

ity which imposed assumptions, usually implicit, which included a general belief in the uniformity of laws and stuff throughout this universe. Modern mathematics would actually allow various cutting and sewing operations which would allow a universe to be constructed out of parts inconsistent in some ways. This construction would be rather strange but describable in rigorous terms. Arguably, some entities conjectured by modern physicists, such as the worm-holes which would allow time-travel, are regions ‘sewn’ into the fabric of our universe—if they exist. But they can plausibly exist under our current understandings of physical reality. In fact, speculative theories describe how ‘normal’ regions of our universe could develop into strange regions, but they are as if cut from someplace else and sewn into our universe by some mathematician with a strange sense of humor.

A century from now, those in the know, especially those who read the best of popular science books, might well laugh at our ideas about cosmology and genetics and human history. More sympathetic and more knowledgeable thinkers in those future generations might have good reason to consider us to have been headed in the right direction, however wrong some of the ideas held back in 2013.

I was born in 1955, the year Einstein died. I was born a century and a half after Cauchy and various predecessors had largely completed the construction of a solid mathematical foundation for the calculus and Newtonian dynamics. I was born about a century after Darwin began publishing his major works, half a century after brain-scientists began disciplined studies of neurons, half a century after the beginning of the exploration of aspects and regions of the cell which seemed to be some sort of machinery of inheritance. I was born a century after John Henry Newman calmly and quietly advocated an acceptance of the world as God had created it, though he seems to have still accepted a dualistic view of human being. I was born a half-century after the rediscovery of the truly radical nature of Thomistic existentialism and the teaching of Thomas Aquinas and others in the High Middle Ages that all we know, even divine revelations, comes through our senses. Aquinas had also taught that all that is truly human is embodied and an immaterial soul is a non-human thing attached to us to carry out abstract forms of reasoning he thought impossible to a brain seen as static in its structures—an interesting combination of anticipations of modern scientific discoveries and ancient errors.

From a Christian point-of-view, it’s quite possible to accept a full-blooded Biblical Christianity and also accept that God works in ways not

describable by Intelligent Design Theory, oddly tied to freshman calculus and physics, an introductory course in probability theory, and a common-sense of the sort which powered the Industrial Revolution. Biblical Literalism is part of the package and not a good description of the ways of thought of the leaders of the school of Intelligent Design. In other words, the limited views and knowledge-base of the advocates of Intelligent Design are very much what were part of the worldview of the men who developed modern construction techniques, including the use of iron and then steel beams, and modern forms of production and transportation and public utilities. We owe our fresh-water and sewage systems to men who thought like the current advocates of Intelligent Design Theory. The Bible is read literalistically on Sunday afternoon after worship services on a day breaking up the main work of a man's life. This doesn't mean that every follower of Intelligent Design is a competent mechanical engineer or skilled steel-worker. It does mean that their view is limited in a way that ties them to outmoded 19th century thought, that is, the thought of those those who played a disproportionate role in creating the prosperity of the modern world. Gratitude and criticism can be directed to the same figures but we modern people seem to have more trouble with gratitude than with criticism, often downright nasty criticism.

We should be very careful in how we reason. Indeed.

Maybe we can do better than those who limit the Creator to engineering sciences and introductory probability theory? Maybe we can do better than those who take the odd view that anything physically small by galactic standards must be meaningless? Apparently, a child dancing in a sunny yard is worth less than an advancing army with great fire-power, let alone a black-hole which distorts spacetime with its mass millions of times greater than the mass of our sun. Is Shakespeare less important than those who miniaturized nuclear-fusion bombs so they could be carried by ICBMs? Yet, these morally dense thinkers, led by the likes of Carl Sagan and Richard Dawson, usually pretend to humanitarian sensibilities even as they worship size and power and impressive numbers in general, but only galaxies; they pretend to dislike the physical greatness of nuclear bombs.

I've been reading an often insightful book on the technical aspects and general principles of complex systems and the author wrote of how Creationism is implausible because it depends upon an agent no one has ever seen. And he went on to conduct more insightful analyses of highly abstract, invisible aspects of being which reason can find in this concrete world though

those aspects remain invisible, other than in their effects, to the human eye.

We should be very careful in how we reason. Indeed.

Do these people not have the imagination to realize that even our universe in its early years, as described in the standard cosmological theory, was a very abstract, very strange entity with no thing-like being?

We should be very careful in how we reason. Indeed.

This very problem of unconscious or ideological bias, or the largely equivalent problem of assuming our metaphysical beliefs are simply common-sense rules of absolute truth, leads me to still more strongly advocate the view that even the most quantitatively successful realms of science have to be put into a greater framework or worldview to make total sense or to be seen as nonsensical. Even good thought, outside of a more general framework or worldview, can be wrongfully understood and can lead to a variety of problems in our political and economic activities as well as in our religious and intellectual activities.

Download *Four Kinds of Knowledge* [43] for a coherent way of understanding how human beings know.



# 138 Remembering What Someone Pushed into Your Head

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1671>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/08/13.]

Scientists have succeeded in creating false memories in lab mice, though it's not at all true they created memories from scratch. Rather did they expose the mice to a bad experience in one location and then manipulated activity levels of brain-cells so that the mice associated that bad experience with another location where they'd not had any such experience. It was a substantial achievement and could lead to some very good treatments for various problems as well as having already improved the understanding of memory formation. I'll write a little about the possible good a little later in this essay. The work done by the scientists who were working at MIT is discussed in the article: *Neuroscientists plant false memories in the brain* at <http://web.mit.edu/newsoffice/2013/neuroscientists-plant-false-memories-in-the-brain-0725.html>.

But, as they note, our heads are already filled with false memories:

In many court cases, defendants have been found guilty based on testimony from witnesses and victims who were sure of their recollections, but DNA evidence later overturned the conviction.

One example the article doesn't give is more germane to what the MIT scientists actually did: cognitive psychologists discovered over the past couple decades or so that some phobias, including some which are crippling, seem to have come about as the result of a gratuitously arising physical state corresponding to fear at a time when the victim happened to be in an

open space or in an airplane or near a certain sort of animal. Other phobias seem to be at least partially built-in, such as fear of snakes or spiders and a fear of large animals when we're young which can last to the end of our lives for one reason or another. There is no one-size fits all explanation for phobias but it would be good to be able to deal with those which do involve false memories.

Being able to scan a brain of someone afraid of flying as they're in a plane might allow a psychologist to remove or replace the false memory which connects the plane to fear. Clearly, this technology could be misused, but nearly all powerful technologies can, by definition, do great harm. Even simpler technologies have that property. For example, my attitude toward herbal medicines has always been, to simplify a bit, that they either don't work or, if they do, they can cause harm by way of side-effects or wrong doses in the same way as any medicine coming out of a chemical plant. This isn't an argument for or against herbal medicine or any other human technology, only a reminder that a hammer can drive in nails or bash skulls, or at least thumbs even in a nonviolent society.

We should remember that we're the product of evolutionary processes which work, first of all, to select successful reproducers. Accurate memories aren't as valuable as the sorts of memories, whatever they are, which lead to successful reproduction. We can think about the human bias toward optimistically remembering the past and anticipating the future. Nature is prolific and it's likely that she's ready to throw away a lot of optimists so long as she gets, so to speak, the optimists who produce children and continue to do so even after a painful childbirth or dealing with a misbehaving 16 year-old. A mother might remember the child clearly and the painful childbirth somewhat dimly. As father watches a son graduating with a degree in engineering, the father's brain might weaken the memories of the rebellious son who was brought home by policemen after a street-race, and again and again; the father is ready to be optimistic and encourage son and daughter-in-law to produce a goodly number of grandchildren. The main point is that our memories aren't oriented to accurate recording of events but rather to recording of events in a way that aids reproduction. This may or may not involve accuracy but likely doesn't when it comes to those aspects of memory which affect our general attitude toward the world and its dangers.

At that, it's remarkable how good our memories can be, especially if well-trained—I'm one of those who thinks that one of the biggest of many

mistakes made by modern educators was the strange decision to stop the training of memories by way of memorizing speeches or political documents or whatever. Abraham Lincoln, whom I admire as a speaker and consider interesting as a thinker though disastrous as a political leader, drove powerful rhythms of speech into his brain by memorizing parts of the Bible and parts of Shakespearean works—I think *Hamlet* was a particular favorite. The *Gettysburg Address* worked not because it was coherent morally or politically but rather because it rode on the waves generated by rhythms borrowed from Jeremiah and Isaiah. Young human beings tend to like memorizing and having words on hand, but our schools no longer require the students to memorize, say, the preamble to the American *Constitution* and those students devote their mental energy to memorizing strange and sometimes outright despicable song lyrics.

Our memories are, as often noted, more powerful and sometimes more accurate if we learn to use rhythms and also if we tie memories to concrete places or things. They are clearly more powerful if exercised, as is true of the arms we use to swing a baseball bat or tennis racket or framing hammer.

Let me quote from the article, *Neuroscientists plant false memories in the brain* at <http://web.mit.edu/newsoffice/2013/neuroscientists-plant-false-memories-in-the-brain-0725.html>, so that we can see what the MIT neuroscientists really did:

In last year's study, the researchers conditioned these mice to fear a particular chamber by delivering a mild electric shock. As this memory was formed, the *c-fos* gene was turned on, along with the engineered channelrhodopsin gene. This way, cells encoding the memory trace were "labeled" with light-sensitive proteins.

The next day, when the mice were put in a different chamber they had never seen before, they behaved normally. However, when the researchers delivered a pulse of light to the hippocampus, stimulating the memory cells labeled with channelrhodopsin, the mice froze in fear as the previous day's memory was reactivated.

"Compared to most studies that treat the brain as a black box while trying to access it from the outside in, this is like we are trying to study the brain from the inside out," Liu says. "The technology we developed for this study allows us to fine-

dissect and even potentially tinker with the memory process by directly controlling the brain cells.”

In other words, they didn't really create memories directly. They worked with a remembered fear response learned in a chamber where the mice had been shocked and tied that memory to another chamber where the mice had never been. This is similar to the hypothetical development of some phobias by way of a legitimate fear response being tied to a situation or place or entity for which that fear response wasn't legitimately attached, though there might well be real underlying reasons for fear.

In still other words, the MIT neuroscientists tied an existing memory to a newly experienced place. That sort of phenomenon occurs often to me and probably to others. Some cases of *deja vu* are likely the result of a memory suddenly becoming active in a situation or place or entity not really connected to the events underlying that memory.

I wouldn't worry that we're days away from the Matrix, or whatever, and we have to see that memory manipulation technologies might well have some good and moral uses such as helping those with false memories or with memories formed by wrongful combination of real or imagined events or by way of attaching emotional responses illegitimately to a plane or a big, friendly dog. And we also have to remember that all powerful technologies and 'deep' scientific discoveries, along with insightful histories or novels, are potentially dangerous and that danger is far more likely to be realized in a morally disordered age.

Before moving on, I'll emphasize the implication I intended that novels and historical works, even when they provide only a plausible ordering to known events, can also create memories in us or tie emotional responses to existing memories of, say, the chaos of the 1960s. Unaltered memories of events tied together in a new narrative can be a more powerful manipulation of memories than the creation of artificial memories of events that didn't really happen or maybe happened in a different setting or involved different entities or whatever.

False association of a memory with a different situation or place or entity and other manipulations of memory can be seen by an objective outsider or by a self-aware re-memberer if he contemplates the matter properly. It's usually very hard to change a shared, communal narrative. Most human beings seem to have not the capability, or at least not the willingness, to reevaluate their internalized story of, for example, the United States or

other nation. More importantly, few Christians or Jews or other peoples of faith seem capable of reevaluating their communal memories of their spiritual ancestors.

This problem of the distortions which come when our greater narratives, conscious or unconscious, are inappropriate are of greater interest to me than the implantation or manipulation of individual memories. I'd already explored the issue by the way of the implantation of false memories by commercial advertisements in Chapter 431, *Your World is a Narrative—Don't Let it Be Written for You*. I wrote:

False memories can be implanted in your minds so that you can't even remember truly where you've been, even so mundane a false memory as that of holding a glass bottle of Coca-cola in a stadium which bans glass containers: see the article *Ads Implant False Memories* at <http://www.wired.com/wiredscience/2011/05/ads-implant-false-memories/>. This is a frightening possibility in a world where governments and corporations and other powerful entities have plenty of reasons for you to accept their false histories of important historical events and of the very ways in which wealth is distributed and power is structured. They have reasons for you to live a life profitable to them.

There are a variety of studies in which the scientists 'read' minds in one way or another, for example, to predict which songs will be popular with teenagers by scanning the brains of test subjects as they hear new, unreleased music. There are others which are showing an ability to predict our actions in the near-term future by scanning brains. The scanning of brains is a powerful technology and a dangerous technology. It can help us a lot and lead to medical miracles, but it can most certainly be misused. In general, the more powerful a technology is, the greater the harm it can cause. And we should remember that prediction can lead to causal or correlative models that can then lead to control mechanisms. As it is, sophisticated marketers, such as those at Coca-cola, have found weak but effective steering mechanisms.

The philosopher Ian Hacking wrote an important book, *Rewriting the Soul* in which he concludes that the multiple per-

sonality syndrome was the result of the creation of barriers between different blocks of memories, some of which were false memories and some of those may have been implanted by therapists who were trying to help troubled human beings. Some of the so-called “recovered memories” which tore apart families and tortured human beings who needed help were implanted by incompetent therapists. Some of the spectacular claims of child-abuse in institutional settings turned out to be the result of memories implanted by incompetent investigators. I remember reading of a case of alleged large-scale child-abuse where competent investigators came in later and said they thought something bad had occurred but they couldn’t get at the truth because of the false memories in the minds of some of the children. By that time, they were group memories. The children were remembering together what had never happened.

If you can control someone’s memory, you can control, or at least influence, many of the thoughts and actions of that human being. Stalin knew that but wasn’t so good at rewriting memories as the American politicians, marketers, and entertainers.

After discussing some political implications of memory manipulation, and also questioning if memory manipulation explained our complacency in the face of huge transfers of wealth and other evidence that our leaders are working for their own good and often directly against the good of the average citizen, I concluded:

A true human person is a human animal who tries to shape himself by intelligent responses over time to external reality. Those intelligent responses begin when we’re young with firm guidance from parents and other adults with a concrete relationship to us. As we mature, those intelligent responses should increasingly be the result of our own understandings and voluntary actions towards a state of human being we’d like to occupy.

A human animal which allows itself to be shaped by whatever external forces grab hold of him is nothing like a moral person.

Let me close by quickly discussing a major problem which I’ve dealt with only tangentially in the past. Most human beings have not shown the inclination or ability to understand these issues in such a way as to anticipate

problems before they've overwhelmed their society. The inclination might be present in highly intelligent men and women, though we can see many such human beings who seem to loyally support the mainstream narratives even when they break down in the minds of those who, for example, simply pay attention to soldiers returning with stories of being systematically put in a position, say by Harvard and Ford Company trained operations research guys, to kill in self-defense though they are killing civilians defending their homes. Some who seem less intellectually talented might well see through the various sorts of false memories planted in our heads by power-grabbing politicians who wish to be seen as 21st century Jeffersons or Burkes, by generals and their political and industrial allies who are more dedicated to certain modes and technologies of waging war than they are to defending their countries, by corporate executives wishing to glorify the consumer life-style, by no-talent artists and novelists who wish their bland puddings to be treated as if the spicy stew of a a young Picasso or a grizzled war-veteran and ex-slave named Cervantes, of scientists or technologists who wish to pursue what they can pursue without any moral quibbles, of various thinkers who feverishly imagine their ideologies can produce paradise without even seeing that a true understanding needs to support the great mass of our modern civilizations. Generally, false memories are created for their own minds and the minds of others by barbarian children who don't understand the complex civilization they inherited, don't know what it's true nature is, can't clearly recognize what has gone wrong—lack of progress in understanding God's story, and wouldn't have a clue how to start moving toward a better situation if someone were to tell them what had gone wrong.

Some members of the Body of Christ have the duty and responsibility, the privilege and God-given calling, to explore God's story in such a way as to make some sense of it. This means that the story must always be updated, accounting for new knowledge—even knowledge of newly discovered forms of being. The well-established parts of the story must be restated according to the words and concepts of the current age. Those members of the Body of Christ haven't done their job in at least a couple of centuries, during what is surely the most dynamic phase of the human portion of God's story.

To a Christian, the greatest danger with the manipulation of memories has already been partially realized, largely because of our own lack of faith and courage, our sheer moral irresponsibility. Perhaps I should restrict

the moral responsibility to Christian thinkers and authors and artists and ecclesiastical leaders. In any case, we've left an earlier understanding of God's story behind and haven't shaped a newer understanding. This has produced that most dangerous form of false memories, memories false to any plausible understanding of God's world.

# 139 Memorization and Mind-shaping

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1693>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/09/25.]

In a short article, *What Does Memorization Have To Do with Learning?* at <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/what-does-memorization-have-to-do-with-learning/>, Marina Olson addresses what I consider one of the greatest failings of the American educational system and, more generally, of American attitudes toward human culture and, indeed, all of Creation. Ms Olson's article deals with one educator who seemed to attack memorization (Orlin) and one who advocated memorization (Leithauser) with these words which approach a greater wisdom about the human mind but fails to reach that greater wisdom, in my opinion, because of an inadequate understanding of created being. The article ends with this summary:

Orlin explains that "what separates memorization from learning is a sense of meaning." For Leithauser, "to take a poem to heart was to know it by heart." That is certainly not a sense of memorization devoid of meaning. Rather, Leithauser has taken the poem into himself in such a way that it has become connatural to himself. This is leagues apart from Orlin's description of memorizing only necessary facts to obtain a high grade in a class. In fact, when speaking of poetry, Orlin describes his own experience with writing a paper on Robert Frost's *Once by the Pacific*:

"I read it dozens of times, dissecting every phrase. Months later, standing on a rocky, storm-swept beach, I found that I

could recite the poem by heart. I never set out to memorize it. I just... did.”

Both Orlin and Leithauser, in their seeming opposition, strike at the need for teachers to encourage students not to be satisfied with becoming mere repositories of factoids, but rather to allow their lessons to infuse them. Such is the nature of learning.

As I noted in Chapter 303, *Communal Being and Communal Sin*:

There is a small example of our moral decay which says much about this issue [of communal being and communal sin]. Students in religious education no longer memorize Bible verses. Students in public and other schools no longer memorize important speeches or parts of the *Declaration of Independence* or the *Constitution* of the United States. Instead, they go home to fill their empty memories with biographical knowledge of disordered cretins in the entertainment industries; they fill their hearts with the lyrics of songs about sexual violence and recreational drugs and disordered teenaged anger; they shape their habits to their own immediate desires rather than learning the habits and customs of their traditions.

Human beings memorize as a natural matter. If there is no *Iliad* or *Henry V* to fill their memories, no noble speeches, no facts about the lives of great men and women, they will fill their undisciplined but powerful memories with the products of a trashy entertainment industry or a who-rish ‘news’ industry. We should remember that great writers and orators, including Abraham Lincoln—not so great a political leader in my opinion, drew upon large stores of memorized quotations from the Bible, Shakespeare, Milton, Virgil, Horace, Homer, and so on. The specific ideas and rhythms of those various great works filled *Moby Dick* as well as the *Gettysburg Address*, and even the modernistic books of Edgar Allen Poe and William Faulkner and many others. As long as I’m beating this dead horse, I’ll add that Chaim Potok, in the two-book novel *The Chosen/The Promise*, writes about the memorization of shelves of books by rabbinical seminar-ians (mostly likely including himself) who had to be able to move fluidly from one work to the middle of another to pass their oral exams.

Mind is both stuff and form. Memorization of “good stuff” provides the material to be shaped. A research mathematician, a Biblical exegete, a choreographer, or a cabinet-maker have a stock of “good stuff” in their minds.

There’s more and that more is of still greater importance. As I noted in Chapter 101, *New Forms of Human Mind and New Forms of Human Civilization*:

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

But there’s a non-linear complexity involved in this business of cultures and minds. At any one slice of time, it seems to me that minds shape culture and culture tells minds how to move, to paraphrase John Wheeler [physicist and expert in general relativity].

As I put it in Chapter , *Differential Geometry and Moral Narratives*:

The American physicist John Wheeler once summarized general relativity by telling us that matter tells space how to shape itself and space then tells matter how to move. Maybe we can play around with this metaphor:

“Human beings tell moral space how to shape itself and moral space then tells human beings how to move through life—how to act.”

The “good stuff” when we talk about moral spaces is rules of behavior and habits formed so that we may not even be consciously aware of them. Memories none the less. The “good stuff” for a mathematician is all those rules of differentiation and integration as well as proof techniques—a high-level expert in analysis (think of abstract calculus) would spend all his life on one complex proof if he hadn’t formed a lot of memories and instead had to develop that one proof from basic principles. In other terms, mathematical skills are not something separate from all those memorized equations from freshman calculus and woodworking skills are not something separate from those memorized properties of woods and of tools. In still other terms,

mathematical skills and knowledge and complex skills and knowledge in general are cumulative, based upon prior skills and knowledge already held in the mind.

As I say in a novel not yet completed:

His memories were shaping his mind but his mind was telling his memories how to move along as if they were an orderly succession of events, though not so orderly as a half-hour television show with an obvious plot-line and a clean ending. His memories often hinted of a story, but not a story he always wanted to be part of.

It's apparently hard for American educators to teach 'facts' without rigidifying the minds of their students. That's a problem with American educators and their ways of teaching, more so a problem with the ways in which American children, including future teachers, are raised. I'll leave that problem behind as I make a still more important point, at least within my understanding of being.

So many modern thinkers don't see that the separation of facts (as in what's memorized) and conceptualization (as in some alleged ability to apparently do something with the mind unformed by and empty of empirical reality), is a form of dualism which is less reasonable than a full-blown version in which creatures capable of moral reasoning (alas, more than just human beings) and abstract reasoning (alas, including at least chimpanzees) have some sort of immaterial entity capable of dealing with these immaterial concepts which are independent of thing-like being. In other words, pre-modern human beings thought facts and knowledge and understanding to be immaterial but they also thought they had immaterial minds or souls to handle this immaterial stuff. Modern thinkers are, in my opinion, less reasonable in positing immaterial facts and knowledge and understanding which is to be contained in the matter of the brain. How is protoplasm to contain ectoplasmic knowledge? I don't know but I seem to be perhaps the only one to realize it is an overlooked question.

The human mind forms by way of response to its environments, including the abstract realms of created being such as mathematical spaces, which have been discovered mostly in recent centuries. At that, those abstract realms continue to be misunderstood even by great mathematicians

and physicists and philosophers. Some artists and musicians and poets seem to have better understood the sheer reality of abstractions.

The biggest of all issues is involved here, the understanding of the nature of contingent being, “created being” to a Christian. As I said in Chapter 628, *Becoming Child-like in Our Thinking*:

I’ve said often: created being, reality, is a manifestation of certain thoughts of God. We accept what we see as being true; things are true as St. Thomas Aquinas claimed. We have no warrant for a belief that we human animals know something outside of what we are told by way of the thing-like realm of being and the abstract realms of being we can begin to detect by studying that thing-like realm in greater detail and with greater sophistication. We are children learning from the Creator and shaping our thoughts in response to His answers. We’re not some sort of natural adults bringing schemes of truths to the task of understanding what lies around us. Any schemes we have are drawn out of our environments, concrete and abstract, by studying our traditions, and by that painful process of growing into a world, becoming truly part of it. We need to refound our Christian faith and we must do so by accepting on faith what is known of empirical reality and to move on to making sense of that knowledge in light of our Christian beliefs. As children take on faith the claims of their parents, we need to take on faith what God is telling us through His Creation.

Even more directly: a properly shaped human mind is an encapsulation of Creation, something of a complex and smeared image of the thoughts God manifested in created being. In shaping our minds to the thoughts of God, we are becoming truer images of the Almighty.



# 140 Maybe the Resulting Culture(s) is the True Measure of a Country's Educational Systems?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1738>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/12/07.]

In a typically intelligent way, Steve Sailor discusses the latest results from PISA, the educational tests which basically cover the 'rich' (OECD) countries. Sailor's article, *PISA, Piece by Piece* found at [http://takimag.com/article/pisa\\_piece\\_by\\_piece\\_steve\\_sailer#axzz2mVuMBKg1](http://takimag.com/article/pisa_piece_by_piece_steve_sailer#axzz2mVuMBKg1)", is worth reading.

They say the proof is in the pudding and I'd claim the pudding for education is the resulting culture, not test scores. We don't learn just to pass tests, though there can be value in tests if they are taken as indications of the rate of progress (if any) toward the acquisition of skills and attitudes and knowledge which is necessary to play our proper roles in our civilization.

It's probably appropriate to let conformity settle down upon those who are so comfortable but when tests are used as a means of enforcing conformity upon all the students, we lose most possibilities of adapting to God's dynamic Creation as it emerges more fully and more clearly to human minds and hearts and hands.

The world is dynamic and human being, individual and communal, is shaped in response to that dynamic reality. Human being is changing, but some parts of individual and communal human being is highly resistant to change, at least rapid change. That's certainly not all bad. Our current

educational systems, certainly in the United States, have been for a few generations or more one of the heaviest drags upon any efforts to respond to modern empirical knowledge, in the history of the ancient Hebrews as well as nuclear physics.

If we had a proper educational system, students in various tracks—straightforward textbook learning and vocational learning and advanced learning for those more energetic and talented—would probably do well on standardized tests though the advanced students might be bored and trying to head for the library or laboratory halfway through the test period. Those advanced students, and occasionally others, would be learning the new knowledge, maybe starting to acquire new knowledge, and starting to integrate that new knowledge in their cultures.

Instead, we in the United States are seeing our cultural institutions, with the notable exception of serious music, being taken over by those whose idea of adaptation is downgrading their product to reach ever larger audiences of ever more barbaric human beings, barbaric in terms of both their individual and communal being. I've been told by an active literary agent (thrillers and detective novels but he was an older man who'd known more literary editors and agents) and an ex-editor in a major publishing house, that the minds of workers in our publishing industry have decayed more rapidly than the minds of Americans in general. The very talented have been mostly crushed down toward the middling level but those with some lesser talents have also been crushed down. There has been some decay in the middling level itself—check for the number of successful middle-brow authors from the 1950s and earlier who produced works of some lasting interests to serious readers.

I suspect that Western Civilization is being pushed to the side and will continue to be pushed to the side, perhaps by a civilization with heavy Asiatic content. But that new civilization might be a Christian Civilization (a truer precursor to the Body of Christ) which is a meeting ground and home for a large portion of the human race, European (including the US and Canada and others) and far east—though it might be a while before other regions of the world can participate much in this new civilization.

At any rate, there is little reason to believe that the United States and Europe are producing much, outside of music and some fields of science, which will be of lasting interest to the human race. Who cares if we do badly or well upon standardized tests?

They justify a large industry and corresponding bureaucracy of obscure

purpose.

They produce a lot of statistics which can be analyzed and who cares? Though I'm an advocate of the importance of the sorts of skills which can be tested accurately (such as memorization of basic facts and use of basic language skills), the Western educational systems—certainly those of the United States—are self-serving systems which are clearly not set up or run to do anything truly useful for a troubled civilization or for a civilization which is coming to life or reviving alongside its own dying organs (become self-serving institutions such as our schools).



# 141 A Brain Shaped to Geometric Thought?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1777>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/02/12.]

In an interesting article, *How Our Brains Go the Distance* found at <http://phenomena.nationalgeographic.com/2014/02/03/how-our-brains-go-the-distance/>, Virginia Hughes tells us:

People think about distances all day...long. Distance can describe physical spaces (a far-flung city; a nearby store), time (distant past; near future), and social relationships (near-and-dear pals; a quarreling couple needing some space).

Researchers have long thought that these various examples of “psychological distance” are represented by some of the same circuits in the brain. A new brain-imaging study strongly bolsters the idea, finding that certain patterns of neural activity underlie all of our judgments about distance—whether in space, time, or the social realm.

The results makes sense, the researchers say, given that all of these distances have something in common: They give us a way to move beyond the visceral, here-and-now experience of our lives. More provocatively, this ability to “go the distance” might be uniquely human.

This is probably necessary to the ‘higher-level’ claims I’ve made that human beings can abstract from concrete or relatively concrete levels of created being to relatively abstract levels of created being. I’ve particularly emphasized geometric reasoning in my claim we can gain some sort of a

better handle on our moral messes by using qualitative reasoning borrowed from modern physics and mathematics, borrowed perhaps by an abstraction of that reasoning from, say, the analysis of spacetime in our universe, followed by a movement toward the concrete levels of human morality, or of human life in general.

I'll reuse a diagram which appears in several essays in this book because it explains something basic about my way of thought:

I first used that diagram in the essay included as *The Essence of Liberalism* 438 where I claimed:

What we need, in terms set by this essay, are thinkers who can move up to higher levels of abstraction to figure out how our human natures and communities become more complex and richer in possibilities (even the most passive of individual human beings have natures which are more complex just because of our more complex communities). I'm suggesting that we can learn many tricks from modern physicists and mathematicians and might very well be able to borrow directly from what has been learned from the exploration of spacetime, matter and energy and fields, and even the most abstract regions of mathematics.

The article, *How Our Brains Go the Distance* found at <http://phenomena.nationalgeographic.com/2014/02/03/how-our-brains-go-the-distance/>, also tells us:

What most surprised me about this research is its possible connection to empathy and “theory of mind,” or the ability to take the mental perspective of someone else. About a decade ago, researchers linked theory of mind to a specific region in the brain: the temporo-parietal junction (TPJ). Intriguingly, the TPJ region encompasses the IPL [which is the brain region with activity corresponding to the concepts of ‘near’ and ‘far’].

Theory of mind may be another way that we have evolved to look beyond our immediate, individual perspective, notes Nira Liberman, a social psychologist at Tel Aviv University. “We predict the behavior of other people by forming abstract mental constructs,” she says. “All these different ways of traversing immediate experience were and are achieved by abstract mental representations.”

See the article, *Rebecca Saxe: Fine tuning the theory of mind* found at <http://sfari.org/news-and-opinion/investigator-profiles/2009/rebecca-saxe-fine-tuning-the-theory-of-mind> for the discussion about “theory of mind”.

I also discussed this issue of empathy in Chapter 222, *Through the Body Comes Sin, Through the Body Salvation*, and also in Chapter 295, *The Embodied But Constructed Self*. In that second chapter, I wrote, “ We are, in some reductionistic but legitimate sense, mappings in our brains, mappings which include both our individual and communal selves.”

That last line is important. Our individual selves are created by processes in this mortal realm, processes which produce imperfect and incomplete results in a world which allows no better. After all, if the process could be completed in this world, God’s story would end at that point. More importantly for my current purposes, our communal selves are constructed by mappings in our brains. Mappings similar to those which shape our human animal beings as individuals of a truer sort shape our human tribes and clans as communities of a truer sort—though I believe we become ‘persons’ in a greater sense only when we also become a part of the perfect and complete community: the Body of Christ.

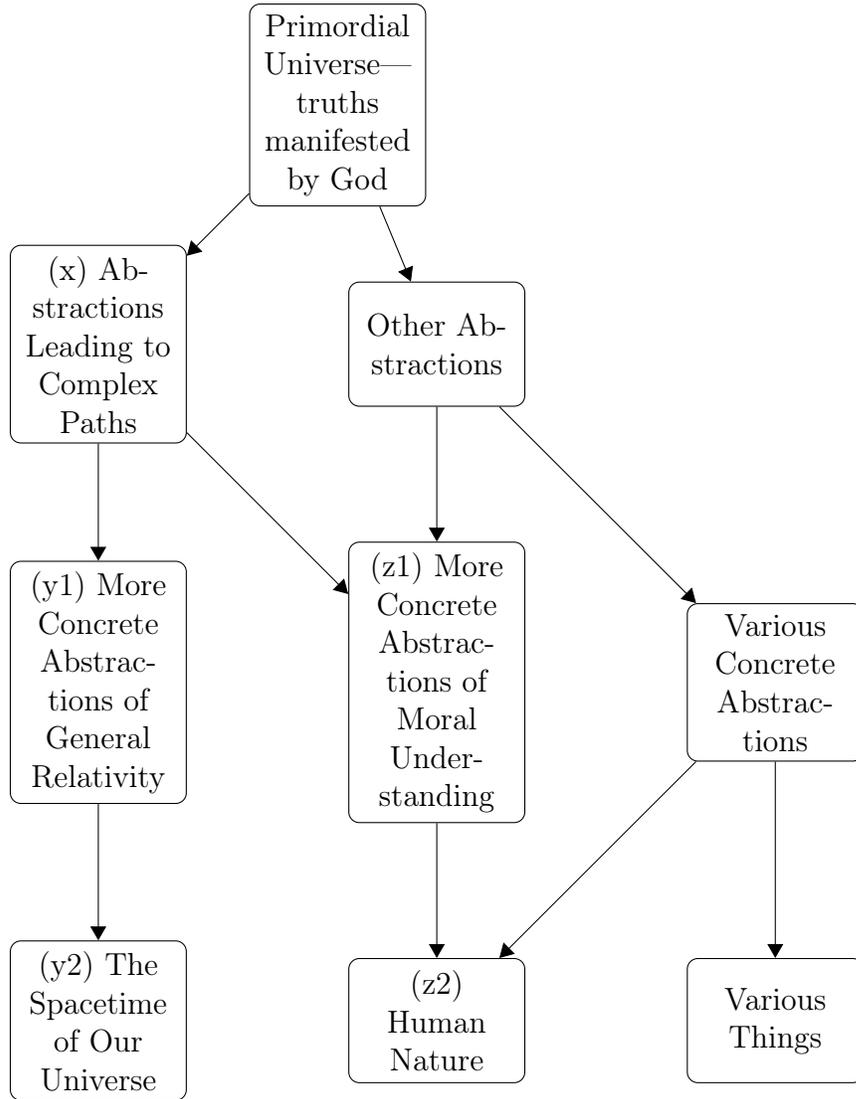


Figure 141.1: Simple Relationships of Abstract and Concrete Levels of Being

# 142 National Security Intelligence Analysis as Mind-shaping

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1818>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/05/08.]

Col Pat Lang (ret), a Green Beret and military intelligence officer, has written another of many short and authoritative commentaries on the current messes which are the US civilian government and US military. Of the two, the military seems to be the far lesser mess, even to the point of being reformable so long as we can prevent our corrupt politicians and war-mongering corporations from further spreading their corruption into the uniformed services.

In this commentary, *Clapper's Edict* found at [http://turcopolier.typepad.com/sic\\_semper\\_tyrannis/2014/05/clappers-edict.html](http://turcopolier.typepad.com/sic_semper_tyrannis/2014/05/clappers-edict.html), we can read the specific idea I wish to discuss from my way of thinking.

As has been observed here, open source information is the bedrock of the information base from which analysts work. Contrary to the egotistical belief of many policy people who think themselves as capable of dealing with data, *the intelligence analysts' minds are the true weapons in the intelligence business*, not secret information. As I have said before, secret information is often useful but it is not the base of the data pool. [Emphasis is mine.]

I've made very similar claims before including the fundamental claim that our minds form as we shape our very complex and very flexible brains

in active response to what lies around us. At some point, we might be part of a large population of individuals who are members of a variety of communities also shaped as their members respond, as individuals and as communal beings, to what lies around them. An uncertain future lies ahead and those minds will need to respond to what is new or sometimes what is known but suddenly becomes new in a new context. Back in the late 1950s, Jacques Barzun claimed in *The House of Intellect* [7] that Americans were in pretty good shape so far as individual intelligence went, even perhaps using their individual intelligences when intellect (part of what I call “communal intelligence”) might better serve. Unfortunately, the individual intelligences of Americans entered a period of degradation shortly after Professor Barzun’s book was first published.

You should also be aware that where I wrote ‘mind(s)’ in the above paragraphs would be more complete if I had written ‘mind(s) and heart(s) and hand(s)’. I’ll stick to the simpler language because mind is the most important of the three in the context dealt with by Col Lang, but be advised you should also keep this more complete understanding of human being in the back of your mind.

I’ll expand on this idea of the importance of the intelligence analyst’s mind and the reasons I see behind Col Lang’s quite justifiable dismissal of the “many policy people who think themselves as capable of dealing with data.”

I stated above that “our minds form as we shape our very complex and very flexible brains in active response to what lies around us.” This is a claim consistent with what is known about the human brain by way of modern science, obviously neuroscientists lead the way in this research but evolutionary theorists and geneticists and mathematicians and engineers and various other sorts of scientists (or those from related fields) have played a role. It is also a claim first made by St Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century and implicitly made by many a literary man or woman of substance. Actually, the situation is more complex because Aquinas had a fully ‘modern’ theory of the development or shaping of moral character but he placed abstract reasoning in a ‘soul’ or ‘mind’ which was nonhuman and only accidentally attached to the human being—from at least the time of Aristotle philosophers and medical doctors knew of the importance of the brain in thinking and perception but they didn’t understand how dynamic matter is, and they thought the brain itself was largely inert. So it was that Aquinas didn’t think a mere hunk of even living stuff could be flexible

enough to engage in more abstract forms of reasoning, such as realizing—as an infant does—that the dachshund and the greyhound are members of the same species. I'll ignore this complication, as did the neuroscientist and philosopher Walter J Freeman in his insightful book, *How Brains Make Up Their Minds* [35] which explains this part of Thomistic thought far better than any other book I've yet seen, even those of Etienne Gilson who is generally the best at explaining Aquinas and his context.

I can only sigh at the mere mention of such matters as 'American mind' or 'American moral character' or 'American education' or the very basic 'American attitude toward reality'. It is that attitude which guides us in responding to reality, leading us Americans to respond to some fairy-tale version of reality; so it is that our minds and moral characters and our educational systems are deformed and serve something other than God's truths which are drawn from reality. I confess to having too readily accepted deformation, or perhaps lack of proper formation, in my moral character as well as in the shaping of my individual mind and my relationship to greater intellects, especially the somewhat general and even ghostly intellect of modern Western men. I attended a school system up through high school which encouraged all to move to some level of laziness and acceptance of a comfort-zone of mediocrity. I took the bait and didn't start recovering a stronger mind or moral character until nearly ten years after a disappointing career in college. Under the circumstances, I had little hope of fulfilling my desire for a successful career in physics because that is one of the fields where standards had been maintained at a properly high level. Help was available but I had gone into a bad spin of too much drinking and games-playing as a freshman and didn't take that help. By my junior year, I was getting good grades again but that isn't good enough for a field with high standards—a bit of interest and signs of a well-developing mind are more important. I was burned out and exited the academic life, perhaps wisely or perhaps just in a cowardly manner.

I look back and see myself as having exhibited a typical, but not universal, American trait. When caught in a bluff, I didn't take the correction from someone who knew more than I about a specific topic—I would advance and increase my error in an immoral effort to defend my poorly formed beliefs or my false facts as the real truths. This attitude is easily seen in American political leaders and leaders in many in other realms as well. Such an attitude now seems to be desirable for any academics or diplomats or intelligence analysts who wish to rise to policy-making posi-

tions. Similar comments seem appropriate with regards to nearly all realms of human endeavor in the United States and increasingly in all the other countries which have been poisoned by American thoughts and attitudes. A succinct summary: we have become a country which uses the wealth and power accumulated by our ancestors to shelter us in our desires to feel good about ourselves as we destroy out country in a remarkable display of incompetence in dealing with reality. This tendency was always present in the American character, at least in New England—see Chapter 408, *The Need for Abstractions in Moral Self-understanding* for my discussion of the stupidity and self-righteousness which lay behind the Puritan treatment of native Americans.

Physicists and other scientists and engineers are forced to be more honest and to be properly humble *when* their peer-review processes work well, sometimes public processes and sometimes private, but all fields of human endeavor should have a similar review process. In some fields, including literature and philosophy and theology where I spend most of my time and energy, the peer-review process can last over generations but there are some matters which can be settled quickly. Oddly enough, the process of writing serious novels or verse seems to enforce honesty even in men not so honest or morally courageous in most parts of their lives. The morally dissolute Flaubert portrayed a man much like himself with brutal honesty in *Madame Bovary* and the puritanical barbarian Tolstoy did the same in *Anna Karenina*.

Honesty of a certain sort, that is—honesty in perception of realities both internal and external and in the greater understanding of that reality—is necessary for higher achievement in nearly all fields of human endeavor, including politics and intelligence analysis. Note I speak of ‘achievement’ and not of ‘short-term success’, including that dangerous, blinding sort of success in American domestic politics. We Americans have benefited from such honesty in politics during the early decades of the United States when even the scoundrels were men of some moral intelligence and substance; there has been a notable lack of serious moral character from the time that noble generation left public life. There has been a scattering of presidents and senators and others of high and serious moral character, but that scattering seems to have further thinned in recent decades.

Let me mention a particular American agency which has been so dangerous just because there is a pretense of superhuman competence when the most basic levels of competence have been lacking. The CIA has been prob-

lematic from the beginning of its existence, despite the true OSS war-heroes who helped to found the CIA to fight the cold war where they had helped to fight the very hot war against the Japanese and the Germans. To be sure, my impression is that the OSS itself was an agency of mixed competency but always sliding too easily toward a state of playpen for adventure-seeking blue-bloods, disproportionately from Yale and from *Skull and Bones* and convinced the world corresponds to spy-novels and even the most ridiculous of spy movies. At the same time, we have living examples of CIA officers of high intelligence and high moral character in Philip Giraldi and Ray McGovern and Paul Pillar and a deceased example in Sam Adams. There are others including—I'm sure—many who never became known to the general public, but there are no indications that such men dominated the analysis or presidential advice-giving processes. Giraldi has said the CIA has the same distribution of human beings as other institutions: most put in an honest effort for their 40 hours each week, a very small minority are criminals of some sort, and a somewhat larger minority are men and women truly willing to sacrifice for their country and to simply achieve excellence in their work. I'll only mention there is some evidence the criminal element in the CIA has been disproportionately powerful and dangerous given their small numbers. See Chapter 495, *Quietly Charitable or Quietly Murderous But Always Quietly American* for a related discussion.

We Americans are prone to an “egotistical belief... [that we are born with minds fully] capable of dealing with data,” to somewhat rework one of Col Lang's statements. It's not just our recent presidents and senators and cabinet officials and even celebrity ‘policy-makers’ of the ilk of Condoleeza Rice or others in recent years who are supposedly competent academics but the mistakes they make seem to me to often be due not just to inexperience in the national security policy-making environment; they seem to be deeply ignorant in the fields in which they held prestigious academic posts.

Americans, and certainly many politicians and the academics who pander to them, seem to believe they had been gifted at birth with well-formed minds which only need some ‘data’ from any given field and then the humans possessing those minds can penetrate to truths as readily as any who spent years shaping their minds to information and well-stated knowledge about reality, not ‘data’ which lies about reality as often as it tells the truth. This reminds me of the story of President Truman hosting a meeting of intelligence analysts, military officers, scientists, and engineers who were struggling with the question: When will the Soviets have a fusion (hy-

drogen) bomb? All of a sudden, Truman triumphantly announced, “Never!” A deep silence fell upon the room as the most antagonistic proponents of various viewpoints realized as a group that a man of this mental and moral caliber was in command of the United States government and military, including the nuclear-weapons systems.

The fact was: the Soviets had a true hydrogen bomb before us—the monster set off by the US on Bikini Island was the size and weight of a railroad car filled with mostly industrial freezing equipment. It maybe could have been transported as a unit by a C-5 but not by the B-52 or any other bomber. Some, including perhaps Solzhenitsyn by hints have claimed the nuclear spy rings run by Stalin himself at times had the main purpose of corrupting American intellectual circles. After all, the Soviets had Sakharov and Landau and other scientists of that caliber, many of nearly that caliber. They were missing prototyping quality machine-shops and a population of well-trained production machinists to have easily kept up with the United States in most technological fields. But that was a heck of a lot to be missing and was but one result of their badly functioning system. We should even remember that Solzhenitsyn himself, when an inmate in the research lab portion of the Gulag before his rebellion, was doing good work with little resources on voice-recognition systems when such was an exotic project even at the well-funded Bell Labs.

I hope I’ve given a good flavor of my philosophical reasons and even hints of my theological reasons, for strongly supporting Col Lang’s claim that “the intelligence analysts’ minds are the true weapons in the intelligence business.” If we use the analogy of weapons, those minds have been shaped to penetrate deeply into the thoughts and feelings of the military or political or economic leaders of another country—leaders at various levels. (Keep adding realms such as culture and science and engineering and you can get to a more complete statement which would be quite clumsy.) I wouldn’t follow this particular line of reasoning too far just because we undoubtedly have, and should have, analysts who work on countries which are quite friendly to us, yet we would wish to have some deeper understanding of foreign political events or the decisions of foreign businessmen to develop, say, their computer industry in a certain way. Such information would always be of general use in understanding friendly or unfriendly powers when we anticipate responding to some problem or when we go about our normal peacetime activities.

We Americans, not just our political leaders, end up with malformed

minds largely because we don't recognize that the human mind is shaped by our active responses to reality. We think we are gifted at conception with some sort of a mind which only needs "data" to understand the world outside of us. We are forced to admit there is something different about the mind of a physicist or a geneticist but we, certainly our elected and appointed government officials, believe that our monolingual and historically innocent 'minds' can come to a complete understanding of Iranian or Russian politics if we but pour a little bit of 'data' into those minds which are truly pure only in the way of a whitewashed sepulcher. I've been in conversations with the pompous sort of fellow who was charitable to the Iranians though advocating a tough stance: "After all, they don't think in rational ways as we do." Two men I've mentioned, Col Lang and Philip Giraldi were experts on Iran during their careers as intelligence analysts, have claimed the Iranian leaders are more rational than our leaders. Those Americans who 'see' that many of our enemies are such because they aren't as rational as us have seemingly once had a thought flash across their minds and it seemed so good in its power to explain so much—let's go with it. Those Americans deserve the leaders they have, leaders so much like them.

The fundamental problem is moral: we who claim to be a Christian people, when it suits our purposes, pay little attention to God's Creation which is the totality of created being. We think we have minds which can reconstruct how things are and how they should be with just a little data as input.

As I noted before, this moral insanity, as Herman Melville labeled it, is an act of rebellion against God who failed to do as good a job as Creator as we would have wished. We deserve a better world to live in and we'll remake it to our standards as well as we can and make up the difference by 'knowing' what the world really is. Who needs to listen to those who have worked for years to learn the languages and histories and cultures of various peoples, who have worked just as long or even longer to develop their minds to specific tasks such as the understanding of specific countries or specific types of situations—including crises such as those in the Ukraine or Syria. We'll just wing it and eventually reality will come around to prove itself to be what we already believe it to be.



## 143 The Context of Thought and Language

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1842>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/07/03.]

According to a couple of dictionaries, an ‘explanation’ is “Something that explains” or equivalent definitions of the sort which would gain a failing grade on a junior high school test back in the days when American schools were so tough we had to write essays explaining how it was possible to walk uphill going to and from school.

According to a highly respected textbook, *Theoretical Physics* [79] by George Joos with the collaboration of Ira M Freeman, an explanation provides “a reference back to simpler elements.” This is more solid but needs elaboration and more than a little expansion to cover fields beyond physics and similar sciences; in fact, a bit of expansion is needed to cover such ‘philosophical’ sub-fields of physics such as cosmology and also the truly fundamental sort of work done by Newton and Maxwell and Einstein and the founders of quantum physics. (I will return to the sub-topic of explanations in physics in a short while, without pretending to ‘solve’ longstanding problems but only the (Thomistic) intent of putting physics and other such fields of study in the context of more general human thought.)

Even within physics, such an explanation—“a reference back to simpler elements.”—relies on much conceptual, linguistic, methodological, and other apparatuses; there is much that could be labeled cultural capital in each of Newton’s simple laws. Without the entire history of ancient Greek philosophy and its battles to learn how to develop proper words and concepts and methods for abstract reasoning, without Euclid and Archimedes, without Ptolemy (whose ‘model’ of the Solar System was arguably the

first such large-scale mathematical-physical model), without a multitude of philosophical and literary thinkers from Christian and Jewish and Moslem cultures, without the empirical thinkers and doers of the Middle Ages, Newton's laws make no sense. Civilized thinkers realize this. Barbarian children who think the world is transparent to human thought and human language—many modern scientists and too many teachers and cultural leaders among others are such barbarian children—think that Newton's laws, the US Constitution, ancient Christian creeds, and other complex encapsulations of thought mean exactly what they 'seem' to mean. Such an understanding of understanding is thoroughly incoherent, but we'll gradually get to a better understanding.

When we explain something substantial, we're a bit like acrobats who support ourselves by standing upon our own heads, but mostly we, as individuals and as communal beings, stand upon our communal heads. We rely upon not so much our individual intelligences but our intellects as defined by Jacques Barzun in *The House of Intellect* [7]:

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

There is much more to be said. I'm trying to understand understanding within the context of my worldview and doing so in a somewhat arbitrary way, but that is also the nature of human thought. We are blessed and sometimes cursed by the personal aspects of the thought left to us by Plato and Augustine and Dante and Shakespeare as well as Newton and Faraday and Einstein.

We are embedded in a world of particulars including particular men and women and other creatures; we are further embedded along with our world in a greater Creation of realms of abstract and particular or concrete being.

I'll be writing more about explanations and trying to write in such a way as to provide digestible pieces as part of a long-delayed effort to try

to make my worldview more accessible. As is often the case with me, it is a quite idiosyncratic way to move forward and a way decided upon by a seeming impulse after thinking hard about the problem for years. I'm bound to be idiosyncratic even when I'm working in a field seeming suited for systematic thinking—after all, I'm a philosopher and theologian who writes novels even when I'm writing philosophy and theology.



# 144 Adopting Mathematical Reasoning in Non-quantitative Fields of Thought

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1849>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/07/18.]

I use the term ‘empirical science’ to include any field of disciplined study of Creation, physics and chemistry and engineering sciences but also including mathematics and history and literature.

The modern empirical sciences have advanced ahead of philosophy and very far ahead of Christian theology. Philosophers and theologians would be wise to start borrowing from those modern empirical sciences, not the particular mechanistic models but the true reasoning underlying those models. I’ll ignore for now the fact that fields such as history and sociology are in between, going through some successful and some far from successful efforts to use more advanced and abstract reasoning at least in principle similar to the powerful abstractions of those empirical sciences which had long ago adopted mathematics because of their need for quantitative analysis and then learned in the 1800s of the power of more flexible and more qualitative forms of geometric reasoning.

Yet, I’m only speaking of the arguments which, so to speak, end an analysis. It has always been true that the fundamental forms of human reasoning, including those of all modern empirical sciences, are qualitative and not quantitative. It takes a great deal of study and the development of sophisticated thinking processes to penetrate to those fundamental forms, though they are visible in the writings of Einstein in his early works and in many of the writings of the quantum theorists. They are also visible in

the writings of modern theorists of evolutionary biology, in the writings of modern neuroscientists and geneticists, perhaps even in the successful (perhaps a low percentage?) and the failed experiments of modern music and painting and sculpture. As will be clear soon, the idea that quantitative fields rest on qualitative foundations comes to the fore in the thoughts of some mathematicians including educators and famous (at least in small circles) men. There are also philosophers of science and mathematics working on this and related ideas.

Let me back away for a short while and put in my own two cents worth about the need to deal, at least ultimately, with issues of being and not to treat knowledge, thoughts, and truth, and other mental ‘entities’ as if they were separate from being and to be imposed upon being to establish a proper order. That order, in fact, comes from being and emerges in our own mind but only as we learn to encapsulate relatively more concrete forms of being and to move on to the more abstract forms of being from which the concrete, thing-like being is shaped.

In Chapter 156, *A Christian View of Einstein and Bohr’s Debate on the Meaning of Reality*, I addressed this general issue in terms of being and not knowledge, and in terms of an important debate which took place between Einstein, advocating what was really a ‘high’ pagan philosophy of worldly realism where things exist in themselves and can’t be inherently changed by external relationships, and Bohr who was advocating a radical view that relationships, such as those we can express in terms of the equations of quantum mechanics, are primary over stuff. Bohr’s position, as I point out in Chapter 157, *Quantum Mechanics and Moral Formation*, is pretty much the view advocated in the writings of St John the Evangelist and his followers and also anticipated in the Old Testament.

If we accept that relationships can be such, then we have accepted the reality of abstract being and should learn to speak in ways more appropriate to being, to reality.

I’ll move on to a few suggestive quotations on the subject of qualitative reasoning in modern mathematics and, hence, in modern scientific and engineering thought in general. For now, I’ll let the readers use their imagination to transfer these thoughts about mathematical knowledge to those aspects of being described so well by mathematics; from there we can see how this reasoning can be applied to all forms of created being, including human being.

In the article, *Symplectic Geometry* [146] by Alan Weinstein, we can

read on page 1:

[G]eometry has taken a new role in mechanics through the contributions of Poincare (1854-1912) and Birkhoff (1884-1944). Now, though, the geometry is the more flexible geometry of canonical (in particular, area preserving) transformations instead of the rigid geometry of Euclid; accordingly, the conclusions of the geometrical arguments are often qualitative rather than quantitative.

In that same article, we can learn that the highly regarded 20th century mathematicians, GD Birkhoff, expressed “the disturbing secret fear that geometry may ultimately turn out to be no more than the glittering institutional trappings of analysis,” while Poincaré (1777-1859), in Weinstein’s words, “suggests that calculations are merely a tool in the service of geometrical and mechanical reasoning.” (I decided to include Birkhoff’s statement, though I can’t currently wrap my mind around it, because Weinstein indicates that Birkhoff and Poincaré were expressing the same opinion.)

In a book of writings by Soviet mathematicians, *Mathematics: Its Content, Methods, and Meaning, Volume 2* [85], the truly great Russian mathematician, A N Kolmogorov, has this to say on Page 258 of the article, *The Theory of Probability*:

The proponents of mechanistic materialism assumed that such a formulation [of systems describable in terms of relatively simple differential equations, such as gravitational fall] is an exact and direct expression of the deterministic character of the actual phenomena, of the physical principles of causation. According to Laplace, the state of the world at a given instant is defined by an infinite number of parameters, subject to an infinite number of differential equations. If some "universal mind" could write down all these equations and integrate them, it could then predict with complete exactness, according to Laplace, the entire evolution of the world in the infinite future.

But in fact this quantitative mathematical infinity is extremely coarse in comparison with the qualitatively inexhaustible character of the real world. Neither the introduction of an infinite number of parameters nor the description of the

state of continuous media by functions of a point in space is adequate to represent the infinite complexity of actual events.

It's interesting and enlightening and refreshing to see determinism shot down, not by probabilistic arguments but by arguments pointing to the "qualitatively inexhaustible character of the real world."

Another volume of the same collection, *Mathematics: Its Content, Methods, and Meaning, Volume 3* [85], contains the article, *Non-Euclidean Geometries* by another highly-regarded Russian mathematicians, A D Alexandrov. On page 155, we can read

The real significance of this point of view is that it makes it possible to use the concepts and methods of abstract geometry for the investigation of diverse phenomena. The realm of applicability of geometric concepts and methods is extended immensely in this way. As a result of the concept of space the term 'space' assumes two meanings in science. On the one hand it is the ordinary real space (the universal form of existence of matter), on the other hand it is the 'abstract space,' a collection of homogeneous objects (events, states, etc.) in which spacelike relationships hold.

On page 158 of the same article, we can read a description of 'space' from an abstract viewpoint:

By a 'space' we understand in mathematics quite generally an arbitrary collection of homogeneous objects (events, states, functions, figures, values of variables, etc.) between which there are relationships similar to the usual spatial relations (continuity, distance, etc.). Moreover, in regarding a given collection of objects as a space we abstract from properties of these objects except those that are determined by these spacelike relationships in question. These relations determine what we can call the structure or 'geometry' of the space. The objects themselves play the role of 'points' of such a space; 'figures' are sets of its 'points'.

Abstract spaces might well be a 'graphing' of abstract forms of being in so far as they show up in properties or behaviors of concrete being, including human being.

Finally, we can read on page 1 of the book, *Topology and Geometry for Physicists* [96], by Charles Nash and Siddhartha Sen:

[T]opology produces theorems that are usually qualitative in nature—they may assert, for example, the existence or non-existence of an object. They will not in general, provide the means for its construction.

Some of my readers may have better knowledge and skills in these fields than do I, but, for the others: qualitative, topological reasoning is very important in modern physics, even in fields where the goal is to ultimately produce a quantitative result.

We have hints of a greater unity, one in which knowledge is not ‘of’ being, but rather an encapsulation of being in a way that makes it a sharing in being. Created being is manifested thoughts of God so that Creation is certain acts, acts-of-being, of the mind of God, acts-of-being become objects in which God is ever-present because that divine presence is God’s thought. God is unified in such a way that thoughts and acts and feelings aren’t really separate, as will also be true of that completed and perfected human being, the Body of Christ.

By exercising the human ability to encapsulate large chunks of the world and even of those realms of Creation invisible to the sense organs of our thing-like being, we share in those thoughts and acts and feelings of God in His freely-chosen role as the Creator. Being able to quantify, say, the effects of gravity under relativistic or non-relativistic conditions is a part of that sharing but it is more complete and more perfect when it becomes that greater understanding in a way similar to the greater, geometric understanding of spacetime which is the General Theory of Relativity, an understanding which can be made more specific so that it is the quantitative description of a particular universe or relativistic object such as a black-hole. Yet, the more general understanding, the more abstract description, doesn’t go away even when you tighten the constraints on the field equation of General Relativity so that a specific universe/object is described and the equations can be solved.

More importantly for my purposes, if we stay at the very abstract level for a while, we can begin to better understand the being of that abstract level, being from which this concrete, thing-like world is shaped. Using

abstract space and geometry, I can propose that we might be able to understand the cohesion of societies which have expanded far beyond kinship and proxy-kinship relationships in terms of a bending of the state space which brings citizens together.

There's much work to be done and all I can say at this point is that we won't come to better, even more exact, understandings of human communities by way of straightforward adoptions of quantitative methods from physics nor by way of more clever use of our current stock of words and concepts regarding the concrete, thing-like, directly perceptible properties of those communities.

# 145 Developing Human Minds, Individual and Communal

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1953>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/01/15.]

Reality often messes up our formal models as well as our less rigid schemes of how reality should work. A good thinker takes such glitches not as a sign that we can't use models in a particular situation but rather as an invitation to think our way to a better model or perhaps to develop a more flexible understanding, perhaps a narrative structure in which some of the entities and events are describable by quantitative or qualitative mathematical models and much has to be described in a more purely qualitative way.

We need a general way of thinking this through and one of my goals has been to produce an understanding of created being which unites created being, and allows us to also see the true relationship of created being to its Maker. Specifically, I'm choosing to look at the 'boundary', which may be gradual or abrupt, between qualitative mathematical models and more purely qualitative understandings. This is roughly the domain of opened, non-deterministic narratives. This is also the domain which largely gives the setting for the more formal models and also points toward the greater story which is Creation, all the realms of created being.

I advocate the idea that relationships between and among creatures and other 'abstractions' are also a form of being. We can now abstract from matter and energy and fields to a level of reality already very abstract to us, though largely quantitative and deterministic to an extent that I'd further claim it can't be the entire source of this concrete world's being. That limited but extensive abstract level is described by the formalisms

of quantum mechanics. Even on strictly physical grounds, it can't be the entirety of the abstractions from which the thing-like being of this world is shaped. Spacetime comes from a different set of abstractions which may or may not be tightly linked at some highly abstract level to the abstractions of quantum mechanics. I'd go beyond what I've said in the previous few sentences: recognizing the dangers in consistency for its own sake, I would yet argue we get a more consistent and also more coherent description of created being if we simply consider those abstract levels (or realms) as created being. In this way of thought, I speak of concrete being as shaped from more abstract being. See Chapter 53, *How a Christian Finds Metaphysical Truths in Empirical Reality* for a more complete description of my ideas, including a discussion of this very simple, almost cartoonish chart:

Don't think of this chart in terms of knowledge of being but rather in terms of being which we can encapsulate in our minds so long as we respond properly to what lies outside of us, abstract being which is metaphysics and mathematics and some qualitative aspects of our concrete world and also concrete being which is chemical engineering and surgery and carpentry and child-rearing. Our vocations and avocations are created being as much as the tools and materials we use.

There is no absolute separation of abstract and concrete being. Concrete being is shaped from abstract being itself shaped from relatively more abstract being until we reach the truths God manifested as the raw stuff of this Creation, but abstract being remains yet in the lowest and most degraded things of this world.

This gives a new perspective on what a mathematical model is, including the most complex of scientific theories, say those of quantum physics or modern gravitational theory. It also gives us a way of speaking about my division of knowledge: revelation, speculation, scientific empirical knowledge, and practical empirical knowledge. (For more on this, see my freely downloadable book: *Four Kinds of Knowledge* [43].) Note also the problem I've created just by trying to break the bounds which were holding back human efforts to understand Creation, including human being, and to better order our own individual and communal selves: I'm forced at times to use a confusing, mixed language in which 'knowledge' seems to mean what I deny it means. But 'knowledge' had a meaning to ancient Hebrews and ancient Greeks far closer to that which I propose. For a man to know a woman was to become one with her in an act of sex and, at least to the

ancient Hebrews, this implied a respectful and loving act. We can recover such an understanding of ‘knowledge’ and purge our thoughts and feelings and acts of the modern dualism which fragments our world in a way less plausible than the ancient split between body and soul or matter and spirit.

I propose:

For a man to know this world is to have an encapsulation of that story being told by God in his own mind, so that it shapes his feelings and thoughts and actions. If such a story is morally well-ordered, it can be the stuff of a civilization.

For a simple and short introduction to my understanding of being, see two essays I wrote early in the process of developing that understanding: Chapter 156, *A Christian View of Einstein’s and Bohr’s Debate on Reality*, and Chapter 157, *Quantum Mechanics and Moral Formation*. In that second essay, I pointed out the similarity of Bohr’s ‘radical’ position to the teachings of the school of St John the Evangelist.

I’ve written of human being as a matter of heart and hands and mind—see Chapter 282, *Do We Need Heart and Hands as Well as Mind to Understand Reality?*. Since we are images of God the Creator, this means we can speak, in the sense in which we already have something of a share of God’s life, of all created being as created by human mind and human heart and human hands at work along with our Father in Heaven. All three are necessary. All three acting together is truly God-like and when we share God’s life there will be no true distinction between the three. To feel is to act is to think. There will be one person even if the organs of brain and heart and hands yet exist.

I’ll quickly examine a case where some scientists applied the type of thinking associated with the study of complex dynamics (physics) to a linguistic problem. In the article, *Focus: Why Language Exceptions Remain the Rule* at <http://physics.aps.org/articles/v8/3>, Michael Schirber, a freelance science writer, discussed some work done by Christine Cuskley of the Institute for Scientific Interchange in Turin, Italy and her colleagues on an oddness which is particularly noticeable in English: Why do irregular verbs survive? Why “swept” instead of “sweeped?” Children try to apply the rules to every verb and will say “sweeped” until ‘corrected’ often enough that an eccentric verb form settles into their minds.

It turns out that it's the verbs less often used which remain irregular. The force of many users, including children learning English, will lead to the use of a regular verb form so long as those many users do truly use that verb often enough.

The last paragraph of the article is a summary sufficient for my current purposes:

“The strength of this paper is that it focuses on the essential ingredients of simplified models for the evolution of language,” says Eduardo Altmann of the Max Planck Institute for the Physics of Complex Systems in Dresden, Germany. Because the new model can be solved analytically, it provides more direct access to the conditions that produce the different language states, he says. In addition to irregular verbs, Altmann imagines the model could also work for instances where two languages (or ideas or beliefs) compete.

The initial model didn't work and the scientists complicated it, making it more accurate but at the cost of adding in a population of people with certain behaviors about adopting simpler rules or staying with the older rules—this population can't be identified. To match reality on a global level, they had to move away from reality on a local level.

This is all very interesting but my point will be a still more general one. Because we, as individuals, are very particular, we view being from a particular perspective at any time. On the other hand, we as communal human beings, view being—including this thing-like world—from a multitude of particular perspectives which an individual can somewhat assimilate and, in a weak sense, come to understand a great deal about Creation. Of course, what we understand about Creation is always timebound and spacebound, culturally constrained, subject to our particular role and skills, and so on.

When communal forces suppress an individual's inclination to do things more consistently and, at least arguably, better, we see the communal mind at work; this should be generalized to the conflict when any individual tries to think or feel or act in a creative way that conflicts with convention. Our communal minds are themselves far from mature, even for the simplest of communities with the simplest of roles in the life of the community which can be called mankind and is really the Body of Christ in formation. (This doesn't mean all men will be saved into the Body of Christ in Heaven, just

as it is well recognized that formal membership in the Church doesn't imply any automatic salvation.)

In Chapter 57, *Mathematical Models of Human Communities: Randomness*, I wrote:

From facts come—sometimes—patterns. We've become somewhat accustomed, by way of terribly vulgarized mathematics and biology and other sciences, to the idea that patterns come from 'randomness' or 'chaos'. Something of an overview can be communicated to those who have not heard of Poincare or Hadamard or Duhem, Ruelle or Smale or Prigogine and to those who don't know what a nonlinear equation is; we should wonder what sense these people make of it. We are at a more complex transition point than the one noted by Oystein Ore, prominent number theorist and teacher (see *Number Theory and Its History* republished by Dover Publications in 1988): in the 14th century or so, long division was coming into use and was considered to be a topic for mathematical geniuses, well beyond those even of more normal high intelligence. Nowadays, we start learning long division in mass education elementary schools, though many still have trouble with it and some can never master it even to the point of figuring how much per pound a roast costs if 4.5 pounds costs \$25.

In the struggle between consistency and established convention in verb forms, we see the communal mind reluctant to change certain fundamentals of language unless it has good reasons to do so. In the ongoing expansion of the human mind's capacity for learning what was once considered advanced mathematics in elementary school, we see the communal mind growing and maturing and individual minds somehow becoming capable of mastering skills well beyond the capacity of similar minds in earlier generations. Could the same happen with quantum mechanics and other hard theories some day? Could it happen with larger and more complex bodies of theories and concepts and narratives, such as the greater narrative of this world and the world of the resurrected set in the entirety of Creation?

We can see in the study of the irregular verbs that there is always the possibility of an imbalance between the individual mind or the communal mind. It's hard for a people to develop individual and communal minds

in a way such that both are strong and healthy, though—in principle—the strongest and most capable of individual and communal minds will develop together and co-exist. But not in peace, for we live in a world of struggle. It's almost a cliché that some of the best literature has been written by authors fighting the constraints of implicit or explicit censorship. I think of myself as fighting an implicit censorship which is the result of willful ignorance and the resultant stupidity of Americans and most other Westerners; this censorship takes the form of a sort of Gresham-like flooding of the bookstores and movies and television lineups with mindless crap which dulls the mind and stimulates our less noble emotions and will often lead to immoral acts.

My current opinion is that we're not in a situation where individual or communal minds have become too strong at the expense of the other. There are certainly some who think only the thoughts put into their heads by the wig-stands of the mainstream media or by the speeches of Presidents or Senators. There are also certainly those who think to break free of a morally disordered society, or perhaps to protect their own interests as they remain part of that society, by nurturing their own sense of individuality and denying what they inherited from their fellow-citizens or from men of distant times and places. This latter denial often takes the form of treating received human being as objective knowledge, that is, knowledge which can be treated as if it were x's to be combined in logical formulations. In any case, the West in 2015 has individual and communal minds which are both weak.

We Americans are morally unordered or disordered individuals who are ignorant and functionally stupid, yet we have some sort of strong attachment to the idea that we are well-formed individuals. Our communities, and communal minds, are equally disordered and yet express a strong self-regard, unlovable and criminal communities demanding our full and unqualified love. We Americans are poorly formed individuals moving in disordered herds and we think ourselves to be at the height of human accomplishment, downright exceptional we are. Similar states hold in most Western countries though the paths to those disordered states were different and some of those other Western peoples seem to at least suspect something is profoundly wrong inside of us and our various communities.

And, yet, there is much truth in claims that we've reached our disordered states at least partly because of those who sought to develop our communal natures at the expense of our individual natures, because of others who

sought to rip individuals from their communities or to seduce them to leave their families and other communities. Marxists and libertarians are equally committed to deformed understandings of human being.

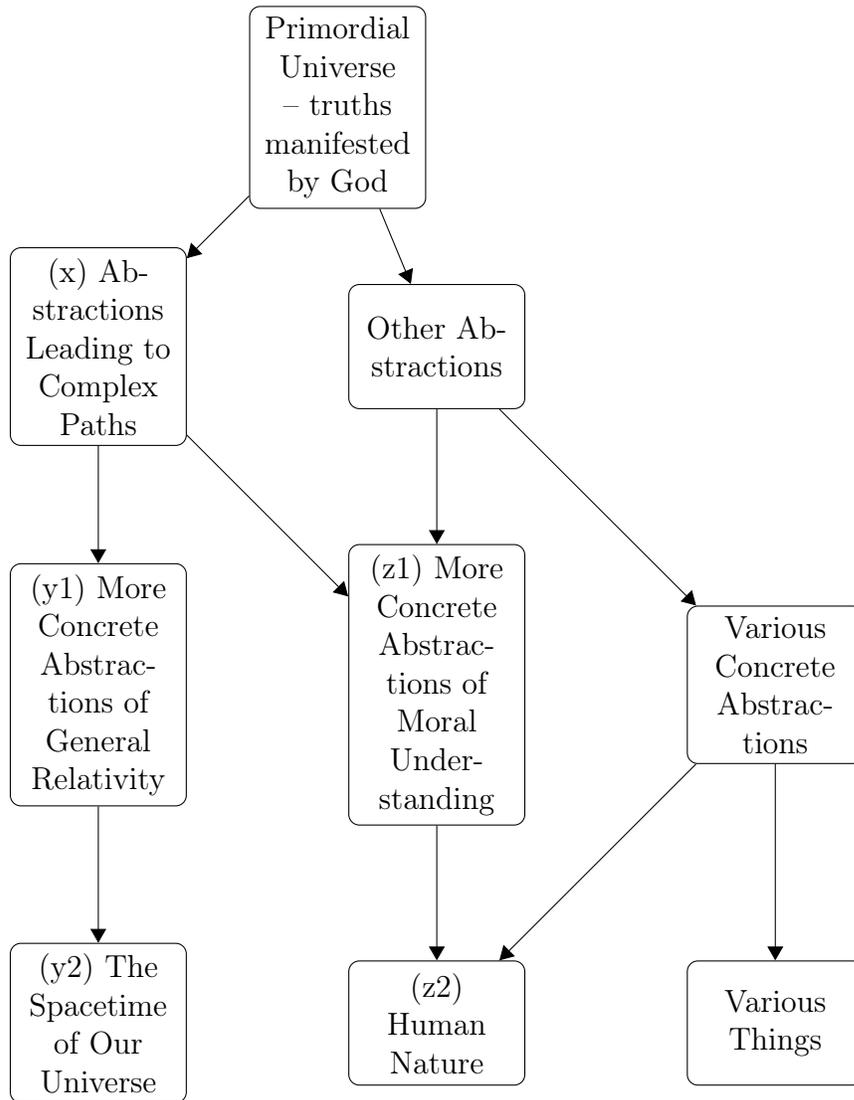


Figure 145.1: Simple Relationships of Abstract and Concrete Levels of Being

## 146 Elitism and Americans

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2001>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/04/20.]

An article published in March of 2015 by Steven Wasserman, *In Defense of Difficulty* at <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/in-defense-of-difficulty/>, is subtitled: *A phony populism is denying Americans the joys of serious thought*. The article begins:

It is a commonplace to bemoan the vanishing of serious criticism in our popular culture. The past, it is said, was a golden age. More than 25 years ago, Russell Jacoby put it sharply in *The Last Intellectuals*, when he decried the disappearance of the “public intellectual” since the heyday of the fevered debates over politics and literature that broke out among Depression-era students in the cafeteria at New York’s City College. Much had gone awry: “A public that once snapped up pamphlets by Thomas Paine or stood for hours listening to Abraham Lincoln debate Stephen Douglas hardly exists; its span of attention shrinks as its fondness for television increases.”

We should remember that public schools, as we know them, didn’t educate those colonists or the farmers of the Midwest. There were some schools set up and run by clergymen or parents or local political leaders, but much of the education took place in the home which would typically have a small library including some version of the Bible, some version (perhaps expurgated) of Shakespeare, and then perhaps a copy of *Pilgrim’s Progress* in some regions or some of the Latin or Greek classics in other regions or even both in some households in various regions. Lincoln was himself famous for lacking much in the way of formal education or even formally directed

self-education. In a similar way, I had relatives in my grandmother's generation who'd finished formal education in sixth grade but read serious novels and history books—I inherited copies of works by Flaubert and Balzac and Sterne from that earlier generation by way of an aunt who was a 1930 high school graduate with high tastes of that sort.

Take the prior description of American education before public school barbarism as an oversimplification which is meant to communicate the flavor of the situation. In any case, learning to read with the Bible as your text develops concentration in a way not possible with even the more rigorous schoolbooks (even McGuffey's and other collections of short works, etc) let alone the See-Spot-Run books and... It should send shivers up the spines of educated people, or anyone caring about the minds and moral characters of exploited children, to think about *Sesame Street* and other more recent innovations which blazed the path more fully developed during breaks from the violence during the Superbowl.

Not all aspects of a deep, deep problem can be discussed at once and Wasserman is speaking of of a specific phenomenon: the disappearance of those who once wrote essays for the middle-brow magazines as well as the higher literary magazines, of those who once wrote introductions to serious books. He is speaking of those such as Russell Kirk who added substance and intelligence and civility to the conservative side of discussions or arguments and of those such as Lionel Trilling who played a similar role for liberals of the modern sort. The efforts of these and other intellectuals, sometimes prestigious academics who put some substantial effort into writing and speaking to a wider audience, appealed to the types of Americans who once ran through decent and good quality novels and history books and biographies at their local libraries. And maybe those self-learners and the sometimes isolated readers of more demanding works wanted, even needed, some help in achieving a wider or deeper understanding. There were substantial thinkers of various beliefs and faiths who provided at least a structure for gaining that wider understanding; there were the conservatives (such as Kirk) or liberals (such as Trilling), the Christians (such as Flannery O'Connor) or the Jews (such as Chaim Potok). Yes, sometimes it seemed almost redundant for other public intellectuals to provide basic discussions of novelists because some, such as Miss O'Connor and Rabbi Potok provided powerful insights in the conversations and actions of their works of fiction and in their nonfiction writings.

This effort to provide for a developing American intellect was, in a man-

ner of speaking, followups or commentary to be read after or along with Charles Eliot's *Harvard Classics* (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harvard\\_Classics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harvard_Classics)). In Chapter 127, *Intelligence vs. Intellect*, I discuss the issue of communal mind or intellect by responding to *The House of Intellect* [7] by Jacques Barzun, a very prominent public intellectual who expressed the opinion in that book that the effort to raise the level of intellect in the United States was a failure, leaving active individual minds, or "living intelligences," which are strong but also shallow since they're not part of a greater intellect. But the heroic effort was made by Eliot and by the likes of Kirk and Trilling and those of their quite separate groups and those of other groups, during the fifty years between Eliot's publication of those Classics and Barzun's pronouncement of failure. As Wasserman tells us:

In the postwar era, a vast project of cultural uplift sought to bring the best that had been thought and said to the wider public. Robert M. Hutchins of the University of Chicago and Mortimer J. Adler were among its more prominent avatars.

Those "great books" programs failed, as did the effort to nurture a middle ground, middlebrow literature—including histories and other nonfiction as well as many novels, some of which have held up well and most of which haven't. Even a more focused, though unorganized, group which comprised what can be labeled the "Catholic literary renaissance" failed to influence their major part of the mainstream though Flannery O'Connor's masterpiece, *A Good Man is Hard to Find* was produced in the heyday of the efforts of Rod Serling and others to use television for good cultural purposes. If creative storytelling of a higher sort was dying, if political and moral thinking was collapsing to policy-wonking, why would anyone expect any public demand for commentary upon past literary efforts? There is a demand for such commentary in certain Catholic and Calvinist circles and perhaps the circles of those—including some of those Catholic and Calvinist thinkers—who would revive respect for the works of the great pagan thinkers of Greece and Rome, but such demand is meaningless without some current efforts to produce serious creative efforts. Even serious efforts quickly seen as failures would allow some chance for survival of the West, even if only as a tributary into another civilization being born. As it is, even the most serious of Western thinkers are but traveling the same path

to irrelevance as the most mindless of mainstream American politicians or academics. After all, that path is along a river which can no longer be fed entirely by what lies far behind.

The end result of this process, under my description and understanding or those of Wasserman, is:

We inhabit a remarkably arid cultural landscape, especially when compared with the ambitions of postwar America, ambitions which, to be sure, were often mocked by some of the country's more prominent intellectuals.

But those ambitions, at their highest, concerned second-hand thought, commentary upon serious works in an age when serious works weren't being produced—outside of a lot of specialist works and an occasional worthwhile novel or narrative history. Samuel Johnson was part of the production of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and of *The Wealth of Nations* as well as being a worthy commentator (if wrongheaded) upon Shakespeare. Russell Kirk and Lionel Trilling wrote a lot about dead white guys and a lot against living guys, white and from upcoming or reviving countries of various colors. Few of the writings or the battles are likely to be remembered by any but those who will one day study the strange detachment from reality by modern thinkers, where you can define reality as a Creation in the Christian sense or a Cosmos in the pagan sense. It is those 'cosmic' structures which are the most important and most necessary part of any tradition and, yet, the modern thinkers, even Kirk who was a devout Christian, worked on a piece—perhaps a wall or window of a once-great cathedral—and left alone the disturbing truth that the vandalism of a Rousseau or an Emerson, let alone the later vandalism of a Marx or a Dewey, was that of barbarians looting from the rubble of not just a decaying city but a decaying Creation or Cosmos. In the end, Kirk and Trilling didn't have the vision of Samuel Johnson, let alone the nearly God-like vision of Augustine of Hippo. But Augustine was looking at Creation, however imperfect and incomplete his worldview compared to what is possible nowadays—and is, I think, at least partly realized in my writings, fiction and nonfiction. Yet, no one is interested in the major and necessary effort to rebuild our understanding of Creation, that is, to reshape our own minds to better accord with reality and to make better sense of our religious beliefs. Policy-wonking is the work of our age, even for those who seem capable of far better.

As I've stated above and in other writings, this discussion of literature is largely beside the point. Good books are good because of the way they engage objective reality, if sometimes by way of concentrating upon the events occurring inside one particular, contemplative human being. It's a little unfair but also a little insightful to claim the modern literary elite of the sort discussed in this essay or in Wasserman's article were but barbarians who were trying to preserve some of the individual masterpieces but not noticing that the West was falling not because of the attacks of philosophical or literary radicals or mindless barbarians; the West was falling because its intellectual and other leaders had not properly addressed the good work of Columbus as well as that of Newton and Sterne—had not integrated that good work into an enriched and more complete understanding of a Creation or a Cosmos. I imagine some of them had an intuition that something was wrong at that higher level, but, outside of a small number of creative writers, Flannery O'Connor being my personal favorite, they failed to even explicate that greater problem. The best most Christian critics could do was advocate the thoughts of someone, perhaps Burke, who had—at least “sort of”—been a Christian in some past century. Pagans couldn't even do that much since it is hard to think the world will be saved if we adopt the political insights of a citizen of a Greek city-state, circa 350BC; to be sure, some advocates of Aristotle and others did write as if that were possible but that is the sort of belief only a highly (over-?) educated man could hold. More damagingly to all of us and not just to pagans, such an effort ignores the changes to human being which have taken place over the previous 2500 years, the enrichment and complexification seen very clearly in our communities and also in our individual selves if we look closely. These changes are seen more clearly by someone who has made the effort to re-understand Creation in light of modern knowledge about the empirical aspects of that Creation. And those changes affect everything, even affecting our understanding of revelation in a recursive sort of way, and certainly affecting our understanding of the literary and aesthetic aspects of human culture.

Yet, if I think Wasserman failed to penetrate to a deeper level of understanding, he does see the damage wreaked upon the modern, American mind and soul:

The ideal of serious enjoyment of what isn't instantly understood is rare in American life. It is under constant siege. It is the object of scorn from both the left and the right. The

pleasures of critical thinking ought not to be seen as belonging to the province of an elite. They are the birthright of every citizen. For such pleasures are at the very heart of literacy, without which democracy itself is dulled. More than ever, we need a defense of the Eros of difficulty.

Good commentary but I'm going to point out a problem in the midst of good stuff. By speaking of democracy in this way, Wasserman shows too clearly his limited viewpoint. There is nothing in the experiences of the past two centuries which would prove, even weakly, that democracy is even a viable moral option, let alone the clearly superior one. Wasserman's own words indicate the problem.

I'm not saying that democracy would work only if all men and women, boys and girls, devoured good novels or informative and reliable works of history. Yet, for democracy to work, we need such efforts to be distributed to the level of not just nationwide publications of various viewpoints; we need some way for those who do learn about Iraq, perhaps by reading books from local libraries or by reading on the Internet the writings of some of the many critical thinkers who are dissenting academics or retired military personnel or diplomats, to become known and respected, to be consulted by the voters in a smalltown or a city neighborhood or those gathered at one of the churches in a farm district before everyone signs on for a war desired by some politicians and armaments manufacturers. We would need this distribution of knowledge and reliable judgment for democracy to be a morally well-ordered form of government. Some would say that this isn't viable—if so, democracy isn't possible under conditions where the voters would be electing men more inclined to attack Iran while not knowing, in any meaningful sense, much about the reasons to attack or not to attack. To borrow Churchill's comment about journalists: American voters would be—in fact, are—like the courtesans (court whores) of the ages, desiring power without responsibility. Specifically, we Americans want to be able to 'support' a war without being required to find out about the real issues and without being required to think about those issues in light of knowledge and disciplined judgment. This allows us to hold parades during or after a war while feeling free to fight the war so long as it doesn't inconvenience us or to pull the plug if it does. In any case, knowing history, or knowing someone of moral sanity who knows history, is part of what we need to be moral citizens of a morally well-ordered democracy. But we also need to

have critical skills which can most readily come from the serious works, and commentary upon the serious works, which deal with such moral issues as war or a citizen's responsibilities.

I don't wish to reduce literature to a useful activity but rather to deny there is a true gap between utilitarian considerations and those of that triad of the good and the true and the beautiful. This claim itself can only be evaluated, provisionally, by an individual with some serious knowledge and disciplined skills in judgment or, more authoritatively, by a community with a number of individuals with overlapping but somewhat separate bodies of knowledge and skills of judgment.

And, to somewhat repeat myself, any sort of a living civilization or major part of a civilization requires the ongoing production of creative thought rather than just commentary upon existing works. If we miss either one, it would be like having a brain missing the region which puts together coherent sentences or the region which makes sense of sentences as they are being constructed in our brains. Those who can utter but can't evaluate their own utterances will produce streams of gibberish. Any evaluative capability without some ability of creative utterance would produce a silent critic. Take the previous two sentences as applying to individuals and to communities, both of which really mean individuals and communities as they respond to each other and cannot be truly separated from each other.



## 147 Elitism and Christians

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2039>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/04/28.]

In Chapter 146, *Elitism and Americans*, I responded to an article by Steven Wasserman, *In Defense of Difficulty* at <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/in-defense-of-difficulty/> (subtitled *A phony populism is denying Americans the joys of serious thought*). I largely agreed with Wasserman but went further in maintaining that higher literary pursuits make sense only in light of a greater understanding, one encapsulated perhaps in a Christian Creation or a pagan Cosmos. Let's call that higher understanding a 'worldview', however much that term has been misused. Moreover, I claimed that higher understanding in its full and communal form requires current and ongoing creative efforts of a high sort.

As Wasserman described matters—truly in my opinion, we have seen a specific decay process: public intellectuals writing for an audience of literate and intellectually curious high school teachers and insurance brokers and engineers and at least a few blue-collar craftsmen have disappeared. I'd say they disappeared as their existing audience put down their books and magazines and turned on the television and apparently Wasserman thinks something of the same. And, yet, this decay process was part of a network of decay processes, the highest of which is the decay of traditional Western worldview which is itself part of a decay of the processes which have educated and nurtured the creative thinkers who update worldviews or produce new ones.

We are talking about networks, correlations and complexes of causes-and-effects, typically at least nonlinear and perhaps even having recursive structures. There was no one worldview in the West and couldn't possibly

be any such unity in any complex civilization in this world of evolutionary and developmental processes; for convenience, I will sometimes write assuming that simplification and similar simplifications when necessary to avoid excessive verbiage. In fact, the term 'West' is problematic, especially when the reader isn't (yet?) well enough read in history to appreciate the complexity underlying any large human community, especially when there are so many different languages and ethnic histories, so many political and cultural and economic systems which don't quite correspond to even the ethnic populations.

It's certainly clear that literary elites and serious creative writers and thinkers aren't highly respected in the modern United States and perhaps not in much of the West. American public intellectuals were but one node in that complex network which is being destroyed by those various decay processes at work in the West. Without the guidance of an elite, politicians as well as the ordinary citizen are rapidly losing any clarity in the sorts of thinking processes used at more global levels and are also losing a respect for different viewpoints and for solid bodies of facts and knowledge as a foundation for opinions and attitudes, where I use knowledge as "facts at least partially and perhaps somewhat speculatively processed." As a general rule, creative scientists retain some public respect though applied science and engineering are more deeply a part of the thinking of even most highly literate men and women of the West; we are curious about Einstein and his successors but better understand the work of that nephew who is helping to develop a better carburetor. In some Western communities, such as the Western Catholic churches, scholars are respected; the underlying assumption, unconsciously held in nearly all cases, is that past creative thinkers told us everything God wants us to know and we just need to be reminded. If there is nothing new, there is no reason to have public intellectuals or even insightful novelists to help explore and evaluate this fascinating world. All the fascinating elements are either on the surface or supernatural mysteries. Against St Paul, most modern believers would leave themselves as slaves and not sons working with the Father, barbaric human animals watching God's acts of magic as if they were some sort of fireworks display.

Reality is confusing, complicated and complex, and this is one reason some of us see a need for those Wasserman calls "public intellectuals." However, the primary need is for creative thinkers to propose new thoughts and new ways of perceiving reality; then, the public intellectuals can get to work and so can the members of the general citizenry who are curious about re-

ality, from any viewpoint pagan or Christian or . . .

There is, in fact, much new in recent centuries and we have done little to make greater sense of all that new stuff. Some of the new is pre-existing, discovered by wider or deeper explorations of reality, including those of mathematicians who work in abstract levels of created being. Some of the new is truly new, most of that is the new forms of human communal being which have evolved and developed as the human race has grown in size and has discovered a need for new forms of relationships.

All of this affects even such matters as Christian beliefs. I'm an empirically oriented Christian. This means I think it to be of the utmost importance for us to listen to God, not just in Holy Scripture or the words of extra-Scriptural prophets and saints, but also in His acts as Creator. God isn't constrained by human ways of thought as they were as of 1800AD nor as they were as of 1300AD nor as they were during the lifetime of Jesus of Nazareth. Nor is God constrained by my provisional, but greatly updated and enriched, understanding of the human mind and of the reality which it deals with. Christian have been morally irresponsible in recent centuries—perhaps back to at least the time of Galileo; in particular, intellectuals and artists and other creative workers have retreated from their responsibility to make greater sense of all those facts and sets of knowledge gathered by modern explorers of this world and the abstract realms from which the world was shaped.

So it is that I expand Wasserman's analysis of the loss of public intellectuals to one covering also the need for a creative elite, specifically will I deal with the Christian need for an elite. In fact, there is not usually a way to clearly categorize a substantial thinker as purely 'creator' or 'commentator'. Despite his own occasional claims of limits to his work, Etienne Gilson creatively updated Thomistic philosophy in the very act of faithfully communicating what Aquinas said in the middle of the 13th century. Flannery O'Connor, and Walker Percy to a lesser extent, enriched Catholic philosophy and theology as they wrote fictions exploring traditional ideas in modern contexts.

We can learn from even public school textbooks that there was a time in the West when public men, politicians as well as any describable as 'public intellectuals', had minds formed by more disciplined study than has been common in recent generations. We can remember many, such as Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson, and even the greatly underestimated man of fewer hours of formal education—George Washington. Whatever your

opinions of the specific ideas and acts of these men, we can acknowledge that those old-timers had strong minds and those strong minds carried a wide and deep knowledge of classical literature, some more recent literature (such as Shakespeare), human history, some knowledge of then-current science and mathematics and technology, and even the non-believers knew a bit about the Bible and Christian creeds.

As surprising as it might seem in a world where so many men and women, boys and girls, of high intelligence have minds stocked with knowledge of pro sports and popular music and popular movies: in earlier times—as Wasserman points out, Colonial Americans gobbled up Paine’s pamphlets (and, a bit later, even *The Federalist Papers*—see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Federalist\\_Papers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Federalist_Papers) which were far more sophisticated) and farmers in the Midwest in the 1850s stood for hours to listen to very complex debates between Lincoln and Douglas. Another writer of more radical tendencies than Wasserman or me, Garry Wills, once wrote that those farmers weren’t just being polite—they responded with clapping or laughing at the right times, showing they understood the allusions and could at least follow the rudiments of the arguments raised by each of the speakers. And Lincoln hadn’t yet adopted his later (probably overly) simplified style and was also not speaking in the folksy style which he adopted with juries. He spoke sentences taking up multiple pages in printed form. Along the same lines, Jacques Barzun claimed in *From Dawn to Decadence* [9] that the 16th century French peasants who could read were devouring novels too complex for most late 20th century college professors.

The audience has decayed as much as the troupe of performers. While Washington as a young man was shaped by a near obsession with an idealized, but sophisticated and highly literate, play about the harsh but virtuous Roman, Cato, modern young men are more likely to be exposed to daily stories of rich young men who would be in jail if they weren’t NBA or NFL stars, movies such as *Rambo* or the more recent ones idealizing American operatives who are portrayed as sociopaths. Though it’s no longer a hobby of overly educated men of little understanding, those young men and the rest of us are still exposed on occasion to exercises in the debunking of legendary men, such as Washington, who had faults but were yet moral giants. Along similar lines, an American high school student is more likely to have the option of studying vampire literature than she is to have the option of studying Shakespeare or serious American novelists of the 19th century.

Again, this entire issue is of great importance to Christians and of

interest to some others, such as Razib Khan, a geneticist, who blogs at Ron Unz's website. Khan, raised a Muslim in Bangladesh and now an atheist, is very well-read in history and often produces intelligent analyses drawing upon both genetic and historical knowledge. In the article, *Cuius Regio, Eius Religio, in Anglo-Saxon England* at <http://www.unz.com/gnxp/cuius-regio-eius-religio-in-anglo-saxon-england/>, he blogged about British ancestry, an interesting and complex subject where historians and geneticists have cooperated in recent decades to produce a new understanding. A simple summary: the British, residents of Scotland and Wales as well as those of England, have a predominately ancient British ancestry; they share an ancestry from ancient farmers (described as "Spanish-like" in Khan's article) closely related to ancient farmers from southern Europe but are also descended partly from ancient Celts, largely those whose Brythonic culture and language developed some centuries before the Gaelic (Irish and Highland Scot) Celts arrived. In any case, the various pre-Roman residents of the British Isles seem to have had a predominately Celtic culture.

After the conquest by the Romans of part of what is now England, the native population was Latinized in culture, which meant that they were baptized into what is now known as the Roman Catholic Church—at a somewhat later time than the original conquest. From a very early stage, the Sacramental Christian churches, including the diocese in Rome which became the Roman Catholic Church, had rites and creeds which both symbolized and manifested a very complex understanding of this world and its relationship to its Creator. Moreover, they had a worldview which was rich and complex, though not plausible in its entirety to us in this post-Copernican and post-Darwinian era. That worldview drew upon the Bible, Judaism as practiced by the various groups in the Near East at the time of Christ's life on Earth, Greek philosophy, Roman law, Roman politics, and more; much of that worldview is foundational to my updated Christian worldview. The underground Church of the early years had an elite represented by St Paul and other men highly educated in Jewish or Greek knowledge or both. The Church became very visible even before Romans accepted it as their official religion and it was visible partly because of the accomplishments of St Paul and his many worthy successors. It became more visible when altars in underground grottoes were replaced by altars in magnificent basilicas in which buildings were celebrated the elaborate rites of Sacraments as well as many lesser rites. The very effort which these

noble and accomplished elites put into celebrating the Eucharistic Rite if they were priests, the pious attitudes of noble and accomplished elites as they knelt and bowed their heads and as they accepted Communion, the money and artistic talent which went into the buildings and vestments and altar vessels, would have been more than enough to awe the Catholics who could make no sense of Trinitarian doctrines or of the concept of a Creator.

In his article, Khan puts it this way:

[T]he Christian Church collapsed in eastern and southern Britain, only to reappear around the year 600 under both Brythonic and Continental missions. Despite the influence of the Celtic Church in the early decades, English Christianity was not an organic outgrowth of a religion which was submerged in the intervening century. Rather, it was a fresh planting of what had died. I have made an analogy before of what happened to Christianity in Britain to what happened to Christianity in the Balkans. While a regression occurred in post-Roman Gaul, what became Francia, it pales in comparison to the cultural devolution and atavism in Britain and the Latin-speaking world of the Balkans. It is fashionable in some quarters to declare that the Christian Church saved European civilization after the collapse of Rome, that the Church was the ghost of Rome. There is some truth in this, but, the example of Britain and the Balkans suggests to me that institutional and formal religion of the sort which we see in Christianity necessarily needs a minimal level of social and economic complexity, and concomitant “buy in” from the elites. Without the support of the powerful these sorts of institutional religions decay rapidly back toward primal animism and folk paganism. The old gods of the Celts and Romans were memories, but the new gods of the Germans were living and vital. It was a natural fit for the small scale economies which arose in the post-Roman landscape of proto-England.

Simple religion is folk religion, animistic paganism. It is likely many Christians could be described as animistic pagans, having a piety much like that of, as some have said, an Italian peasant from pre-modern times. Many devout Catholic Christians, in particular, can relate better to demons or Satan himself than they can to the Trinitarian God; something similar

could also be said of many Protestants. After all, Trinitarian doctrine is an ever provisional understanding of claims in the Bible. God can't be 'reproduced' by proper application of humanly derived axioms or other basic rules; God has to be understood on His own terms and some of us have faith that we can find enough of those in Creation as well as in the Bible that we can speak rationally of the Trinitarian God and it will make sense in terms of our own mortal lives and our hopes for salvation. Again, our knowledge is provisional and needs to be refreshed as we learn more about created being. We will never complete this process in this mortal realm.

Most of the more advanced levels of human knowledge and creative skills are a mystery to most human beings and so it is that they tend toward that simple faith of animistic paganism in which things move because there are unseen spirits moving them. After all, the internal power to move is something belonging to living creatures. A rock will simply sit there on the ground unless thrown by a young boy or tossed into the air by an earthquake which must surely be caused by some spirit or god or even the Father-God usually so distant from his pagan children. This goes deeper than a wrong or right understanding of the physics of projectiles. It is a matter of basic understanding of reality. Paganism, usually a variety of animistic paganism, is the natural state of mind for a human being; simple forms of pagan belief and seemingly most forms of higher pagan belief are brutally reductionistic in assuming direct cause-and-effect relationships, seemingly as a result of very basic human ways of perceiving and thinking. Even great physicists and philosophers have problems with quantum theory for exactly the same reason that the simple in heart will exercise their faith in cause-and-effect and look for spirits behind the events for which there is no simple or direct cause. See Chapter 90, *Shaping Our Minds to Reality*, for a discussion of the problems we have in doing that, shaping our minds to reality, which discussion was a response to an analysis by John Polkinghorne, an Anglican priest who'd had a first career as a highly-regarded theoretical physicist and professor of physics at Cambridge University.

Animistic pagans follow what seem to be inborn responses in conjecturing, or maybe just assuming, that the world is made of inert matter and living creatures, material or spiritual but there is always some spirit which moves an otherwise inert body. Modern non-believers tend to reduce reality to dynamic matter which forms relationships; the magic of cause-and-effect having been transferred to formal mathematical descriptions—often

by those of partial or no understanding of that underlying mathematics. I've argued in a number of places that Christians have to begin with relationships, rather than assuming stuff or entities come into being and then form relationships. The mathematics describing much of this world, including the formalisms of quantum mechanics, is one type of relationship. To a Christian, this idea of relationships having primacy over stuff comes from the Gospel of St John where the world came to exist because God first loved it; God didn't create the world and then choose to love.

I've explored this issue elsewhere; my current purpose is to point out the complexities of a Christian worldview as opposed to the simplicities of animistic paganism. If we really want simplicity then we should choose animistic paganism and I suspect many modern Christians will do that as their leaders fail to even move toward a worldview which makes sense of medical miracles and the *Apostles' Creed*—see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apostles'\\_Creed](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apostles'_Creed).

Yet, some of those who hold a form of simple religion are Sacramental Christians who take seriously the celebration of the Sacraments. As an example, the Eucharist was subject in the past to very sophisticated analyses in efforts to understand the matter (bread and wine), the way in which God effects some sort of change in that matter, and the relationships between the human parties and the matter and God. A man such as St Thomas Aquinas didn't just sigh and say the Eucharist is such a mystery. He rolled up his sleeves and set to work to produce a way of speaking coherently about the Eucharist in the best terms he had. Six centuries before John Dalton (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Dalton](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Dalton)) the father of modern atomic theory, and another century before Niels Bohr (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niels\\_Bohr](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niels_Bohr)) and other quantum theorists of atomic structure, Aquinas worked with what he had: disciplined philosophical contemplations of the nature of material stuff, which contemplations were shaped by the philosophers' own experiences of the world and its stuff.

If some, probably most, of the great Christian thinkers have considered it necessary to understand the Eucharist rather than just accept it as a mystery and if those great thinkers have found only provisional understandings, how is it possible for simple believers, often men and women of a robust earthiness and skepticism of a healthy common-sense variety, to believe and to receive communion so piously? Is it just coincidence that faith is weakening, outright dying in the younger generations of even some families of

great devotion, at a time when we have not even a weakly plausible understanding of the Eucharist in terms of modern knowledge of the world and its matter? There are some who, perhaps in good faith, recite the words of Medieval Scholastics as if the assumed Aristotelian understandings of matter and human being can be carried forward into this world of Einstein and Darwin. The simple often just receive the Lord's Body and Blood but more often in recent generations will lose their faith in the Real Presence of Christ in the consecrated bread and wine. After that loss of faith, one generation and maybe even two, will continue to practice their faith as if believing but the grandchildren have a sort of hardheaded common sense that sees the holes in what they are taught.

Christian communities haven't made it possible for even the more literate of members to retain a faith which makes sense in light of modern knowledge of this world. Children, young adults, and those of simple faith are vulnerable to the calls of a more or less pure secularism, or to some form of paganism, or perhaps to an unreasonably and unsustainably simple form of Christianity.

For the situation to change, Christians have to first understand they need to develop and support creative elites who can develop a Christian worldview and other elites who can teach the new understandings and make them accessible to still others. There might well be multiple levels such as: creative thinkers inspiring high-level scholars who begin to teach high school teachers and future artists and novelists.

Human understandings of reality, however limited or expansive we think reality to be, are what I call worldviews and we should always remember they are provisional but they are also real. In fact, they become the ways in which we perceive and understand reality and that is why they can endanger faith when we don't have elites to update or occasionally replace them with better ways of perceiving and understanding. Christian leaders are trying the impossible task of holding together or re-forming churches from human beings whose most fundamental beliefs about reality are non-Christian, inconsistent with the Bible and the Creeds and most Christian practices.



# 148 The Unbearable Lightness of the American Mind

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2141>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/01/05.]

[There are typos in the essay I'm responding to. I think they are probably due to the site's archiving since the *Scientific American* website is generally well-edited. I've kept the typos and avoided using the "(sic)" notation—the reader can make the corrections in his or her head.]

In this essay posted several years back, *Look East, Young Man* found at <http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/guest-blog/look-east-young-man/>, Tony Rothman of the Princeton physics faculty tells us that even supposedly elite American students can't compete against Asians or Eastern Europeans or first generation Asian-Americans in the hard field of physics. Near the end, Rothman writes:

People often ask me, Can this really be happening at Princeton? Arent your students the best of the best? Im telling you it can happen at Princeton and is. My chief worry about the ["super-deluxe track" of freshman physics] minoritywho take physics out of genuine interest and who, despite the fact that we regularly pulverize them with our exams, generously reconstitute themselves is that we are needlessly discouraging potentially excellent physicists. (Some of the...dropouts, Im told, remain bitter for life.)

I'll leave it to the reader to contemplate Rothman's qualification that it's "first generation Asian-Americans" who can compete with the students from Asia and from eastern Europe. As a freshman physics major in 1973,

I was struck by the fact that the Ashkenazi Jewish students (mostly from New York City) had covered much of the material in their high school years that was new to me as a college freshman, but most were little different from other Americans in work and socializing habits. The physics stars in my class, at least in the freshman year, were a group of a dozen or so ethnic Chinese from Malaysia. At the same time, I knew of a couple of Ashkenazi Jewish students who'd attended NYC's magnet schools and maybe had taken courses at Columbia or CCNY; those few students were taking mostly graduate school courses in math and chemistry from their freshmen years. What remains strongest in my memories is walking through science and engineering buildings and seeing a very high percentage of Asian graduate students and post-docs. American taxpayers were putting up good money to provide weak science and math educations in high school to their students talented in those areas and good money to brutalize those students in college as they watched foreign students and first-generation immigrant students perform well. In addition, lots of money was being spent to provide excellent graduate school educations to some substantial body of foreign and immigrant students. (I don't begrudge a good education to those students but I do begrudge the failure of the American educational system to prepare talented young Americans.)

A math professor told me something similar to one of Rothman's observations: I had poor writing skills, little ability to write coherent sentences to a firm purpose. Even my reading skills, once very advanced by age-group standards, had decayed over four years of watching TV, listening to many hours of pop-music, and reading sci-fi. To be sure, I was fighting boredom by heavy use of the town library which was almost across the street from my family's house, but I had little guidance and my reading tastes decayed, followed by my reading skills. And the peer-pressure was intense for one who had no reason to believe his interest in history and science was anything but weird. In American schools, at least in a blue-collar town in the Connecticut River Valley, you had to watch *The Monkees* and *Laugh-in* and *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* and—of course—some Red Sox and Bruins games to be able to join the conversations at recess and lunchtime. This was crappy stuff even by the standards of mind-candy—a certain amount of which is necessary for the mental and emotional health of even the most serious of thinkers. Even in spectator sports, everyone, and all our local communities, would have been better off if we had followed local teams, little league or semi-pro. Yes, all of this stuff, high and low culture and

much else, is important in the formation of moral character and all that is made possible by good moral character. Even low culture shouldn't be stuff that leads to weakening of that moral character, to a decay in work-habits and the ability to concentrate.

Rothman wrote in the quote above: "(Some of the . . . dropouts, Im told, remain bitter for life.)"

I didn't go to Princeton but I'm one with those bitter dropouts from physics. I admit I perhaps had less excuse than the students Rothman refers to as I was a special scholarship student with an assigned mentor and was encouraged to believe that many American physics students went through a troubled undergraduate career and went on to success in the field. Help was even available from the physics department but I adopted a fatalistic attitude and dropped down to a relatively weak mathematics major. I was raised to be morally soft and was educated in the public schools of my town to be numbed down if not quite dumbed down, that is, I performed very well on IQ tests and standardized academic tests but had lost my once good attention span during my high school years and couldn't perform well in academic work of a more demanding sort. I was actually recovering and did fairly well in my latter years as an undergraduate as a math major but was thoroughly demoralized and went on to become an underachieving actuary—labeled as such by a manager at Fireman's Fund, a future CEO of three major companies. If not for the emotional damage, I would have been far better off in graduate school studying physics or math or engineering.

I have to admit that one of my high school math teachers warned me that he had watched me decay from an enthusiastic, hardworking student over my high school years—I should have had, and many talented students should have, enriched education, including supervision of developing work-habits, right from elementary school years; much of what was missing was actually the responsibility of my parents and of other adults, not just the teachers and administrators in the school system.

And so, I went to college with behaviors and attitudes corresponding to some belief I would magically do well in the same way I did in high school—in *Euclidean Geometry* (tenth grade), I had gotten perfect scores on the tests and quizzes up to Christmas vacation **without** doing a single homework assignment; I was threatened with an 'F' if I didn't make up all those assignments over that vacation. Something was seriously wrong and I have some reason to believe that there were discussions about the situation held behind my back, but nothing was said to me, no guidance was given to

me, no offer of enriched education was made until a ridiculous and useless effort to put me in contact with a local physics professor in the latter part of my senior year of high school.

I know my mother was afraid of disrupting my social development if my academic development was accelerated, but my most enjoyable and healthiest socializing came in my neighborhood, in pickup games and in card games and even tree-climbing; I could have enjoyed that healthier activity while going on to advanced courses in nearby colleges.

I, who grew up in a town of gentle and morally irresponsible citizens, the town itself embedded in a morally degenerate country, fit in with the students described by Rothman:

In [the freshman physics course for engineering majors and most science majors], the difference between the Asian students and the American students is so marked that they might well constitute distinct populations, and the reason can only be rooted in cultural attitudes: an American student may be failing the course and still think he is getting an A, while an Asian student may be getting an A+ and think she is failing the course. Asians are here to work; Americans are here to ensure that Princeton remains a Division 1 athletic powerhouse. The results are naturally evident, not only on test scores, but in work habits. Asian students exams, correct answers or not, tend to be models of clarity, each step written out clearly below the previous. Exams from Americans often more closely resemble Rorschach tests, ink blots left as exercises for interpretation.

Yes, I wrote out many a Rorschach test for the professors, though something came through to impress some of those professors who may or may not have known I was there under a special scholarship program named after, and perhaps funded by, Joseph Wilson who had retired from Xerox, a company he had co-founded and had set out to help further build up the University of Rochester—he died months before my freshman year began. On the whole, I fit in with those Rorschach students but I was supposed to be on deluxe, not super-deluxe, tracks for talented physics and mathematics majors. I couldn't do the work and needed to be put in a two-year program in which I would be doing college-level work under closer supervision. Doesn't happen in this country though the mathematician Raymond

Wilder was writing about this problem in the 1950s and claiming many talented American students could be rescued by the proper program and the right teachers—I don't know the details of his proposed 'rescue' program, if he ever gave such. As it is, the bureaucrats set schedules for everyone and many Americans, including my mother and my younger self—with much reluctance—followed those schedules with a fatalistic attitude. Perhaps physics professors, if they still have the power they had in the days when the Pentagon needed their work, could start a remedial, habit-formation program and require all American physics majors to enter it if they don't demonstrate the competence and mature attitude of those Asian students? Even an effort to start such a program would provide some needed embarrassment for the American educational system and for American culture in general.

I'll diverge somewhat to point out that, circa 1973 when I was entering college, Hannah Arendt's last work, *The Life of the Mind* [5] was published posthumously. In that book, she followed up on earlier works where she took the measure of American moral character and found it wanting—famously, she claimed that Americans were much like Adolf Eichmann, the logistical genius behind the Holocaust, who was nice but had no real moral character at all. Eichmann did his job, did what he was expected to do, though not a believing Nazi. In that last work, Professor Arendt claimed that Americans had set the United States on such a path that within a generation or so, we would be facing a difficult situation which would leave but two options: Americans could fall back into a relative state of poverty and powerlessness or could become an outright empire and steal what the United States could no longer make. (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hannah\\_Arendt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hannah_Arendt))

In a sense, we can't make good science in the truly difficult fields and need to 'steal' brains from other countries, more or less as Rothman points out in his essay. One problem, even from the political and bureaucratic viewpoint, is that this isn't a matter under the control of the American power elite as is the decision to invade and destroy other countries or to use much of our wealth to produce high-tech weaponry. There aren't enough good-quality American scientists and engineers, and may soon not be enough foreign scientists and engineers, to keep up our infrastructure, to develop new energy technologies, to modernize our infrastructure, and so on.

The cultural and spiritual problems are even more fundamental than the political and economic problems. We have turned ourselves into creatures

who can't entertain or educate ourselves nor can we even guide ourselves or our children in proper use of public or private resources, such as libraries or sports fields—direct supervision of a crippling sort is the only option being exercised. The two, entertainment and education, are greatly overlapping activities in a true civilization. We have built an education system which teaches some rudimentary skills in literacy and then teaches the students to consider the novels of Charles Dickens as objects of an unpleasant activity called “studying”. This is a negative accomplishment of monumental proportion: we teach our students to hate reading even the greatly popular literary works of past but recent generations. And so it is that many of them who are inclined to literacy in some strong sense will ‘study’ Charles Dickens novels and then read Stephan King novels for pleasure.

Almost all modern human beings are capable of concrete thought of at least some minimal competence though there are some who seem socially competent yet can't be trusted to take care of their morning toiletries. Many human beings are capable of high levels of concrete thought and I've known some who were at best marginal students in formal classroom settings but have acquired some serious levels of abstract thinking skills after years of difficult machining tasks or the like. Some conquered trigonometry in the machine-shop though they would have likely failed in that subject in a classroom.

This is getting both long and depressing. Let me close with another quote from Rothman's essay found at <http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/guest-blog/look-east-young-man/>:

If the Asians are the most industrious, the best prepared are the Eastern-Europeans, who come equipped with the vestiges of old Soviet-style education. Those students, passing through a system largely influenced by the mathematician Andrei Kolmogorov, have often attended special math-science schools and have been fire-tested through Olympiads. Few Russian undergraduates are visible in Princeton physics, but our Bulgarians, Romanians and Serbs tend to be so well trained that not long ago I was forced to quip to a colleague, Anyone whose last name ends in ovich, adzich, or escu should be put in the honors course without discussion. No exaggeration. Each year a tiny handful of students four or five places out of freshman physics altogether via an in-house exam. Last year none of these were American.

The standard retort to such observations is that foreign education rewards discipline, while American education rewards creativity. Believe me, I'd settle for some Yankee discipline, and I've seen no lack of creativity on the part of the foreign students. Never forget that the Manhattan Project and the postwar science boom was largely the work of immigrants. The fact that American students have all taken AP physics is virtually irrelevant; they have clearly been taught to pass a standardized test and their knowledge of actual physics generally suffices for three weeks.



## 149 Making Peace with Plato

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2144>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/01/13.]

Basic relationships and not complex things or ideas are the true Platonic Reals in the sense of being the basis of created being. So to write. So to speak, if I were discussing these matters with a like-interested friend over some good whiskey or stout or port. If we were to try to imagine a realm of Platonic Reals, we shouldn't try to imagine even the building blocks of concrete being, such as electrons and quarks. We should try to imagine relationships, or forces, that bind and that repel.

Something of this sort should have been proposed, often and perhaps in various forms, as a result of the work of Darwin and Einstein and their followers and productive opponents, but too many—including myself just ten years ago—reflexively opposed any sort of thinking that smelled of metaphysics. I'll assume metaphysics to be a legitimate way of building upon empirical knowledge, including that built by evolution into our brain operations, and move on.

I developed a worldview, including a metaphysics, or understanding of what-is, over a short period beginning about 2005. Some would be upset by the explicit Christian nature of my viewpoint, but I am a Sacramental Christian who was received into the Roman Catholic Church and receives Sacraments in that particular sacramental and Sacramental Church. Of course, my worldview is that of a Sacramental Christian. Perhaps the basic idea, relationships are primary and stuff secondary, comes from my sacramental religious beliefs, my belief not only in the Sacraments such as baptism and the eucharist but also my belief that God is present in all that He creates; if God were to absent Himself from me, I would cease to exist. The same could be said of the computer monitor in front of me and all

the earthworms outside which are probably retreating downward as a late winter arrives.

Even when it comes to the core of my own self-identity, encoded if vaguely by modern people of the West as ‘personhood’, I think in terms of relationships—we are born as human animals and begin to take on the characteristics of a person by way of our responses to God or at least to His Creation.

Relationships create stuff. Stuff doesn’t come into existence and then start forming relationships.

In Biblical terms, the world came into existence because God first loved it. God didn’t create the world and then choose to love it.

Put this together with the empirical discoveries that complex things don’t come directly into existence in this universe but rather evolve and develop from simpler things. Put it also together with the facts which led to my belief that relationships are primary: some empirical discoveries and some speculations tell us that there is a strange form of very abstract being (roughly: the wavefunction of quantum physics) from which the concrete stuff of this universe is shaped and continues to be shaped.

Behind evolutionary theories and quantum theories and modern mathematics and all of that, there are big piles of empirical facts, sometimes having been organized well enough to be labeled ‘facts’. There are many powerful and fruitful theories and less well-established speculative understandings of some crucial aspects of this concrete world. There is much to work with and somebody such as yours truly will be off to the races in trying to make greater sense of it all.

This is the sense I’ve made of created being in the greatest of possible contexts, all of Creation:

1. God manifested some truths as the fundamental form of being.
2. Under the guiding hand of God, those truths interacted so as to create more complex truths and other forms of abstract being.
3. Also under the guiding hand of God, these various complex truths, abstract being, relationships mainly, interacted to produce concrete being of the sort found in this universe and in our own bodies and environments.

Just a couple of comments on each of these three items.

I've claimed and argued for the idea that our modern empirical knowledge tells us that relationships are primary over (concrete) stuff. The truths manifested as the raw (abstract) stuff of Creation are relationships.

The evolutionary and developmental nature of complex things in this universe, galaxies as well as the surface of the earth as well as elephants, seems to be such a basic truth as to imply that complex forms of abstract being were the result of similar sorts of processes. Thinking in this way also seems, at least to me, to make it easier to form concepts and even images of being as it becomes richer and more complex.

Concepts of concepts, images of what is so abstract as to be beyond images even when we try to understand how the concrete being of this universe is related to the entirety of being, some of which is quite abstract and yet perceivable to some extent. We do the best we can and it be remarkable how much sense we can make of:

- intertwined space and time;
- matter seemingly forming as the result of the 'collapse' (a philosophically loaded term) of some form of abstract being which we 'perceive' as mathematical formulas and I think those formulas to be as close as we can come to a type of abstract being;
- moral and social creatures which evolve by way of truly nasty processes at least amoral and possible to perceive as immoral;
- abstract ideas about infinities far larger than the number of numbers and yet ideas which arise in minds generated by those complex things called "human brains";
- abstract mathematical ideas so intertwined with concrete, thing-like being; and
- and so on.

Go up to the first list and its first item: God manifested some truths as the fundamental form of being. Let me raise a claim from my book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41]. A world or a person (think of 'human person' as being analogical to the only true persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) have three fundamental characteristics: unity, completeness, and coherence. I would conjecture that these three characteristics correspond

directly to truths manifested by God as part of the raw being from which all of Creation is shaped.

# 150 How Can Wrong Understandings Lead to True Insights?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2206>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/04/12.]

I've pondered a problem for years. How is it that premodern thinkers, such as the 4 A's, Aristocles ('Plato' is a nickname which might mean 'Chubby') and Aristotle and Augustine and Aquinas, produced so many true insights into the nature of reality, the nature of contingent being and even of the empirical and concrete realms of being? How could useful and true insights have come from men who believed:

- Euclidean Geometry to be the one and only and true geometry,
- the universe to be centered upon the earth,
- men to be particular cases of Man who was an entity defined in ideal and absolute standards,
- the city-state and the experience of men as of circa 300BC to define all political and social and moral possibilities for men, and so on.

This isn't some sort of convergence problem. Aristotle didn't just hit the edges of some very big target with the small bulls-eye at the center, a small bulls-eye not to be hit until...? Until the age when we know the truth so well that we began to nail that bulls-eye with every shot? Of course, considering the states of disorder of nearly all realms of human endeavor in the West of the 21st century, I'd have to believe we aren't

even facing the target; we tend to mostly hit innocent victims such as the younger generations with their badly formed minds and disordered moral characters.

There is some truth in the idea that Aristotle hit the target but not often near the bulls-eye, but perhaps a better analogy would consider human being, individual and communal, in its entirety. We could examine our perceptions and cogitations which produces such mental entities as conceptions and those conceptions are the beginnings of a greater understanding which I call a 'worldview'.

We have our sense organs, our eyes and noses, our ears and tongues, our hands and the entirety of of our skins. We also have a vast array of instruments to extend our senses or to even 'sense' forms of being, such as quantum wavefunctions, which lie out of the reach of the sensory organs of the human body.

We have our brains which think well on concrete matters even without a lot of intellectual skills or abstract knowledge and we have the mind which can be considered as the relationships of that brain when it begins to know and think in abstract ways.

So, we have senses extended so that they can sense much that is in our environments but remained beyond the senses of premodern men and we have brains extended to minds that can perceive and conceive (perhaps) all that is in our environment, can indeed (perhaps) encapsulate all of this universe and other forms of being from beyond this universe. Maybe human beings of ever-growing sensory and mental abilities can be seen as analogous to a lens evolving and developing to allow clearer vision at near distances and far, of large objects and small, to make sense of all that is perceived and conceived. Then Aristotle could have perceived and conceived a multitude of objects of various sorts of being and could have seen them in their proper places and relationships, but those perceptions and conceptions were quite fuzzy.

Maybe.

I don't know, but I think the viewpoint explored very lightly in this essay might help to bring focus to various metaphysical and ontological explorations of this universe and beyond.

# 151 Disembodied Knowledge is the Root of Many Modern Evils

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2289>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/11/15.]

I take knowledge seriously. I take seriously the problems we human beings have in gaining data, checking it, putting it into some sort of shape where it can be considered information and maybe even knowledge. After all, we human beings as individuals and communities are finite creatures biased to survival and reproduction; our individual and communal talents in measuring the movements of stars and then building models of the development of the observable universe seem to be something of a miracle from a Darwinian viewpoint. Serious knowledge should be taken seriously—respected and treasured. That statement covers even a lot of knowledge which proves eventually to be false knowledge, such as the Ptolemaic model of the solar system.

Knowledge is good. We should gain it. We should shape our minds to it, thus acquiring the skills and understanding of carpenter, music composer, or organic chemist. Most importantly, we should shape our minds to the Creator's work that we might come to share His thoughts, to think as He thinks. Yet, I have often denied epistemology as a valid part of metaphysical thinking, that is, thinking about created being or even (sort of) thinking about the (sort of purely) relational being of the Triune God, the God of Jesus Christ.

This is how the 1913 edition of Webster's dictionary defines epistemology:

The theory or science of the method or grounds of knowledge.  
[1913 Webster]

I don't object to the method business, though I consider that to be the primary domain of others than philosophers. Philosophers should be aware of what brain-scientists and other empirical investigators have discovered about our acquisition and use of facts, data, knowledge and so on. Philosophers can comment upon that good knowledge about knowledge and use it as they use the more direct results of physicists and historians and geneticists, but those philosophers should then move on to speculation about created being, using empirical knowledge which has been corrected and supplemented through the various efforts of various empirical researchers and doers.

As to "grounds of knowledge"? I object strongly. Our knowledge comes from created being through our perceptual organs or our conceptual organ (brain)—each of those organs being also created being. If we can't trust our senses, though admitting them to be limited and imperfect even in their range, then how could we ever know anything? The grounds of human knowledge are singular: being as it presents itself to us.

In other words, I take being far more seriously than knowledge. Being is primary and knowledge is certain effects of being upon our brains and—to a somewhat lesser extent—other bodily organs. Valid knowledge is some (typically imperfect and incomplete) encapsulation of true being—meaning not just actual being, but also possible being with some direct connection to what actually is. There is no Gnosis, that is, knowledge that comes to us "in the spirit" or as a pure revelation. We have no sensory organs to receive such (allegedly) pure knowledge. We have no minds but those which are formed by our embodied selves responding to what is inside and outside of those selves, minds which can handle facts and other thoughts which are reconcilable with our raw perceptions of this world.

Knowledge comes to us mortal creatures when created being presents itself and we properly respond to it. God created us so that He must come to us through His effects upon Creation—as Scholastics might put it. God must come to us through a more direct manifestation than 'hidden Creator', leading to human responses which bring about some of that knowledge.

Those who think of abstractions, of knowledge of species of trees and also the Pythagorean Theorem, as separate from created being are always in danger of losing themselves in the mazes of their own minds, or the minds of a misunderstood Plato or a more truly understood Spinoza or Kant or Heidegger.

St Thomas Aquinas and other moderate realists were right: we have

no choice but to accept what comes to our senses as true knowledge of created being. It might be defective or incomplete knowledge, but the correction of that knowledge isn't a proper task for philosophers but rather proper tasks for biologists and experts in use of instruments to extend or correct our perceptions and various other specialists in various aspects of empirical reality. Philosophers, those who study created being in its more fundamental aspects, can try to make sense of human beings and of Creation in light of the corrections to our perceived knowledge which come from the specialists in human visual and memory systems, from opticians, from physiologists, and from others. They might well find it useful to explore the details of those empirical investigations as philosophers of science often have explored quantum physics and evolutionary biology and the use of science in technology and so on.

Philosophers have no warrant to comment upon knowledge as being separate from created being; even theologians have to be careful to deal with divinity by way of God's effects in His Creation. To do otherwise is to separate one's thoughts from Creation, the work of God; to do otherwise is to wander into a humanly imagined world. To wander from God's Creation, in our thoughts about flesh-and-blood human beings or in our thoughts about the Creator, is to enter psychotic—nightmarish—realms, realms outside of what exists. And all forms of psychosis lead to nightmares, even if they start as sweetness and sunlight on a meadow of spring grasses and early wildflowers.

We set out on a wrong path, we imagine we have the ability to imagine a better world, when we begin to separate ourselves from what is around us, when we—motivated by religious or anti-religious beliefs—think that we are creatures somehow able to judge our knowledge of created being and then move on to judge created being and its Creator.

It's God who has the imagination healthy enough and powerful enough to see the way to a world which can be endlessly wonderful. We do well enough to learn about the results of God's chosen acts-of-being and to participate in the shaping of the forms of created being which are those results. Sometimes we even do well by straying away a little from empirical reality to produce variations upon what God has done—in our music and our poetry and our visual art.



## 152 The Knowledge Possessed by a Creature

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2337>. It was finished and uploaded on 2017/02/27.]

What is truth? Not so ridiculous a question as some would have it, certainly those who don't understand how difficult a struggle it has been to develop various plausible and implausible understandings of the abstract concepts of 'truth' and 'knowledge' over the past 10,000 years or so of rapid increase of human intelligence in certain Eurasian peoples—see the previously referenced *The 10,000 Year Explosion: How Civilization Accelerated Human Evolution* [23] by Gregory Cochran and Henry Harpending for an introduction to the genetic-historical study of the underlying events. If you wish to read of these events, or at least of snapshots of these events, from a philosophical or historical viewpoint, a viewpoint also more or less Eurocentric, you can see *The Origins of European Thought About the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time, and Fate* [106] by R B Onians, *Body, Soul, Spirit: A Survey of the Body-Mind Problem* [139] by C A van Peursen, and *The Discovery of the Mind in Greek Philosophy and Literature* [128] by Bruno Snell. General searches on the Internet or in your local library system on the *Axial Age* (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Axial\\_Age](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Axial_Age)) will lead you to to a variety of 'old-fashioned' and 'new-fangled' historical works on the strange and glorious transformation in human culture, including the intellect, which occurred from some time in the *Iron Age* (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iron\\_Age](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iron_Age)) and ended a few centuries or so before the birth of Jesus Christ. For a historical perspective which relies on particular mathematical and statistical analyses rather than starting at the level of abstract being as I'm doing, see Peter Turchin's website at

<http://peterturchin.com/> for an interesting, plausible, and powerful attempt at building applied mathematical models of events in human history; at the least, there are some good insights in the work of Turchin and allied thinkers. (At the same time, Turchin writes some good histories, such as *War and Peace and War: The Life Cycles of Imperial Nations* [136].)

The writings referenced in the above paragraph are but an entry into various sorts of literature dealing with the results of an important period of evolutionary and developmental changes in human being, changes which led to Archimedes and Augustine and Aquinas and Fra Angelico and Pascal and Newton and Mozart and on to Planck and Einstein and Picasso and Arnold Schoenberg and Eliot and Joyce and Sartre and others. A few minutes of serious thought will lead to the realization that any list of high achievers in recent centuries is remarkably short on great religious thinkers (John Henry Newman was at least a second-tier great thinker but few others reached anywhere near that) and writers or artists working in the traditionalist mode (Eliot was almost entirely modern in style though he advanced—did himself **adhere** to—important, central lines of traditionalist thought). Scientists and various mathematicians, including some great mathematicians discussed in earlier pages of this book, seem to be still more dominant, shockingly dominant, when we limit modern thinkers and writers and artists to those of undoubted greatness.

I'm not sure how many scientists or mathematicians would share my understanding of what-is, merely the universe to many of them and Creation to some of them and certainly to me. Only a few, mostly Platonists and mostly mathematicians, would even grasp the concept of abstractions as a form of being. Probably those Platonists would make the same understandable error as Plato—thinking of abstractions in terms of Reals which seem to be pure and ideal archetypes of complex entities such as human being; this idea seems implausible after Darwin and Einstein as seen through the eyes of the Reverend Monsignor Georges Lemaître (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georges\\_Lemaitre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georges_Lemaitre)) and other founders of modern physical cosmology (in the 1920s).

After the work of evolutionary biology and quantum physics and history, we don't even currently know what are the basic components of being, human or otherwise—where 'know' can be taken as involving the actual truth or just the most plausible speculation of an age. We don't even know if there are basic components of the sort found in particle physics or nuclear physics. I suspect not, having found it easier to make sense of Creation in

terms of abstract being and concrete being—to be sure, I think of concrete being as shaped from abstract being so that abstract being is something like an elementary form of being but it’s a bit different and more consistent with quantum physics. In other words, the wavefunctions of quantum physics aren’t like the elementary entities of particle physics, though those entities correspond to quantum wavefunctions.

We have no coherent and morally well-ordered understandings of Creation in light of evolutionary biology or quantum physics. Our moral philosophers and moral theologians and various leaders don’t know how to view our communities and individuals in terms allowing even potential moral order of a sort which once seemed so clear to our minds and eyes. Our theologians in Christian traditions don’t know how to talk about man’s meeting with God, in prayer or worship or more specifically in the Sacraments; they babble on using terms which once meant something when the Greek philosophers and Medieval Scholastics seemed to have provided solid understandings of matter and mind and even God <sup>1</sup>. Modern thinkers sometimes just accept schemes of words and concepts of premodern times and sometimes try to build up their own—none of those modern schemes seeming at all plausible in light of what we now know about Creation.

We are creatures embedded in a Creation arising from raw stuff which is the truths manifested by God through His Son. To our minds and hearts and hands, this Creation is quite dynamic for at least three reasons:

- Creation is so because it is inherently so, evolving and developing as it moves from its original primordial state toward greater particularity and complexity.
- Creation is so because we learn about it through our own evolving and developing minds and hearts and hands.
- Creation is so because our very efforts to understand and to exploit this Creation brings about changes in the evolution and development

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<sup>1</sup>The Protestant Reformers disagreed, sometimes radically so, with the specific, ‘higher-order’ Catholic schemes for understanding Sacraments and a sacramental world and man’s moral situation and so on, but accepted the words and concepts which existed at that time for discussing these things. Neither Martin Luther nor the Catholic Counter-reformer Cardinal Robert Bellarmine even pretended to engage in creative metaphysical thought.

of our own human being and in much of the being with which we can directly form relationships of any sort.

In my updated version of Thomism, creation is not a place containing entities but rather a set of relationships which are acts-of-being. Material stuff and even abstract stuff is the result of those relationships, most of which are highly dynamic. Human knowledge isn't settled from our viewpoint, human knowledge doesn't encapsulate the truth, until we can reach a better, more stable viewing place. But no such place can possibly exist so long as we're alive because we learn more about Creation and we also change what is by our active responses, as do all entities and lesser creatures, but only we humans can—in principle—encapsulate all that God has created in our own minds. Only we humans can—in principle—participate in God's greater acts-of-being, His thoughts and feelings and actions which take place in any realm or all realms of Creation. Only we humans can—in principle—share God's thoughts even as He creates from nothing.

Some principles can only be realized in the world of the resurrected where the friends of God share God's life by being part of the Body of Christ, by sharing directly in the human being of the Son of God. By so sharing we might even enjoy the dizzying sight of Creation from God's transcendental viewpoint. Then we will be able to understand.

## 153 Knowledge and Being

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2406>. It was finished and uploaded on 2017/05/30.]

Let's be philosophical: What is knowledge?

Under my metaphysics, knowledge is a misleading way to refer to an encapsulation of being in our own being. Words like 'know' and 'knowledge' are our ways of speaking about our active responses to what lies outside of us but also our active responses to our own human being. As we respond, we enter into a relationship. We begin to share in being which might be abstract or concrete but is always a manifestation of thoughts God freely chose. A similar process can result in something like participation in divine being, sharing in the life of God.

Even Christians in the modern world, and maybe most Christians throughout history, take a paganistic view of created being, formally acknowledging God as Creator of all and then ignoring Him when it comes to the hard and exciting work of making sense of what lies around us and inside us so that we can respond properly to that all which is the manifested thoughts of the Creator. We are pagans because we ignore God the Creator and think and feel and act as if this world were something separate from God, something over which God has great—maybe absolute—power, something He rules but something as separate from Him as Russia was from Peter the Great as he struggled to subordinate that country to his will.

We think and feel and act—quite wrongly—as if this stuff exists and then God begins to love it and to seek to control it. In terms of a more Christian metaphysics: What exists only exists because God has first loved it, has chosen to form an active relationship with it before it even existed; moreover, God's ultimate control over Creation is that which He exercises as a Creator, not as a King ruling someplace which exists independently of

His creative will. If the Almighty wishes to act as a King, imposing His will upon what He has done as Creator, then He is free to do so. We Christians shouldn't assume that is His only way of doing business or even His primary way of doing business.

Every bit of created being, including each and every human being, is a thought He manifested and has to continue manifesting for that bit of being to continue to exist. Thus it is that we have to think of God in terms of analogies from what He created. In some regards, we should think of God in terms often ridiculed as 'anthropomorphic'. Often the underlying criticism is proper if made in respectful ways, but often it is ridicule by those who aren't truly scientific. They aren't men and women who wish to 'clean up' our thinking about the Almighty; rather do they wish to stop us from thinking about any power, God or the natural world He created, which lies above human power.

God is mind and heart and hands, analogically and powerfully so. This is to say, He thinks and feels and acts in ways analogical to those of human beings. We rise above those analogies when we speak of God in terms of His true unity, a unity of mind and heart and hands which is true of divine nature and also of each of the three Persons, Father and Son and Holy Spirit. In such a unity of mind and heart and hands, we also see the future of the friends of God.

My metaphysics is a grand claim that there is no real knowledge which is separate from true divine being which is mind and heart and hands at once. God's thoughts manifested in Creation are one with His feelings and His acts. He thought of me before I was conceived, felt love for me, and acted to create me in my parents' act of conception. So I came to be, but it's misleading to think of the three phrases in the prior sentence, involving thought and feeling and acting, as truly three. They were one at my conception and they are one and they are the act-of-being which is me. My fragmentation is an ephemeral condition which will end when I join God on the other side of the grave or when I'm left in the permanent grave if I fail to respond properly to Creator and Creation.

It bears repeating: our human minds are encapsulations of what lies around us, whether it be concrete being or abstract being or even the revelation of divine Being. This encapsulation is itself an active response to being; even revelation isn't such until a creature responds honestly and openly to it. Biological evolution has prepared a complex human brain capable of and inclined toward that response and the ensuing encapsulation,

but it doesn't provide us with much in the way of specific beliefs in "the meaningfulness of life" or "the existence of an absolute being" or anything of that sort. Our worldview is the greater 'shape' of that encapsulation, is an active response to the totality of what lies around us, and is—because of that—always under revision in an active and living mind, even the mind of one such as I am: a believer in the traditions of sacramental Christianity, but I believe in a living body of traditions. And that worldview is mostly in the communal human being which is us rather than in the individual human being which is me or thee. (See my freely downloadable book, *The Shape of Reality* [56] for an explanation of the above use of the concept of shape.)

Even when we think about the most abstract forms of being, we are responding so that we participate or share in that being—along with the Creator. If we are honest and courageous, we will encapsulate reality to the best of our abilities—given our specific cultural and historical circumstances. Mostly our minds but also the entirety of our human being will encapsulate the being which we have responded to, whether it be a horse and riding gear, a tennis racket and a ball which can move in strange and rapid ways, revelations about God, 3-d printers and high-precision parts, historical and fictional retellings of the settling of New England in the 1600s, or other strange and wondrous forms of created being. Note that there are too many of those strange and wondrous things to be truly encapsulated by a single human mind or even by all the talented minds of all the universities on Earth. It takes a civilization to make a plausible worldview and that worldview is what really makes a civilization; in this case, you can dig to discover foundations and find yourself on the roof. I said above our worldviews are mostly the communal us and a true civilization has to have an appropriately rich and complex communal us; a Christian civilization, the pilgrim Body of Christ, has to have a very rich and complex communal us which is intertwined with God through the Lord Jesus Christ and through Christian communities of worship and service and belief.

Unlike us, God has control over what He thinks because what He thinks already truly is or has truly become at that instant. His will is fully effective while our wills must be disciplined to do what God left to us, always following His will—our only true guide. The Almighty is free and we are somewhat free, and can learn to be more free, by participating in His freedom. God can even create where there was once nothing, bringing an entire Creation into existence. We can only seek to know, to understand, the Cre-

ation in which we have our being, but this—as I said above—is to share in the being God has created. And this is to share the thoughts God manifested as this universe and in all of Creation. Consider it preparation for a more complete sharing of the life of God in the world of the resurrected.

The Satanic rebellion, the rebellion of modern men but also of many ancient men, is to refuse to share in the being of what-is as best we can perceive and conceive it. We modern men try to live in a Creation more to our liking. This deification of what we desire leads us into various sorts of hells, though we might have misguided forms of prosperity in those hells and might enjoy ourselves for some time; we gain the world though we lose truer forms of human being, those which would allow us to share God's life, to a small extent in this mortal realm and to a full extent in the world of the resurrected. We have no capacity to enjoy or even endure life without end; we can have that never-ending life and have it in joyful abundance only if we share the life of God.

We need to understand that we don't know, we participate in being. We aren't learning. By responding honestly and courageously to what lies around us, we encapsulate that being in our own being. Thus, it is more proper to say, "We are becoming," rather than, "We are learning."

Most of all, we need to understand we aren't in control. Knowledge, as typically imagined, is one human way to try to stand above being, pretending to control it if only by squeezing it into our various schemes. Until it squeezes back and crushes us.

[Many of these inadequate ways of thinking and speaking discussed above can become adequate if we re-orient our thinking towards being and toward God as a true Creator rather than a King. For now, I struggle with a language deformed to speak in false ways about Creation and its relationship to the Creator.]

# 154 Why Do I Write Such Complicated and Complex Prose?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2601>. It was finished and uploaded on 2019/02/12.]

The funny answer would be that I don't have enough time to write my essays so that they would be shorter and easier to understand. Ordinarily, there would be some serious truth in that—even so great a writer as Blaise Pascal could say:

I would have written a shorter letter, but I did not have the time. [See *Blaise Pascal* at [https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Blaise\\_Pascal](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Blaise_Pascal).]

Some serious truth indeed, but Pascal wrote when Western Civilization was on an upward slope, likely because of increases in intelligence during the difficult periods which followed the High Middle Age. A high percentage of literate human beings of the West were more intelligent during the periods of history when, to put it bluntly: God, through the world He created, was applying brutal selection standards to men and women, young adults and children. Being more intelligent, they also—generally—took more ready advantage and better advantage of any opportunities for learning or for entering into more deeply interesting situations.

I've written on various aspects of this subject regularly, often starting with Jacques Barzun's claim that the West hit a peak, of sorts, in literacy around 1500. His book, *From Dawn to Decadence* [9] tells the story of

the West as it peaked and then entered a period of decline—with higher-level innovation (think of Einstein and Tolstoy and not even the best of ‘middle-brow’ thinkers) dropping off greatly after the generation at the peak of their creative activity in 1900 or so. (Barzun’s peak was actually for high-quality literacy among French peasants, a mere shot across the bow apparently ignored by the intellectual, cultural, religious, and other leaders of that country and of the entire West. Mostly, the ‘deep’ thinkers of later generations assumed peasants had always been homogeneously illiterate.)

The truth of the matter is simply stated but would lead to an essay as long and as complex as any I’ve written since I started my blogs:

- *Acts of Being* at <https://loydfueston.com/> [still active], and
- *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* at <https://loydf.wordpress.com/> [not active but accessible].

That simple truth? I write in the way I feel forced to write in order to prevent the sorts of deformations to the information and speculations I wish to communicate. More than that, I myself have to struggle for words and ways of phrasing which maintain the thoughts I have inside of myself. Often, my complex and complicated prose is the result of experiments in being true to those inner thoughts only partly expressed in words. A weak but indicative analogy: those painters who say they throw colors onto the canvas and then scrape away the excess. I want to control the process. I respect my readers and they can form their own ideas and viewpoints, but they should not pretend my writings are merely clay for reader participation of the sort we find in ‘deconstruction’ and some other major new phobosophies.

We live in a truly Orwellian world—in some ways and not so much in other ways. The world is Orwellian in that advanced technology is being used to push into our minds new words, new meanings for old words, simplifications for older ways of speaking which allowed for the sort of complex and nuanced thoughts and speech which are resistant to propaganda, new models of the world to replace the Christian models of the West. Likely it is that a more complete analysis by a new Orwell would identify the various working methods of political propagandists, marketeers, public relations specialists, and ideologically corrupt scholars and academics and public-school teachers.

The world is not Orwellian in that there is no tightly administered command and control center for these various processes of corruption of lan-

guage and, thus, of thought. The Invisible Hand guides morally well-ordered communities of somewhat ordered or well-ordered individuals to form complex economies and polities, communities of trust and requiring little in the way of policing beyond, so to speak, the issuing of citations. In a sense, the Invisible Hand is but a dim perception of the processes by which God is forming the Body of Christ. But that Hand, or its sinister counterpart, can also organize criminal communities, including those inside the American government and inside the banking industry and... Lots of places. As I've claimed before: there is no Deep State or overriding Conspiracy but rather has the modern world been turned into a battleground of criminal gangs of various sorts, with Latin American drug-lords and street-gangs and the partly mythical Mafia being weaker sorts. Sometimes those gangs form into larger and more complex entities. Sometimes they gain a highly leveraged position from which they can have a disproportionate effect on their society or even all of mankind.

It's all very complicated. So is my writing as I seek to say things which are so hard to say in a language stunted and twisted and deformed to the needs of marketing campaigns, including those ideological campaigns carried out in our intertwined entertainment and educational industries. There is also, quite clearly, an effort in our mainstream media to make it difficult to speak of certain things, such as the effort to paint 'national-security' as a prime directive so great as to exclude all discussions of privacy and personal freedom.

I'll end with another claim about my writing. I need to fight the deformations of our current ideological forms of English not just to truly say traditional truths but also to propose new truths in a way that I can control—partly and for now. If I'm truly pointing to new truths, then I'll have no long-term control over them; my own expressed thoughts sometimes surprise me and I'm sure that others will find new angles and new content and...

Where do these "new truths" come from? What are they?

They come from the Creator through His works, through His effects in this world and all the realms of Creation the human mind and spirit can see and understand much—however uncertainly and vaguely. For example, the story of the "origins" of mankind in the Bible makes no clear claims that humans were really a special creation outside of nature. Partly because of St Augustine's endorsement of that view, in *The City of God* and other writings, that speculative understanding of the Biblical narratives became

established as the “only possible understanding,” as the Truth. In fact, Augustine considered also the possibility that man rose from a lower species. It was the rejected option which has proven true and we Catholics and some other Christians ritually chant, “I believe in evolution,” before going back to discussions of human being which reject any intelligent understanding of evolution, which very strongly reject any integration of evolutionary thought in our understanding of human nature.

Stanley Jaki, OSB considered Augustine’s mistake to be the most important and most damaging act of intellectual cowardice in history. I’ve argued we need to correct this mistake in various ways; I’ll not make another such argument here. Rather will I point out that our efforts to hold on to something clearly not true have deformed the languages used by Christians to speak and think of our own beings, of our relationships to each other and to God; we have made that mistake so much a part of our mental furnishings that we can speak of our acceptance of evolution and then of a thoroughly inconsistent claim of a special creation in a state of grace followed by a fall into a state of sin.

If we accept biological evolution, that means we did not fall, rather are we rising from our knuckles. Heck, our backs are still more suited, in some ways, to crouching animals than to upright animals. Our various problems resulting from this rise from our knuckles, such as lower-back arthritis and sciatic nerve irritations, should convince us of this.

So it is that backs and hips mostly adapted, but not completely, to upright living can have a bearing on our understanding of the Bible, a bearing on our theological beliefs.

Yet, our languages—oh-so Modern and oh-so falsely twisted to deform both theological and scientific beliefs—don’t allow us to speak the truth in a greater and more consistent way. We see our spiritual and worldly mistakes and crimes as being the result of a fall from a state of grace rather than seeing them as an inherent part of the processes by which God has created and continues to create, has sustained and continues to sustain, friends for His Son—a double-good result according to Genesis. And those processes, perhaps more fundamentally and perhaps not, also create and sustain a world He has declared good.

So it is that we refuse to advance to a richer and more accurate understanding of God in His role as our Creator, as the Creator of all that exists that is not Him. Though, there is even a sense in which God creates Himself: He is his own Self-sustaining Act-of-being. But He doesn’t create

Himself from anything which is not Himself nor from anything which is more fundamental than Himself, as He creates this world from a seemingly strange and abstract form of being described by, and perhaps being, the formalisms of quantum physics. And then He creates living creatures from the inanimate thing-like being which is shaped from that strange 'quantum being'.

I'm doing my best to speak and think my speculative versions of greater and more consistent truths. And so it is that my thoughts and writings are more complex and more complicated than will be needed in a few generations to speak and think of such truths in simpler ways.



## Part IV

### Love and Stuff



## 155 Introduction: Love and Stuff

In this part, I've collected essays or articles from my weblogs, *Acts of Being* at <http://loydfueston.com/> and *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* at <http://loydf.wordpress.com/>, in which I deal with the basic nature of concrete stuff and my conjecture that this stuff is secondary to relationships. By looking at modern science from a Christian viewpoint, we are surprised by naturally emerging parallels in a radical understanding of the findings of quantum theory with the theological stance of the school of St. John the Evangelist.



# 156 A Christian View of Einstein's and Bohr's Debate on Reality

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=10>. It was finished and uploaded on 2006/07/19.]

Years ago, I read about this famous debate in which Bohr spoke of objects coming into existence as quantum waves 'collapsed' because of an observation. Einstein refused to believe this could be and spoke as if he were defending common sense.

Years ago, I also read *Critique of Scientific Reason* [75] by the philosopher Kurt Hubner. He talked about this debate but I'd forgotten a major claim he'd made about the debate:

Einstein was claiming that reality consists of substances which remain unaltered by their relationships with other substances while Bohr was claiming that it is the relationships which are primary and those relationships bring substances into existence.

Over the past year, I pulled this book out of storage several times to reread Hubner's discussion of this argument. It occurred to me that this argument puts Bohr's 'radical' interpretation of reality in line with Christian beliefs. Einstein's seeming common-sense is that of a hardheaded pagan who believes that matter exists eternally and independently of its relationships to other material entities and even independently of the will of God. God

may be in charge in this world, in Einstein's view, but He couldn't be the Creator in quite the way that Christians believe Him to be.<sup>1</sup>

How did God Create the world? How did the world and all of us come into existence?

Because God loved the world before it existed, loved us before we were conceived, we came to be.

The world as a whole and all that is in the world came to be as the result of God's free-will decision to love it even before it existed.

Pay attention to the line of argument but be aware that time-related language, such as 'before' should not be taken literally. That is, it can denote what philosophers would call an ontological relationship rather than a time relationship. The world could, in theory, be eternal when we consider whatever exists on the other side of the so-called Big Bang—more accurately, the beginning of the current expansionary phase of the universe. The question, "Eternal/infinite or mortal/limited?" isn't so important as some have taught to the issue of God as true Creator. The primary act-of-being by which contingent being, created being, came into existence doesn't have to be located in time.

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<sup>1</sup>Einstein is, in fact, said to be an atheist by most who've studied his writings though many of his words seem to be those of a pious pantheist.

# 157 Quantum Mechanics and Moral Formation

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=34>. It was finished and uploaded on 2006/08/02.]

In my blog entry on the debate between Einstein and Bohr on the meaning of reality, I spoke of relationships being primary. It is relationships which bring substance into being, as Bohr was arguing in an obscure way. In a seemingly separate line of arguments in my book *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], I also argued that we're not born persons; we're born human animals and become human persons, or not, as a result of our responses to those around us, to our physical environments, and—most of all—to God.

In other words, I was already anticipating my more explicit claim that it is relationships which are primary in the viewpoint of a true and rational Christian Creationism. There are other arguments against Intelligent Design, but this is one of the strongest: Intelligent Design places substances ahead of relationships, static structures ahead of narratives. Good narratives, of course, show a strong appreciation of the importance of relationships. Let us hear the Biblical version of this:

Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. 1 John 4:7

And again:

We love because He first loved us. 1 John 4:19

We know God by way of His self-revelations and also through His effects in His Creation, through everything that exists. And both of those sets of

revelation speak to us of love. If we accept that love and struggle to live up to the demands of that love, we become persons, human beings who are being born of the Spirit, that is, being reshaped to become a God-centered and morally well-structured human person. And we are changed deeply by the relationships we take on. We can accept God's love and try to order our selves in response. We can order ourselves to the satisfaction of our creaturely desires for safety and comfort or perhaps for control of our world.

In responding to relationships, certainly in accepting certain relationships and refusing or slighting others, we are not autonomous, pre-formed persons who remain unaltered. We become different creatures than we would have been if we'd made other choices. And we change others by forming relationships with them, or even offering them relationships.

# 158 The Importance of Matter and Nature

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=48>. It was finished and uploaded on 2006/12/08.]

In an earlier entry, I advocated the view that relationships are primary and substance comes into existence as a result of one or more relationships. Now, I'll try to produce a more balanced view by saying why we Christians, perhaps others as well, should consider substance (or 'essence' in the usual philosophical talk) to be necessary for our very existence. In particular, I will be assuming that our substance is the physical matter of our bodies and the human natures impressed upon that matter.

We are brought into existence by God's acts-of-being, though I view that as a two stage process. In the first stage, God created what I call the Primordial Universe, manifested truths or being that is pure in some sense I can't yet define. In the second stage, the stage described in pagan myths and the first verses of Genesis, God shaped that pure being into a particular universe—the one we are part of.

We are brought into existence by God's acts-of-being and we have little control over our existence or non-existence. God can resurrect those who kill themselves thinking to end their existence for ever. He can leave dead those who think that they will go on to some Disneyland where they will continue to enjoy the sort of life to which they accustomed themselves. It is for God to decide who will be companions to His Son, though we can start out presuming He will select those who are trying to be such companions during their earthly lives.

Our substance is God's way of giving us some limited independence from Him. We can't know what that means since God is all-powerful and those

who thought it impossible for creatures to have any true freedom had some good arguments. Despite those arguments, we do experience something of a freedom but we do not exercise that freedom by way of anything deserving the name 'free-will'.

A human being should not even desire free-will because of the implications of the ability to act in a truly random way. For God the Creator, this ability to act in a truly random way means that He could bring into existence a Primordial Universe from nothingness and then shape that Primordial Universe into a particularized universe, the universe of which we are part. Our freedom consists, so far as I can tell, entirely in nudging ourselves towards an acceptance of God's wishes for us. This nudging process can be less painful and almost invisible when it begins in early childhood but few the Christian parents with the faith and courage and integrity to raise their children to be Christians in a world where non-Christian behavior seems to lead to much in the way of safety and comfort, in a word – prosperity.

To look at matters from a different point of view, the freedom we have as creatures is to help in shaping our selves, our stuff and our relationships to others including God. This gives us a very limited freedom, important in allowing us to accept God's offer to share in His life, but limited. The term 'free-will' is a term that is used predominately to speak of the ability of autonomous agents to choose from bundles of goods. We do not have that sort of freedom simply because we are not autonomous agents. We cannot choose freely nor does the liberal idea of bundles of goods mean anything. In fact, experience over the past few decades of rapid decay indicates this sort of view—when taken seriously—is most likely to lead to people being trapped in bad habits and immoral ways of life into which they were enticed as adolescents. In fact, the liberal view of freedom can trap us by the decisions we make in the very early stages of adult-hood. We see this in the teenaged rockers of the 50s and 60s who continue to make asses of themselves on the stage even when they are grandfathers and nearly great-grandfathers.

George Berkeley, a key thinker in the history of liberalism defined spirit—the human soul was one example—as the form of being which thinks, wills, and acts. It is this soul which is autonomous for its ties to the particularity of matter are accidental. It is this soul which could be happy in an age where men can choose to become women and women can choose to become anything but mothers. This modern age is most certainly not to the likings of a human being who is a particular physical being and satisfied

to be so. It is that particular physical being which has a particular moral nature. A being which is an immortal soul, a spirit as defined by Berkeley and the likes of Emerson and Thoreau, has no particular moral nature. This being is an 'agent' as Berkeley himself said, an autonomous agent in the thought of those who followed him on the path to modernity.

I don't know if God could have created such a spiritual creature as Berkeley or Emerson or Thoreau imagined themselves to be. I do know, the Bible tells me so, He created us that some of us could become companions for His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. I also know that our physical nature with its needs and constraints do not allow us to choose freely even amongst the very limited range of 'bundles of goods' offered by nature. Even the unnatural bundles of goods we see offered to us in the modern world show a complete lack of the powerful imagination which would have to be part of a true free-will whether directed to good or bad ends.

We have some freedom, enough freedom to accept or reject salvation and even enough freedom to become good or bad men by the standards of our particular beliefs, but we have no freedom grand enough to deserve the term 'free-will'. Only God could have that sort of freedom. Mostly we have the freedom to move within the constraints and limitations of our human natures.

So far as I can tell, Berkeley put himself in an embarrassing position for a Christian—he defined the 'stuff' of God and the true 'soul-stuff' of man as being basically the same. Berkeley's God seems to have the one additional power to create and destroy other beings, but that seems pretty paltry for the God of Jesus Christ and not even the sort of 'difference' which would be appropriate to a God who established His power most securely as He allowed His Son to be tortured and crucified. God's power to create is one aspect of His true life, most especially of the love shared by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

When we think of God being made of divine substance, we're already in trouble. We limit Him rather than letting Him define Himself. One particular bit of trouble comes in when we begin to think of bodies of truths as somehow existing separately from God so that He becomes a thinker like us, a processor of truths which lie beyond His creative powers. Deism is implicit in such a view just as dualistic or polytheistic paganism is implicit in the oft-stated belief of many Christians that God intended this world to be different than it is. God is all-powerful and He created the world as He wished it to be. In this world are the creatures from whom He will choose

His Son's companions. In this world, such creatures come to be potential companions of the Son of God by reacting properly to the very forces of disorder which can even include those describable as evil.

I don't have any deep theories as to why God chose to create such a world or why He chose to Incarnate His Son as a member of a species of apes. In *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], I merely told a story which is coherent in the way of a story. The sheer particularity of that story is a result of God's free-will decision as to which type of a world to create and then which specific world to create. That sheer particularity of God's decisions as a Creator also argues against us having anything describable by 'free-will', that term which has been taken over by liberal thought with its refusal to see a man as being bound, or even constrained, by his particular nature or his particular history. God created particular creatures and not creatures able to will freely from even a wide range of possibilities let alone an undefined but indefinitely large catalog of bundles of goods.

Whatever views Christians may have of free-will, it has been used in the modern world mostly to allow men to escape the Christian traditions of their forefathers. And now it has the practical role of allowing redefinition of a woman's very biological nature in societies which would collapse into poverty if their economies were not expanding explosively into new needs, the satisfaction of new desires manufactured to the profits of the ambitious and greedy.

A free-will is exactly what a true liberal wants to have because he would be what he desires to be and would rather cease to exist than to be forced to be what he was born to be. I'm not sure why a Christian would want a free-will or why he would imagine he has one.

Substance is what we have, where I consider substance to be both the underlying matter of our bodies and also our well-defined biological natures. More exactly, we have the substance which allows us to be formed into the sorts of companions God chose for His Son. Substance is what we need because we are particular beings. If we will to be other than our substance, we will an end to our existence. We cannot become gods or spirits or autonomous agents just because we are particular creatures with adrenal glands and sexual organs and pre-frontal lobes in our brains.

[More recently, I've decided the main reason God created such a world as this is the desire of the Son of God to sacrifice Himself in an act of love of the Father. Man was created in sin so that Christ could be crucified and this situation also leads to the possibility of resurrection into a life without

end as companion to the Lord Jesus Christ.]



# 159 Negative Theology in Physics and Metaphysics

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=81>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/03/09.]

I've argued that the human mind is shaped by its active responses to its immediate environments, including social relationships starting with that between infant and mother. From there, we expand out into larger sections of those immediate environments and may begin to interact with other environments. In this expansion into other environments, we're like other opportunistic animals—bears and wolves being my favorite examples. Those species are missing the brain structures, mostly in the prefrontal cortex, which interact with even ancient, 'reptilian' sections of our brains to allow us to plan ahead, keep in mind objects which aren't present, form abstract groupings from particular objects, and even to form concepts not clearly related to anything in our experience.

Any claim for human 'uniqueness'—only hinted at in the above paragraph—is clearly true in a substantial sense but it's also overly simplified. Chimpanzees have at least some raw abilities related to abstract thinking but don't display any signs of developing skills from those raw abilities—in general. Recently, scientists were a little surprised to observe chimps in the wild making spears and using them to kill monkeys. We should learn something from the very rarity of this sort of behavior, given that chimps do show abstract thinking readily when given specific incentives. But we also need to see that we are mostly citizens of our universe. The chimpanzees are our cousins.

Already, there are hints of thought patterns akin to those of negative theology, both the deliberate and conscious formation of analogies and also

the nay-saying that tries to claim, “No, God is not truly this,” or “No, men are not truly this.” This sort of reasoning is, in fact, natural to disciplined human thought, But remember that this sort of thought is not purely negative. The real method of negative theology, as practiced in Christianity, is based upon the realization that we creatures know our physical environments and must speak of even God in terms which are derived from our experiences and relationships. Analogies are formed and then an attempt is made to negate the most important errors which arise from applying creaturely analogies to God.

This way of thought, analogy and negation, is most applicable to our efforts to understand something that is not quite definable in explicit terms. I like to think in this way, forming analogies, sometimes drawing on knowledge far afield from the objects of my current thought. When I apply the analogy and I start seeing possible or realized problems, I start adding other analogical elements to counteract the original analogy. This can get complicated fast and all sorts of errors can eventually be hidden in a way of thought. Also, an abstract way of thought can sometimes come to be thought of as the truth rather than an attempt to deal with one part of reality or another. We should be faster to clean out our houses of thought, including those houses which contain accumulated thoughts about God Himself, the ultimate and only true reality.

Let me make a case study of sorts of some of my own thought processes behind the worldview I developed in my book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41]. This is rough because I didn’t keep any notes as I proceeded and my ways of thought tend to be too discursive to truly accord with a systematic presentation.

1. Where do the ideas of abstract mathematics and abstract metaphysics come from if we are physical creatures who learn from the physical things and relationships of this world?

We can become dualists at this point as most do, including most who consider themselves to be materialists. As some have pointed out, concepts of software have crept into the thoughts of the materialists. Soul or software are the same if it’s something that floats above the physical entity, only accidentally attached.

Another traditional form of dualism is the belief in a realm of Ideas which are pure, not corruptible or changeable in any other way. Some accuse Plato

of teaching this, but I read more nuanced and qualified views in the few dialogs I've read—in translation only. On the other hand, Neoplatonists did seem to teach this form of dualism and they had a great, and not always good, influence on thought in both Christian and non-Christian science, as well as other domains of knowledge.

Suppose we decide that empirical reality is sufficient for the natures of empirical entities. There is no magical extra added in, from soul-stuff or from software which can supposedly implement a 'mind' in the patterns of brain-cells or the patterns of insects or sunspots. There is also no realm of pure ideas which we can access.

We're now stuck with things and relationships of things to each other as the foundation of some extraordinarily complex mathematics. It's not clear how ideas of infinities larger than ordinary infinity can arise if all our mathematics has to arise in our physical brains formed in interactions with environments in this physical universe. There are many such abstractions in mathematics which raise such problems.

Those problems have to be considered in light of the empirical evidence that human mind-events are tied strictly to events in the brain. Since the brain is embedded in a body and that is embedded in complex environments, we're not really forced to find all mathematics in the brain as such. But it's not clear how we can use any of this to explain the power of the human mind if it is founded entirely in the physical brain.

We have ourselves a seeming conflict between scientific evidence that the brain is the foundation of our thinking activity and the fact that some human beings can imagine and analyze possibilities which seem unrealizable in this universe.

Let's move on.

2. Cosmological astrophysics and particle physics support a narrative of our universe which begins with the entire universe compressed to densities and states of being which can be described mathematically but not well-imagined by a human mind formed to deal with trees and rocks and hamsters.

As we reverse the narratives of the so-called Big Bang model of this phase of Creation—going backward in time from now until the beginning of that expansion, we find a general tendency for thing-like being to melt down and even to merge in fundamental ways with energy and fields. This

cosmological mush is a vaguer sort of being to us humans with our minds formed for thing-like environments.

If we extrapolate back through the Big Bang...

What might lie on the other side of that extremely dense state? Is it merely a point of oscillation and what we see is what truly exists? Is there some sort of quantum vacuum on the other side of that dense state? Does thing-like being truly melt away? That is, we might wonder if there is a different sort of being on the other side of that initial point of our universe, that point of extremely high-density.

The possibility of a different sort of being underlying the thing-like being of our universe raises a faint hope of letting us at least talk about the problem of abstract mathematics without falling into one form or another of dualism.

3. Modern physics defines space and time in terms of relationships to thing-like being, things and fields and some strange entities underlying them.

Do time and space as we know them exist on the other side of that initial time of our universe? I'm assuming here it was an initial point and not just an oscillation point where a previous, similar universe had collapsed. I'm also assuming our universe isn't just a fluctuation bubbling out of a quantum vacuum. So far as I can tell, a prior quantum vacuum would arise only in a state of thing-like being essentially the same as that of this universe.

Unlike thinkers like Kant who absolutized the nature of things in this universe, this phase of Creation as I would say, we've denied that the nature of things in this universe tells us what the underlying nature of things truly is. Not surprisingly, at least not to me, we've been led to speculate very tentatively that stuff that is not thing-like underlies thing-like being. That underlying stuff also, speculatively, doesn't have time-like or space-like aspects. But it would have to have aspects which would allow it to be shaped into this thing-like universe and to provide the stuff to make the things of this universe.

4. Having speculatively stripped thing-like being of many of the properties we associate with substantial being in general, I add in the claim of St. Thomas: "Things are true".

To a Christian, this should be almost trivially true because of the belief in a Creator God. If God creates from nothing, then the things He creates must be true because they're manifestations of some of His thoughts.

5. At this point, I'll return again to mathematics to point out that the line of thought which runs through Cantor and Gödel and Church and Tarski and Turing, arrived at an alien station in the mid-1960s when the great Russian mathematician Kolmogorov and an American high-school student named Gregory Chaitin speculated independently that randomness is a matter of coding efficiency. Most people seem to think that randomness is some sort of mystical and irrational concept.

By 1990 or so, Chaitin's work had culminated in a proof that all numbers are random. This is to say that a random number is an infinite stream which has no patterns at all which would allow it to be described in fewer characters than a straightforward listing of the number itself. Numbers which are clearly not random include integers and such numbers as  $0.3333\dots$  or  $1/3$ . These numbers have a measure which is 0 relative to the measure of random numbers. You can see [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Measure\\_theory](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Measure_theory) for a discussion good enough to understand what I said. Or you can just use this definition taken from that article:

**Measure theory** [A] measure on a set is a systematic way to assign to each suitable subset a number, intuitively interpreted as the size of the subset. In this sense, a measure is a generalization of the concepts of length, area, volume.

See Dr. Chaitin's homepage [20] to download a number of shorter papers and to obtain references to his books.

Randomness is factuality, as was pointed out by Professor Mark Kac of Cornell in the early 1970s based on the early work of Chaitin and Kolmogorov.

6. Now I ask: Is it possible that "Truths are thing-like?"

Now we're in a fine mess from having taken modern physics and ancient theology seriously. That is, we've taken the narrative of the so-called Big Bang model in reverse to find that, supported by particle physics, nature

herself has little respect for the opinions of man: some of the properties which many traditional metaphysicians have assumed as necessary seem to be quite contingent. They're add-ons to some sort of being which is very abstract and strange from the human viewpoint.

When we follow the narrative of the universe in reverse, when we see it melting down into a seemingly more homogeneous stuff than we could directly imagine, can we possibly say that we are seeing hints of the truths from which this universe was shaped? That is, did God create first some very strange and abstract stuff which is the manifestation of the truths we know and perhaps many others? For example, is gravity a particularized form of a metaphysical principle of unity which holds together those truths in the Primordial Universe and holds together matter and energy and fields in this particularized universe?

This extension of the Thomistic claim that "Things are true" is a very dangerous and potentially fruitful analogy which results in a rather direct claim that this analogy is literally true, that is, that abstract and concrete being are different forms of the same created being. In my book, and a few entries, I've already begun to use the techniques of negative theology to try to bring this analogy under control, but I like the idea because it brings all that is creaturely in any sense inside of God's Creation and leaves the Almighty, He who is His Own Act-of-being, free to be God. Unlike the Leibnizean God, one who's sneaked into Christian thought, the God of Jesus Christ isn't restricted to some humanly accessible set of absolute truths. This theological issue has great implications for mathematics and science, whichever way it's settled.

Should we strip away some of our common-sense assumptions to reach a better understanding of the 'stuff' which is the foundation of our universe? We have guidelines from physics which point towards more general forms of physical being, lacking many thing-like properties and perhaps not having time-like or space-like aspects. Maybe we should be as brave as the negative theologians of Christian history and dare to reason towards more fundamental forms of being? To be quite honest, my Christian beliefs guided me, especially in my willingness to conjecture that truths are thing-like. There are some deep theological and metaphysical possibilities to this line of thought but I'll not talk about those here.

This entire line of reasoning was displayed in my book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41] but obscured in some sense by my decision to use a discursive presentation and to repeat some key ideas in slightly different

forms. The bottom-line in my worldview is:

God created a Primordial Universe which is a manifestation of abstract truths, mathematical and logical and metaphysical. From this very abstract stuff, He shaped this universe which is a world when viewed in light of His purposes. That is, the moral order which only God can truly see is what makes this universe into a coherent narrative or a world.

The bottom-line on the 'techniques' used to develop this worldview is:

There is a complex weaving back and forth between fields of knowledge irrationally separated over the past five or six centuries. Those complex movements are coordinated by the traditional Catholic techniques of thought: analogy is disciplined by negations of undesirable aspects of the analogies which show up as the thought proceeds.

This is a more literary style of reasoning and is in conflicts with the most fundamental attitudes of modern liberal society which would bureaucratize all of Creation and would restrict all efforts to understand Creation to those which can be stated clearly in textbooks. The very stars themselves should obey the various bylaws and regulations of those who've been rendered incapable of the humbling wonder which should remind us of what Aquinas claimed centuries ago, that is, the human mind is, in principle, capable of comprehending all of this universe but any actual human mind is, in fact, incapable of comprehending so much as a flea.



# 160 Randomness as a Sign of God's Presence

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=99>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/09/22.]

One of the most important, if little noticed, intellectual events of modern times is the development of a rational understanding of randomness. Based on that rational understanding, I made the claim in my first published book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], that only God could make a truly random number and only God could act in a truly random way. I'll try to discuss the reasons for these two tightly related claims and I'll try to make the discussion accessible to a larger body of readers.

Let me give a crash course on the new view of randomness which started to develop in the 1960s. In the middle of that decade, a prominent Russian mathematician, A. N. Kolmogorov, and an American high school student, Gregory Chaitin, both had the idea that randomness was more a matter of algorithmic complexity than of some sort of magic. To cut to the chase, a random number is one which has no patterns which allow it to be described more briefly than simply listing the digits. To be perfectly random, the number can have no patterns at all. It must have algorithmic complexity that is absolutely infinite.

Much of Chaitin's work deals with degrees of randomness more than with perfect randomness because we can't produce a random number. Nor do we have the slightest reason to believe that nature can produce a random number or any movement or change that corresponds to pure randomness—unless God interjects that randomness. Yet, Chaitin's major result in many ways was a surprisingly simple proof—by the standards of modern mathematics—that every number is random. No number has

a pattern. This doesn't mean that 1.22222... or 1.25 are random. Those numbers and any individual number, random or non-random, represents a vanishingly small point on the number line. It turns out that all numbers with patterns, all the numbers of our elegant and well-ordered mathematics, add up to a vanishingly small length on the number line. There are so many random numbers that the infinities of numbers with some patterns are overwhelmed. In the sense of what is called 'measure theory', there are essentially no numbers with patterns in comparison with true random numbers.

What does this mean? As the mathematician Marc Kac (pronounced 'cats') said in the early 1970s when the ideas of Chaitin and Kolmogorov were becoming known:

Now we know what a random number is. It's a fact.

I quote from memory.

In any case, this is the basic insight lying behind my claim that God created the truths of Creation, the truths from which our physical universe is shaped. The number line is a set of facts rather than a construction as Pythagoras and his successors have thought. Elegance in the Pythagorean sense, order in the sense of the theorist of Intelligent design plays no part in rational mathematics. Neither does randomness in the mystical sense of a typical Darwinist philosopher,

But elegant mathematics can arise from this pure factuality. In *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], I compared this is the rising of islands of order from an absolutely infinite sea of chaos. Moreover, though I've not always been consistent, I've tended to at least imply that God created those facts as well, but I've also denied that God the Creator, He who is His own Act-of-being, works in a manner truly like that of a human workman.

Only God exists necessarily and He is a pure act of existence. Mathematics and other truths of Creation are the sorts of truths that have to do with substantial being. They would be irrelevant, though perhaps interesting in some sense, to an entity of pure existence. God created them as a side-effect of sorts of His free-will decision to love Creation. His decision to love Creation was the same as His act of creating Creation. To anticipate myself a little, this act was the only one we can know for sure to have been purely random. We should also remember that even the absolute truths revealed to us, those which deal with the necessary being of God and not with

His free-will acts as Creator, have to be conceived and expressed in creaturely terms. We see the true God through our incomplete and sometimes distorted view of God as Creator and shaper of this universe.

Once God created the basic factual truths of Creation, He could begin to shape it and raise islands of order out of that ocean. As part of those activities, He had created the number line and could move on to shape a universe in ways that raised those islands of order that we call Euclidean geometry, algebra, tensor calculus, and logic among many other more concrete laws of substantial being. As part of His acts of shaping this universe, He shaped time and space out of more abstract possibilities. We can imaginatively journey out on those oceans but we really couldn't live there. In fact, I don't think that sort of non-thing being could even register on our senses or our minds, though by the imaginative efforts of a disciplined mind, that non-thing being and even non-substantial forms of being can be thought about in a rational but indirect way.

Let's flip things inside out, to look at matters from inside this universe rather than speaking of truths in the greater Creation. Let's think in terms of constructing a random number, or executing a random act, inside this universe. To construct a single random number would require an absolutely infinite amount of computer power because each individual digit in the number would have to be checked against its neighbors to assure there are no runs which allow a shortening of the description of that number. Then neighboring groups would have to be checked against all other groups for the same purpose. All sizes of groups would have to be checked against all other groups. Then the differences between neighboring numbers would have to be checked because patterns in differences would allow a shortening of the description of that number. It gets more complicated from here. What's amazing is that Dr. Chaitin proved that all numbers, in a mathematical sense, pass these unimaginably demanding tests for randomness.

There's a simple summary of the situation:

Only God can make a truly random number.

And again:

Only God can act in a truly random way.



# 161 Keeping the Ultimate Goal in Mind

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=175>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/08/12.]

There's little new in this entry but I'm trying to restate some of my basic ideas in as simple and clear a form as possible as I move towards an enlargement—God willing—of my understanding of this world, this phase of Creation.

Sometimes I'll mention that I'm trying to show that Christian revelation and modern empirical knowledge can be reconciled in one worldview. While this is true, it's only a major sub-goal. My greater goal is:

To establish the primary importance of God's acts-of-being, that is —acts of bringing into existence. These acts of creation, necessary to the continued existence of contingent being are of primary importance relative to everything else, including all aspects of substantial being and also formal truths and the associated acts of reasoning. In my enlarged existentialism, even formal truths are the result of acts-of-being possible only to God.

This doesn't mean that I undervalue substance, but I do see substance as being secondary to what brings it to be: acts-of-being possible only to our Creator. Another way to put matters is: creaturely substance and particular entities made of substance are objects of God's love.

The existentialist insight has been obscured at the expense of some adolescent angst which allegedly lies at the heart of that insight. Both

Kierkegaard, from a somewhat liberalized and modernized Lutheran standpoint, and Sartre, from an atheistic standpoint, did produce angst-filled writings to be sure. This is passingly strange since neither man failed to enjoy the goodness of God's Creation. Sartre was certainly far more disordered than Kierkegaard but that seemingly dour Dane wasted a personal fortune in an impressively short time, even providing a sinfully extravagant birthday party for a young female relative. Before leaving this subject, I'll note that I read Sartre's *Nausea*, his greatest work of art even if it was what some claimed—a fragment of a great novel. In any case, I came away with the impression that Sartre was upset with the world just because of his existentialist insight. If Sartre could have accepted the more traditional belief in substance as being self-sustaining or even eternal, he would have been more intellectually accepting of the world he so enjoyed in sometimes very sinful ways. It was Sartre's understanding of some 'monstrous' act of creation, no—ongoing acts of creation, that made him understand so clearly that being was outside of his control. Substance was being created but not by any process under the control of Sartre. Yet, the Thomistic historian and philosopher, Etienne Gilson, made the claim that the atheistic Sartre was a better existentialist thinker than the devoutly Christian Kierkegaard, just because Gilson saw Sartre as having a better understanding of substance.

The existential act, the act-of-being, is primary but we'd never know a thing about it if it were not for the substance of our eyes and ears and brain. We'd never be if not for that substance nor would we know truth if not for the manifested truths from which the stuff of our world is shaped. Created being, abstract and concrete, has to be studied, but that's a complicated issue which I've discussed in many prior postings. Moreover, it's the sort of explanation best done by actually producing analyses drawing upon the specific sciences such as physics and mathematics and biology. Hard work of exploring empirical reality precedes the hard work of contemplation and philosophical analysis. That first level of hard work is necessary because higher truths manifested in Creation can be seen only through the substance and specific things which are shaped from those manifested truths which I call the 'Primordial Universe'.

I'm far from satisfied with the above discussion of my goal, but I'm perhaps edging closer to understanding what I'm up to. The process of understanding is itself the understanding, that is, it's a reshaping of my mind and my language. This is to say that I'm edging closer to an understanding of the general direction in which I'm headed, though I'll probably never

pass beyond an understanding more exact than the proverbial “generally westward.” I think I live too early in this process of building the foundations for the next phase of human civilization.



## 162 What Do I Mean When I Say, “God Creates Truths”?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=176>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/08/20.]

In two earlier entries, Chapter 7, *God as the Creator of Truths*, and Chapter 71, *What is Mathematics?*, I argued that God creates truths, though not in the sense that He could have created contradictions or the ‘truth’ of  $1 + 1 = 3$ . My claim is that the fundamental stuff of Creation is what I call the Primordial Universe, the manifestation of the truths God chose for Creation. It is the Primordial Universe which the Almighty brought into existence from nothing and other phases of Creation, including particular and thing-like phases, are shaped from that Primordial Universe.

My goal is to develop a rational and consistent way of speaking about human nature, and the formation of the human mind, while recognizing that we are part of a particular universe which is part of a greater Creation. The human mind is not a ‘knower of truths’ as in most traditional philosophies but rather an entity shaped to deal first with practical needs of human life and then—perhaps—to deal with the desire some of us have to understand what lies around us. In my way of looking at things, to understand is to shape our minds in response to our environments, then to our universe if we can imagine such into existence. A still greater leap of imagination will open the possibility of shaping our minds to Creation in a larger sense.

It’s a mistake to believe human beings are born with minds, mental parts which come into existence automatically with our bodies. It’s also a mistake to think of knowledge, even knowledge of the most absolute of truths, as coming from any sort of realm outside of creaturely being. How could we really grab such knowledge or even receive it if it were somehow

streaming into Creation?

We're creatures with a certain type of being, though physics and mathematics indicate that our being has aspects that are only hinted at when we try to deal with quantum mechanics or transfinite set theory. We know that our being, and that of every creature in our universe and certainly the universe itself as an entity, has aspects which are quite strange and even abstract just because human beings have been struggling to shape their minds to deal with the being of quarks and stars and a spacetime seemingly shaped in ways describable by Riemannian geometry. In speaking of these matters, I mean to direct our thought in this context towards some abstract and conceptually difficult aspects of being that indicate our universe is part of a much greater Creation.

So this provides another way of looking at my claim that God is a Creator of truths. If the human mind is shaped by responses to its environments and its universe and its Creation, then any truths we can know are manifested in Creation. If we can respond to truths barely detected that we might begin to understand them, this must be a similar process to responding to the smiles and baby-talk of our mothers. The truths we can know are to be found in Creation. This is true of God's revelations as well. Having created us as physical creatures which build minds upon the substance of physical brains, the Almighty Himself reaches us through His effects in Creation.

The concrete things of this world, say quarks, are manifested in creation and we can respond to them or to different factual possibilities they imply. Abstract truths, such as those of group theory, are also manifested and we can respond to them or to different abstract possibilities they imply. That abstract truths are more difficult to see isn't a problem as such, at least no more a problem than Fred Astaire faced in learning how to move with such grace. After all it seems at first glance that there are concrete things, such as planets or comets or DNA, which are more difficult to understand than water in its simple attributes.

Water can only be better understood as we learn more of chemistry and quantum mechanics and the allied mathematical fields.

Concrete being comes from abstract being which remains intertwined with concrete being. Our understanding of the concrete and the abstract must advance in tandem or else we'll generate imbalanced or even false understandings.

So it is that I claim that it's proper to speak of God creating truths.

On the whole, it's perhaps better to say that God brings actual truths into being from nothing in that fundamental phase of Creation I call the Primordial Universe and He creates concrete being, such as this universe or the universe of the resurrected, by shaping it from the manifested truths of the Primordial Universe.

As a final point, I don't mean to deny the value of literature and history and biology in shaping a proper human mind. Nor do I mean to deny poets and novelists, spiritual leaders and political leaders, their importance in the human task of understanding God's Creation. In fact, the history of philosophy would indicate that much of my thought could be found in some pre-metaphysical form not only in modern science but also in the unmined treasures of Western Civilization—has anyone ever dealt adequately with Melville's struggle with the nature of created being in *Moby Dick*? I was obsessed with that book during the years immediately preceding my journey into metaphysical oceans. I only started to read philosophical works seriously after I'd begun that journey.



# 163 Not Monism and Not Dualism but Unity of Creation

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=285>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/11/04.]

In a number of writings, I deny the monism of matter and that of spirit or thought. I also deny the dualism of body/soul, brain/mind, etc. Yet, I use the terms 'soul' and 'mind' on a regular basis. What gives?

I think of being as richer than 'mere' matter, yet, I see no reason to speak of other substances being 'present' to us, such as 'mind-stuff' or 'soul-stuff'. Mind and soul exist but not as many would think. There are at least two ways to approach a proper way to think of such aspects of being.

1. Mind and soul describe relationships in which substance can participate.
2. Mind and soul refer to higher or more abstract levels of created being, levels closer to the manifested truths from which this universe is shaped: the Primordial Universe.

I think the second way of speaking will be more fruitful though I'm not sure that the two ways of speaking are truly separate. Still, the second way allows a richness of discourse which invites an acceptance of the ultimate unity of all Creation, not just this particular universe and not even just this particular universe and the abstract truths which play a direct role in it, but also all other 'universes' which God might have shaped from the Primordial Universe.

My language will upset some but I take 'universe' to be a phase of Creation which is self-contained in a meaningful sense I won't explore here.

There are some problems with this, or any, definition of ‘universe’ including the problem that physical cosmology tells us that there can be vast regions of this universe which we can’t observe, though parts of those regions come into observational ‘range’ each second. There is also the strange possibility that some parts of this universe might not have ever been in causal contact, though my personal prejudice is to discount that possibility.

More importantly, all of Creation is united in a very fundamental sense because the Primordial Universe, the first ‘creature’ so to speak, is the source of all created being. The more abstract levels of reality are closer to that Primordial Universe.

The richness of created being is due not to multiplicity but rather to depth.

Creatures, including human beings, are not ‘only’ their bodies but also those abstract truths about being which have been discovered about the stuff of our bodies by Maxwell and Planck and Dirac and Godel. We are, so to speak, made up of theorems from differential geometry and Dirac delta-functions as much as we’re made up of protons and electrons. In fact, those abstract truths are our current best understanding of more abstract levels of created being. Protons and electrons are more immediate levels of that same created being.

## 164 Some Problems with Substance/Form Dualism

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=301>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/11/11.]

This entry is a supplement to Chapter 163, *Not Monism and Not Dualism but Unity of Creation*.

One form of dualism is strongly supported by Aristotle: the idea that things come into being when form is impressed upon substance. What's wrong about this, and perhaps the real error underlying all dualisms, is the idea that stuff is out there in a thoroughly disorganized form and has to have order imposed upon it. This is perhaps one reason that many advocates of moral order are leery or even downright afraid of chaos and of evolutionary processes. They need to ask, "If form, order, isn't already impressed upon substance, then when and how will it be so impressed?"

So it is that many believe that man must be specifically ensouled, perhaps at conception in the view of some modern thinkers or at quickening in the view of some Medieval thinkers. So it is that it seems impossible an evolutionary process could seek any sort of true order by unpredictable routes. Note that rational (such as Pope Benedict) and irrational religious believers (such as the intelligent design theorists) agree on this. Those who don't seem to believe in the reality of order, including ideological Darwinists, agree as well. This is to say they agree that true order, certainly moral order, can't develop by processes not controlled in the way of a modern factory.

As for me, I think order can arise in this universe by bottom up development. After all, I claim that the stuff which is subject to evolutionary developments has been shaped from abstract truths which are ultimately

the truths God chose to manifest as the raw stuff of this very particular Creation.

Relationships are primary in Creation and bring substance into being as if abstractions could coalesce into concrete form by the focusing power of a relationship. Again, the language is clumsy, but the idea is similar to ideas found in some philosophical interpretations of quantum mechanics. Rationality in this universe is the explicit realization in mental form of some significant set of the relationships which shape the space-time structures and the matter-energy structures of this universe. A broader statement involving all of Creation is indicated when we speak of the human mind, but I'm content to speak of this universe in this context. In any case, we can draw from ourselves and the stuff and things around us no more than God used as His raw material in shaping this universe. We can never draw out as much manifested truth as God used. We struggle to draw out each bucketful from an ocean that seems infinite to us, but the principle remains clear: the human mind is the sort of entity which can encapsulate the world and perhaps all of Creation.

I'll turn to the concrete moral problems of those who feel themselves to be of a different sex than their bodies, soma and genes. There's an article, *Study In Transsexuals: Significant Genetic Link To Gender Identity* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/10/081030111005.htm>, which has been bothering me in the sense that I wasn't sure what to do with it, but it provides a somewhat extreme and controversial way to comment upon the general issue of this blog entry. First, I'll provide a short quote:

In the largest ever genetic study of male to female transsexuals Australian researchers have found a significant genetic link between gender identity and a gene involved in testosterone action.

We must always remember that even large and tightly peer-reviewed studies of genetic relationships to traits or behaviors have sometimes proven to be non-repeatable, but I'll take this study at face value because it's merely a, so to speak, sexier version of similar problems raised by genetic links to juvenile delinquency, to alcoholism or drug-addiction, and so forth. Remarkably, this study found a simple genetic link for what I would have suspected to be a complex condition. At the same time, I'm not surprised

that there's a genetic link. In fact, since I began to understand modern empirical knowledge in the context of Thomistic existentialism—including Thomistic theories of moral nature, I've believed there to be some less than fully determined but perhaps strong dependency of our moral natures upon genes, but genes in interaction with our bodily substance and also in interaction with our environments.

Developmental processes can be very effective in this universe but don't produce perfect results and sometimes produce some painfully botched results. This is true of the development, or evolution, of genetic lines over millions of years and is also true of the development of a particular individual. By using the word 'botched', I don't mean to morally condemn those tortured by the feelings and thoughts of having a body of one sex but the 'identity' of the other sex, nor do I mean to dismiss or relativize the wrongness of those who encourage or accept a mutilation of a human body, the temple of God. I do mean to point to the possibility, the likelihood in my opinion, that we don't understand what moral order really is. Nor do we have a clear idea of what human nature is, in its moral or other aspects, and we merely head towards a serious crisis of confidence by pretending we do and by speaking to our children and our neighbors as if we were ensouled in such a way that we were specific persons, male or female, from the instant of conception. It's nonsense for us traditionalists to claim we understand human nature when our understanding can be in serious contradiction to empirical facts. This doesn't mean that traditional moral conclusions are wrong. Science and mathematics are filled with examples of past generations which reached substantially correct conclusions on the basis of wrong or radically incomplete facts or tools of analysis.

Human moral nature is not a given form which is impressed upon the stuff of the human body, just as soul is not a given form which is impressed upon a fertilized egg-cell. Soul is a more general term for the form of a living creature, and it's a form which—at least to mortal view—develops rather than being fully determined at conception or at birth or even at the end of adolescence.

Form in this universe has more the nature of growth processes.  
In the case of living creatures, we can say: Form, soul or moral nature, is an organic growth process.

Though our sexual identity seems so fundamental to our more complete

self-identity, it's actually a matter of development and proper development is dependent upon a certain degree of correctness in the stuff of the body, in events in the womb, and in the developmental processes which occur in the human creature itself.

We're not born who we are. We become who we are and that process of becoming who we are can be disrupted in a variety of ways, sometimes as a result of our own actions or thoughts and sometimes as a result of factors beyond our control.

This is all very disturbing, not because of fears of a meltdown of moral order. The truth is that Creation is more a story in which the very landscape is forming and is not just a predetermined entity. Nor is Creation filled with other predetermined entities, which then simply act according to some nature impressed upon their physical stuff when they were conceived or otherwise created. Form is yet forming, even when it comes to such a basic question as: Who am I?

Moral order is present in God's world just as much as other abstract truths. We don't see all those truths, mathematical or moral, but the body of humanly perceived truths has tended to grow despite the convictions of those who feel human nature and the nature of this 'fallen' world isn't changing. The world is 'fallen' in the sense that it's filled with sin, with sinful creatures, but we Christians and other traditionalists have only mainstream stories which explain this sinfulness in ways that are in contradiction with modern empirical knowledge. We have a handful of raw facts and probably correct conclusions and no narrative to actually make sense of our existence or the way of the world.

Modern science should have taught us of the ultimate unity of what we call form and substance though in my way of viewing Creation, form comes first and God shaped concrete substance from manifested truths which remain present in matter and energy, in the structure of space-time, and in the particular narrative structure which is the story God is telling which we can know as a world. We explore the nature of matter and energy by way of mathematics which is very abstract and places great demands upon those who would participate in this exploration. We explore human evolution by gathering facts and then trying to make a story of all those bones and arrowheads and also telling a story about the development of

moral nature in non-human animals many millions of years before the first humanoids rose to a bipedal form.

For both the raw stuff of Creation and also for human beings, form and substance are but two aspects of a created being which is a unity and not anything like form impressed upon substance, nor is there anything like soul impressed upon the stuff of the human body.



# 165 Ways of Speaking and True Being

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=321>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/11/22.]

Wikipedia tells us that *metaphor* (see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metaphor>) is:

language that directly compares seemingly unrelated subjects. In the simplest case, this takes the form: “The [first subject] is a [second subject].” More generally, a metaphor is a rhetorical trope that describes a first subject as being or equal to a second object in some way. Thus, the first subject can be economically described because implicit and explicit attributes from the second subject are used to enhance the description of the first. This device is known for usage in literature, especially in poetry, where with few words, emotions and associations from one context are associated with objects and entities in a different context.

We should note that metaphor seems to operate at a phenomenological basis. We remain on a surface populated by thing-like being and relate one thing to another—to speak a little simplistically.

Wikipedia also tells us that *analogy* (see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Analogy>) is:

both the cognitive process of transferring information from a particular subject (the analogue or source) to another particular subject (the target), and a linguistic expression corresponding to

such a process. In a narrower sense, analogy is an inference or an argument from one particular to another particular, as opposed to deduction, induction, and abduction, where at least one of the premises or the conclusion is general. The word analogy can also refer to the relation between the source and the target themselves, which is often, though not necessarily, a similarity, as in the biological notion of analogy.

Analogy seems to hint a little more about penetrating to deeper layers of being. That is, it seems to allow us to think in terms of being which isn't immutable, a rock is a rock is a rock, but rather shaped from a rawer or more abstract stuff that could be something other than a rock and becomes a rock only by a process of development.

Our literary ways of speaking don't penetrate to that abstractness from which thing-like being is shaped in my way of updating Thomistic existentialism to account for modern empirical knowledge. They abstract by ways of generalizing across thing-like being, a good and necessary activity in the human struggle to understand our world and what may lay behind or under or over it but that's only a baby-step. I repeat: they don't penetrate to more abstract levels of being. As I implied, some thinkers have managed to use analogy to penetrate to more abstract levels of being, that is, levels of being shared across thing-hood. St. Thomas Aquinas, a master of analogy, is a clear example but so is the novelist Hermann Melville. But they had limited tools and limited knowledge to tell them how to do this.

Are we now in a better situation? I think so. Modern physics and modern mathematics have begun to teach us how to generalize in such a way as to reach more deeply into being rather than just looking for patterns on the level of perceivable phenomena. A particularly clear example is the work of Einstein which—somewhat to his surprise – reached to a level of abstraction at which matter and energy are made of the same stuff, an abstract level that was shown quite sadly at Hiroshima and Nagasaki to be reachable by concrete levels of technology. Still more surprisingly, general relativity reached an abstract level at which we can suddenly see that space and time are intertwined into one geometric structure. We still don't know the 'shape' of that structure, it it's 'flat' or 'curved inward' or 'curved outward'. Quantum theory and particle physics have told us far more about matter and energy and fields, probably even space-time, melting into more abstract and strange forms of being under certain conditions, such as the

high energy or, equivalently, the high density of the universe in the very early fractions of a second of its current expansionary phase.

In the more traditional ways of analyzing being, soul and body are side-by-side. In my view, it's legitimate to speak of soul but as more abstract aspects of that living entity which is embodied in front of us. It's not clear to me how to describe those abstract aspects in more accurate terms but I strongly suspect that we would do well to meditate upon the success of modern physicists in using very abstract mathematics to describe matter, energy, and even space-time. A while back, I spoke of this issue in Chapter 569, *Abstract Mathematics and the Real Presence of Jesus Christ*.

God is present in all levels and aspects of His Creation but the 'unseen God' can be more clearly unseen in the more abstract levels of that Creation. So to speak.

Another way to speak towards the greater possibilities I can vaguely see is to speak in terms of what I called the Primordial Universe, the manifestation of the truths God chose for Creation, the truths from which He shaped this world and will shape the world of the resurrected. I've spoken of the Primordial Universe as an absolutely infinite ocean, a seething ocean of seeming chaos, of randomness. Think of a random number as a fact. Think also of random events as facts.

Islands of organized being rise out of that seething ocean of pure created being, of manifested truths. Islands of things made of what we know as matter and moved about by energy. And then there are fields. So long as we move about only on the surfaces of those islands or view only the surface of that ocean, we remain in the realm of appearances. We don't account for modern science and what it has discovered of what lies underneath thing-like being. And nearly all metaphors and analogies work in that realm of phenomena, relating island to another island, palm tree to brush, land to ocean. They work horizontally. That was appropriate when the stuff from which things are made was seen as permanent in its nature. Even Christians who believed in a Creation from nothing and an end-of-times still thought of the stuff of water and rocks existing in that stable form from beginning to end. Water and rocks were immutable substances and not the results of developmental processes. It took an act of God to bring the stuff of things into existence or to destroy them to nothingness and God, of course, created water and rocks directly.

But I see all created being as the results of Thomistic acts-of-being and thus the creation of the stuff of things and the collapse of that same stuff

into nothingness is happening at each and every instant of time in all of Creation—or at least in phases of Creation where time as we know it exists. Things in this world, in this phase of God's Creation, and the stuff of which those things are made do have their horizontal relationships, but there is a fundamental 'vertical-ness' which goes right back to the most 'raw' stuff of Creation—the manifestation of the truths which God chose for Creation. I call that manifestation the 'Primordial Universe'.

Modern physics and mathematics force a movement of the sort I'm describing—towards abstraction. Neuroscience and other fields are experimenting with various ways of moving more deeply into being. In any case, my current interest is in that sort of a physics-like movement towards abstraction for the understanding of fundamental aspects of being which are of direct importance to the understanding in turn of human nature and especially of the human mind. For example, we need a better understanding of causation before we can understand moral freedom. What we don't need is an abstraction from concrete being but rather an abstraction which explores certain aspects of concrete being, such as the soul-like and mind-like aspects of a human being. In other words, an understanding of the possibilities of moral freedom isn't to be found in the phenomenological events that are the chemical events of our nervous systems. Those possibilities lie in the chain of relationships which tie the physical human being to the fundamental or abstract levels of created being. At the same time, we must realize we won't be able to deal with those relationships or even realize what they are unless we have good understandings of those chemical events in the human nervous system.

We should bear in mind that these more abstract aspects of being and of human being, though inherent in some sense, do not reach any maturity by necessary events. They develop in an organic way just as our brains and skeletal muscles do, a way that might not start at all and—if started—can go awry in various ways. Yet, it's remarkable that so many paths of development, such as that of St. Francis of Assisi or that of Albert Einstein, can result in a human being with mature 'abstract' aspects, soul-like or mind-like or whatever.

# 166 Social and Moral Truths Unfold

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=594>. It was finished and uploaded on 2009/09/12.]

Truth unfolds in time through communal processes.

I've realized there is possibly a very clear example of what this means in an area where I've perhaps misspoken a little. Maybe I've simply been in error. In any case, I'm also willing to claim that new truths might emerge in time through various processes, new truths not emerging from some mystical source but rather emerging as a result of the decisions God makes as He tells this story I call a world—the universe seen in light of God's purposes or, equivalently, in light of moral order.

The issue I'll consider now is human rights. See *Natural and Inalienable Rights* [47] for my position on this issue as of 2006. I've never felt good about denying we have some sort of absolute rights in this mortal life, though I've never been comfortable with those who treat those rights as if they were absolute in the sense of a metaphysical truth such as the law of non-contradiction. It would be nice in some sense to argue that we have all those supposedly inalienable rights declared by Jefferson (though the original Lockean trio of life, liberty, and property makes more sense).

In that earlier article, *Natural and Inalienable Rights* [47], I also spoke in somewhat apocalyptic terms. When the Son of God took on a human nature, being born as Jesus of Nazareth, we were adopted as His brethren, gaining some of His divine privileges, though men and their institutions remain what they are and don't have all that much respect for these privileges. Of course, this refusal of many to recognize the rights of others,

or better—their duties to others, isn't an argument against human rights of the Lockean sort any more than large-scale, modern disobedience of the Fifth Commandment is an argument against that prohibition of murder.

So, we go from apish men with inborn moral behaviors and attitudes to mannish apes with some awareness of themselves as...?

When and how do we become creatures with some sort of inalienable rights appropriate for the sort of morally responsible and self-aware creatures that few seem to be? Is there some magical moment when the human brain or perhaps human social relationships reached some threshold level of complexity? As a Christian, I'd certainly advocate the idea that something was sealed when the Son of God became man and adopted us as His brethren. In fact, I'd suggested that was the only solid basis for this inalienable rights business in my article, *Natural and Inalienable Rights* [47], and perhaps in other places. I now consider the divine privileges that Jesus Christ gave us when He adopted us as His brethren to be separate from human rights as defined by modern thinkers. Those human rights seem to involve empirical matters and can be discussed in the same way that formal political relationships have been discussed by Aristotle and Hobbes and others.

If human rights exist, they're something that first appeared at a perhaps vague or even "smeared-out" time during the evolution of the human species and the development of civilization. It's hard for creatures who live for such a small span of years to truly imagine new entities or even truly new aspects of existing entities arising in Creation, but we can at least move in the direction of imagining, for example, living cells arising out of a chemical soup or creatures with true abstract reasoning talents arising from clever apes. We can try to find a way to talk intelligently about the coming of new things or new aspects of thing-like beings. I view Creation as being made of stuff created, in a manner of speaking, before the so-called Big Bang (try to think in ontological or even logical terms rather than strict chronological terms) and I also view a world of things and thing-like beings which develop in the way of a story. God is telling a story in which He, with the help of creatures enjoying or suffering from a certain freedom, can move in unexpected ways or even bring into existence some truly new and creative possibility.

While officially accepting the evidence that man has evolved from a more primitive apish creature, most modern Christians have tended to prefer the pagan myth of a Golden Age which has decayed into the current Fallen

Age and they have also preferred to think as if the Creator has the same relationship with His Creation as would a pagan God or gods who use great power against recalcitrant matter which maybe has existed eternally along with them (and is maybe the same as those divine beings or divine Being). St. Thomas Aquinas taught an existentialist view of God—He is His own Act-of-being, the Supreme Act-of-being—but few have yet joined the effort to purge our Christian minds of the view of God as some sort of super-creature, acting upon matter as if literally a potter working clay. God is transcendent, for sure, but He is Creator and not Olympian King of the Gods. By creating, from nothing and in the way of a shaper and storyteller, God works more from inside. I've tended recently to speak of being in terms of levels, where thing-like being is a very particularized being which is shaped from more general forms of being. In this way of thinking, God works from the deepest and most abstract levels where He manifests truths out to the particular and thing-like levels of being such as our universe.

The very fact that human beings at some time could claim to have inalienable rights might well tell us that the claim has some validity, but what's of immediate interest is this idea, new to me, that something like inalienable rights could arise in history. Then again, how could it be otherwise? We can't posit our apish ancestors to have always had rights. Inalienable rights would be like the opposable thumb in that they appeared as the result of evolutionary development.

This seems a bit strange, but I've been struggling hard for nearly 20 years to reshape my mind to correspond to reality and I've perhaps had to deal with stranger and more radical ideas than this:

Can it be true that a human being of higher moral awareness and self-awareness might have those inalienable rights though a human creature from the Old Stone Age didn't have any such rights. After all, the two be almost genetically twins?

Let's see if we can apply a particular and plausible meaning to the allegory of Adam and Eve:

Did all human beings gain a supra-animal status when Buddha and Jeremiah and Socrates had first walked the earth?

Physicists like to explore extreme conditions of high-energy (or equivalently—high density) because they'd like to discover 'new physics'.

As they view matters, the universe is a boring place, frozen into a certain condition soon after the expansion had begun from an extremely dense state. A different realm of thing-like being had come into shape and it was very cool and stable and a story could begin, a story of galaxies and even huge clusters of galaxies coming to be from small concentrations in a remarkably homogeneous observable universe, a story of first generation stars which burned fast and exploded to produce waste products such as oxygen and iron and magnesium, a story of organic chemicals coming to exist in many regions and of life coming to exist on at least one planet made of many of those waste products of first-generation stars.

We live in that world of apparently stable physics—though we certainly don't have anything like a complete understanding of that physics. We have a tendency to see this world of rocks and flesh and blood as being “the way it has to be.” Over the period of years allotted to individual men or even to tightly bound generations of men, the world certainly seems pretty stable in some fundamental ways. Nothing new appears under the sun—during the periods of time easily handled by the human mind and imagination. Men are what they are, rocks are what they are, and ocean and sky are pretty much eternal.

In fact, things—including living creatures—have stories. They develop over time. The more thing-like, the more empirical, the entity or its aspects, the more we can assume it to be the result of a story. A story also introduces the possibility of new entities or new aspects of old entities appearing, perhaps as a result of new relationships between an old environment and an existing line of creatures or new relationships between existing entities when changes (such as the growth of technology and the consequent growth and interconnection of human communities) raise new possibilities.

God didn't create this universe all at once at the “time” of the so-called Big Bang. He still has the freedom to introduce new things under the sun. Moreover, we can participate in this ongoing creation, helping to raise at least the possibility of a better world.

# 167 Not Probabilistic Smudges but Relationships

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1000>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/09/01.]

In James Gleick's biography of Richard Feynman, *Genius*, he refers to an early theory developed by Feynman and John Wheeler as "a classical theory, not a quantum one. It treated objects as objects, not as probabilistic smudges."

Mr. Gleick is speaking in terms of concepts of mainstream thinkers in physics and I'm not criticizing him, but I'd suggest that it's better to regard objects not as objects and also not as probabilistic smudges but rather as nodes of relationships. When certain relationships are complete at both ends, one node to another, the object acts much like an object of the common-sense world. When that object is dependent upon a pending relationship, it has a fuzziness which can be labeled a "probabilistic smudge," I guess, though the term seems little more than a meaningless placeholder.

It be far more rational, at least in my opinion, to describe such an object as being an incomplete concrete act-of-being. I stole the term 'act-of-being' from St. Thomas Aquinas so that I might use it in my worldview which I have described, with some good reasons, as an updating of Thomism to consider modern empirical knowledge. I'm learning how to use 'act-of-being', and other terms and concepts which are mostly under development or are still a bit ghostly, for richer and more complex discussions of created being, in its abstract and concrete forms. My willingness to speak of created being as a spectrum from abstract entities to concrete, thing-like entities adds the interesting complication that the smudgy object isn't yet a well-defined object but the abstract forms of being from which it is shaped are

still in existence, though it's not clear if they can be located in any particular place. At the same time, those abstract forms of being will continue on even in the most humble of concrete things in a way weakly analogous to clay continuing to exist in the hardened brick.

Concrete being is shaped from more abstract being by the sorts of relationships modern physicists have explored with so much success.

And that is a very simple synopsis of some important parts of my world-view.

## 168 Not Probabilistic Smears but Interactions

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1026>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/09/16.]

In Chapter 167, *Not Probabilistic Smudges but Relationships*, I jumped the gun and said:

In James Gleick's biography of Richard Feynman, *Genius*, he refers to an early theory developed by Feynman and John Wheeler as "a classical theory, not a quantum one. It treated objects as objects, not as probabilistic smudges."

Mr. Gleick is speaking in terms of concepts of mainstream thinkers in physics and I'm not criticizing him, but I'd suggest that it's better to regard objects not as objects and also not as probabilistic smudges but rather as nodes of relationships. When certain relationships are complete at both ends, one node to another, the object acts much like an object of the common-sense world. When that object is dependent upon a pending relationship, it has a fuzziness which can be labeled a "probabilistic smudge," I guess, though the term seems little more than a meaningless placeholder.

Later in the book, he notes that Feynman came to speak of particles as being of the nature of interactions. Fair enough, though I'd prefer language which recognizes that relationships, or interactions, are primary and bring thing-like stuff into being. At the same time, thing-like stuff does exist and is truly such when it is shaped from that more abstract stuff which

Feynman considered to be interactions though I prefer to think of things as nodes in complex sets of relationships.

I'm trying to be sensitive to these little differences in foundational matters because they can be the difference between a solid foundation and a cracked foundation. There is an example in the writings of Etienne Gilson which is relevant: he said that there were at least two modern existentialists who were worth considering as rediscoverers of the Thomistic understanding of being: the Lutheran Kierkegaard and the atheist Sartre. Oddly enough, Gilson said that Kierkegaard saw the nature of what Aquinas called the act-of-being but he went too far and lost his respect for the stuff which can result from that act-of-being. On the other hand, he said that Sartre had seen the act-of-being but also retained his respect for the stuff around him.

We need to respect the act-of-being by which created being comes to exist and the acts-of-being by which abstract being is shaped to a more concrete level of being. We also need to retain a balanced view, respecting that more concrete being as a so-called 'thing in itself'. Most of the difficulty in seeing that 'thing in itself', noted by Heidegger and others, is due not to some imagined detachment from the thing-like being around us. Most of the difficulty is due to the very richness and depth, the levels of increasingly abstract levels of being, to be found in even the most humble thing. Seeing and understanding things in themselves takes a great effort; it is a work of the body and the mind in all its aspects, especially the imaginative aspects. At the end of our lives, probably at the end of human existence in this mortal realm, we'll have failed to complete our understanding of even the simplest aspect of created being if only because the simplest aspects melt away and reform with each new understanding of deeper levels of being, but this is a major part of being a human person. Even those who never pass beyond the state of human animal to that of morally well-ordered human person will likely have at least some curiosity about some parts of this world and will likely explore those parts even if they never so much as try to make greater sense of what lies around them.

It's part of our human nature to look at a rock and wonder, wonder as a philosopher interested in the nature of concrete being, as a painter interested in colors and shapes, as a chemist wishing to find all the different sorts of stuff in that rock, as a miner hoping to see signs of gold or iron, even as a child looking for a good projectile to hit that nearby tree.

# 169 From Abstract Being to Concrete Being and Narratives

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1050>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/09/30.]

I stretch the truth when I sometimes talk as if I were the only one who sees being as a spectrum from the abstract to the concrete. Clearly, there is a sense in which Platonic and Neoplatonic Realists see being in two forms, abstract being (what they call the Real) and concrete being (the real thing, so to speak). Furthermore, modern physicists speak in terms which imply that entities exist which can only be described mathematically, some of those entities existing at ‘deep’ levels of our concrete world and some being part of some sort of precursor stuff to this concrete universe. There is some sort of interesting and potentially fertile confusion about whether that precursor stuff can be said to be still here. Unfortunately, the ‘fertility’ can only be realized if important questions about being are asked more directly and more openly in cosmology than is currently the case.

I’ll provide a few simple diagrams of some potential relationships between the different realms of being, but I’ll be simplifying matters greatly. See Chapter 438, *The Liberal Mind: The Essence of Liberalism* for a discussion of my view of the spectrum of being in the context of human politics.

## 169.1 Modern Cosmology

Let me start with a short discussion of the view implied by many modern theoretical physicists, and most of the popular interpreters working this field. In this model, abstract being becomes complex and relatively more concrete, more particular, by symmetry-breaking processes, a view which I

find congenial. More importantly, these models have a characteristic which I find disturbing, partly because of my Christian faith. This characteristic of the current cosmological models seems to isolate the universe, separating it from any precursor forms of created being at the moment when expansion of this universe begins. As abstract forms of being, describable in mathematical terms, flow through a bottleneck of sorts—the so-called Big Bang—they form a universe which is then apparently independent of the general realm of abstract being from which the universe came. The universe begins to evolve in time and never, so to speak, looks back at its source in more abstract forms of being.

Here's a simple diagram of the implied 'flow' of being in modern physics:

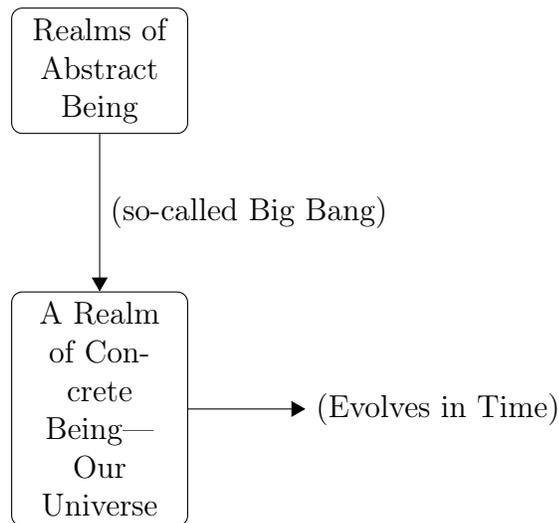


Figure 169.1: Naive Version of Modern Scientific View of Being

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In this view of the concrete being of our universe, of how that concrete being came to exist, of what the universe is, and how the that universe came to exist, we find that something was pushed 'through' the small spigot that was the Big Bang and that something expanded to become our universe, the spacetime as well as the matter. Then the spigot was closed.

Does this leave in place a dualism of sorts? That is, are we left with the problem of explaining how we can access abstract knowledge, such as that

of transfinite numbers, without conjecturing some realm of thought-stuff? If our universe is an expansion of what cosmologists and particle physicists can plausibly conjecture to have spilled in the universe created by the act of spilling—in a manner of speaking—and if that spilling took place for only the early fractions of a second of that expansion, then where do the ‘immaterial’ aspects of our universe come from? It would seem that this standard way of thought implies that matter was separated even from the mathematically describable and very abstract being from which it came.

The above diagram gives a very good backdrop to the mainstream context in which we have to deal with the most basic issues of being. For now, that context gives some inclined strongly to empirical thought a pervasive if radically incomplete foundation for their metaphysical reasoning. A little reading in the accessible literature on modern cosmology will confirm that even those who showed great creativity in their scientific work will simply assume the metaphysical backdrop, which is what it is, that is, a largely unexamined understanding of reality which is read naively out of a literalistic application of the field equation of general relativity, or some similar equation. Most modern physicists would know that mathematics can only describe possibilities and not tell us that an object exists, abstract or concrete, but they assume that what is describable by the basic equations of modern physics is what ‘truly’ exists and other aspects of concrete entities, such as mental activity, have to be simply ignored while we’re slipping it in through the backdoor.

Some empirical thinkers who deal with cosmological issues are reductive materialists and some struggle to maintain a belief in metaphysical entities and qualitative aspects. There are even some who struggle to hold on to religious beliefs or at least vague spiritual beliefs. The non-reductionists, who seem to be greatly in the majority, try to admit other forms of being than what squeezed through the spigot of the Big Bang, but they show no willingness to deal with it directly, that is, by speaking of created being, rather than speaking of physical stuff and then all this other important non-stuff.

Other thinkers, and maybe some trying to escape their human inclination to think, will simply glide over the model of our world as described by modern science and will see the world as awash with whatever entities are needed to readily and comfortably deal with evil or with unlikely recoveries from cancer or with their own feelings that they aren’t ‘just’ flesh and bone.

We can do better in understanding the nature of created being, most

abstract to most concrete, without rejecting the understanding of the physical aspects of concrete being which has been given us by modern physics. To do better, we'll have to muster up the courage to talk in a rational and coherent way of the unity of being so that we don't have to sing fairy-tales or speak gibberish to describe, for example, men and human societies as they really are.

Before I re-present my proposed better way to understand created being, I'll provide a diagram and a short discussion of a very simple, maybe simplistic, form of Platonic Realism.

## 169.2 Platonic Realism or Idealism

I'm presenting this diagram only as background of sorts:

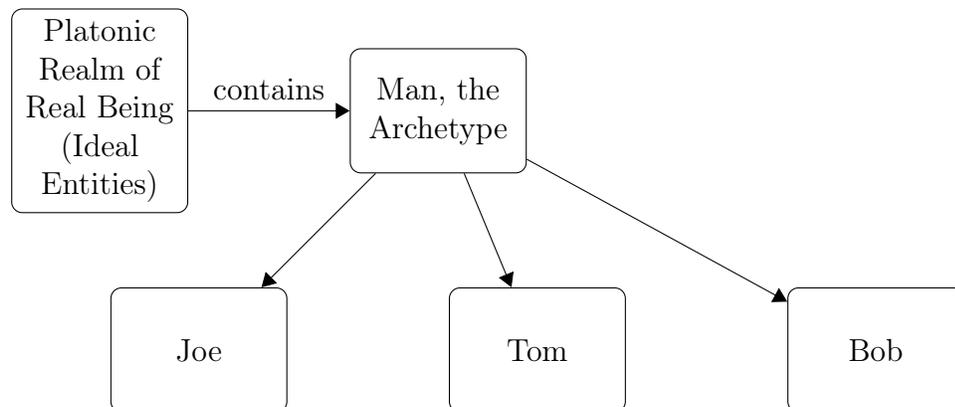


Figure 169.2: Platonist Particular Entities **Do** Come From a Single Archetype

In Plato's metaphysics, there are apparently a set number of types of entities each having an archetype in the world of the Ideals or the Reals. From the archetype Man, come specific men, such as Joe and Tom and Bob. One claim made by some scholars is that Plato's Ideals were the only immortals. For example, any reference to an immortal soul was a reference to the soul of Man. Joe and Tom and Bob were mortal creatures and could have part in immortality only through the species archetype of Man. There are no individual immortal souls in Platonic metaphysics, despite ongoing rumors to the contrary.

### 169.3 Loyd Fueston's Worldview: Concrete Entities Are Formed by Multiple Streams from Abstract Being

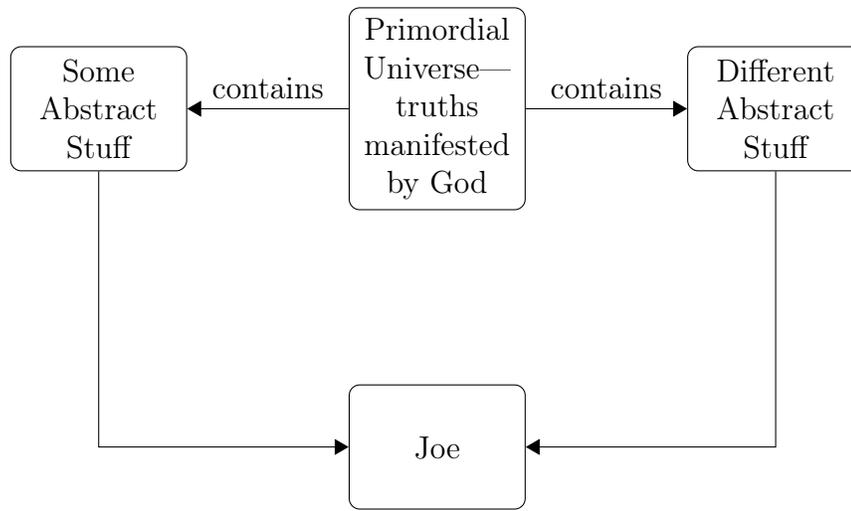


Figure 169.3: Particular Entities Don't Come From a Single Archetype

The main point of this is that there is an ongoing flow of being from abstract realms into this universe, this realm of concrete being. Each thing, no matter how mundane or seemingly simple, is the concrete level of a complex of different forms of being going deep into realms of abstract being.

At the same time, currently available empirical evidence and theoretical arguments tell us there was a special flow of certain fundamental forms related to the beginning of the current expansionary phase of this universe. Did this universe exist as such before it began to expand? If the physical stuff which we know as the matter, energy, and fields of this universe did exist before the so-called Big Bang, was it already embedded in relationships with the forms of abstract being which lead to what might be called the 'immaterial' aspects of this world?

The questions are badly phrased for now, but I think that it's clear what sorts of questions we should be asking to properly enrich the understanding of created being, the entire spectrum from abstract forms of being to the concretized being shaped from abstract forms.

## 169.4    Loyd Fueston's Worldview From One Step Back: A More Plausibly Complex Model

I'll republish the diagram from Chapter 438, *The Liberal Mind: The Essence of Liberalism* to demonstrate other aspects of my understanding of created being. This diagram was written to help me present my claims that our understanding of our own moral natures can be enriched by borrowing, in a special way, from general relativity. Specifically, I had noticed that we speak of our moral paths through life in Euclidean terms but those terms seem inadequate for human beings who live in societies grown tremendously complex and rich. I hope this makes my claim clearer and more plausible:

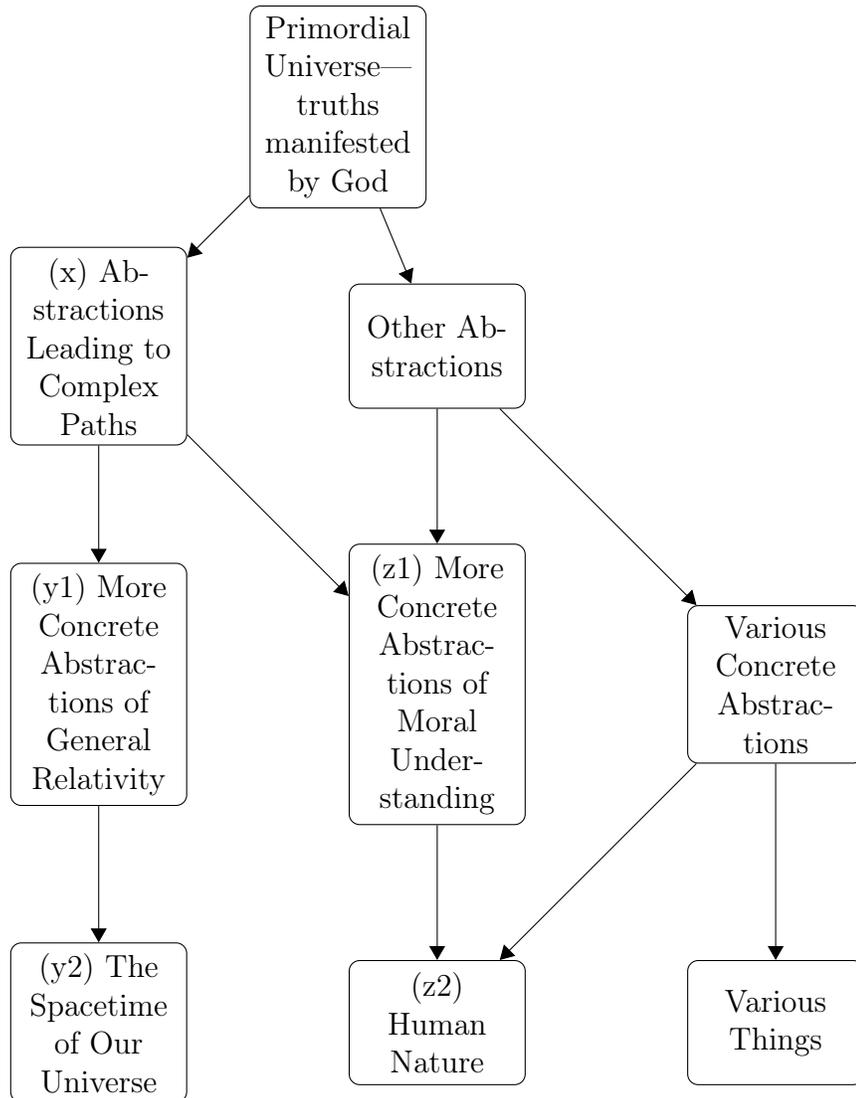


Figure 169.4: Simple Relationships of Abstract and Concrete Levels of Being



# 170 Being: Responding to Some Objections to the Reality of Abstractions

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1177>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/02/08.]

In reading Richard Gregory's *Mind in Science* [65], I find that he raises a seemingly plausible objection to those thinkers who 'regress' to seeing abstractions, including knowledge, in the objective world. He states his objection in a short and loaded way:

[The psychologist Kenneth] Craik is suggesting that human inference has its validity and logical power because and only when it shares the structure of reality. This is pushing the concept of analogue computing to its limit. But how can thinking be like the objects of thought? Craik is surely slipping back here into a 'picture' account with all its attendant difficulties. . . . Craik is forced to say that abstractions such as numbers exist as other objects exist; for his brain states are non-representing objects. He thus goes back on Gauss's insights, which rescued us from the classical difficulties of mathematics, logic and language. This is surely a step backwards, which we should regard with extreme caution. [page 373]

I see various problems with Gregory's viewpoint, not from a traditional Platonist viewpoint which—at least allegedly—follows the ancient Athenian's view that there is an abstract realm which is more real than this concrete world. My starting point is a sophisticated-naive re-understanding of

modern understandings of space, time, matter, and energy—from cosmology and particle physics and abstract mathematics, but also history and poetry and music. With this sort of re-understanding, deliberately bereft of conventional epistemological filtering of real-world information, I have come to believe that concrete forms of created being are shaped from abstract forms of created being. This wasn't really something forced upon me, in any bad way, but ultimately a way of truly solving the problems Professor Gregory refers to. The problems weren't caused by Platonism as such but rather by any general attempts to separate thought and object. Recently, I read about such efforts in *The Meaning of Truth* [78], a collection of Williams James' articles on the real meaning of pragmatism. James knew quite well that man as we know him, the physical creature, doesn't have any special access to any sort of transcendental realm of truths or thoughts or whatever, but I know of no Jamesian pragmatist who has grabbed the bull by the horns and dealt directly with the discontinuities in being caused by this separation of concrete and abstract realms though such thinkers as Walter J. Freeman and Gerd Gigerenzer have helped to establish the human mind as a set of relationships centered upon a creature of concrete being.

But I deny man is fully a concrete being and I speak not of just the fact that all concrete beings in this universe have relationships which are immaterial. Concrete being is shaped from abstract being and that more abstract realm remains in our bodies and our relationships—including our minds—as clay remains in the bricks of our buildings, as carbon and hydrogen remain in the wood of the frames of those buildings. The modern feeling that it's wrong to conjecture a separate Ideal realm is valid but modern thinkers have not the guts or perhaps simply not the flexibility of mind to realize that if there is no Ideal realm but there are abstractions we can somehow access, that means those abstractions are here, in the very stuff of our bodies and in our relationships with other entities and with the entirety of various narratives.

We are still the clay as well as bricks, in a manner of speaking. Going beyond the clay, we're also carbon and oxygen and arsenic (a small amount only, please). Still further, we find ourselves to be protons and neutrons and electrons and—very rarely—some of the strange particles mostly produced in high-energy regions such as supernovas and the accelerators at physics labs. Beyond that? I'll skip a layer or so being actively explored by exotic empirical investigations and I'll claim we are yet those very strangely abstract entities in the investigations of theoretical physicists and mathemati-

cians. Or at least we're the ones which really exist. These investigations are in an early stage and the specific directions chosen by theoreticians might not correspond to the abstract forms of being from which this universe was shaped. But it seems true for now that our universe was shaped from some relatively more abstract form of being and I'm willing to conjecture that process, in one or more additional steps, takes us back to the truths manifested by God when He called Creation into existence.

I'm going to turn to a mathematics textbook, Morton Hamermesh's *Group Theory and its Application to Physical Problems* [68], where we read:

It must be stated at the outset that all our results [dealing with various physical problems] are obtainable without the formal methods of group theory. The alternative "simple" methods are, in fact, a physicist's rediscovery of some group-theoretical techniques. For simple problems, the formal treatment is also simple; in complex problems, the use of powerful tools can save considerable labor. We should not deprecate formalism as such—so long as the physical ideas are not lost from sight, the formalism is valuable. [page xiii]

Professor Hamermesh is far too modest on the behalf of mathematics and other fields of abstract thought. One clue that such is the case is the dependence, shown over the history of human thought and anticipated in a general understanding—however imperfect—in the thought of Aristotle and—even more so—St. Thomas Aquinas, that abstractions of the most ethereal type often end up being used in the physical sciences and engineering. Moreover, many abstractions in both mathematics and metaphysics have been generated over the centuries in the works of physics and other fields of empirical studies and contributed back to mathematics or metaphysics. In fact, Aquinas seemed to think the second process to be dominant, understanding abstract forms of being by studying concrete forms of being, but he lived before science and mathematics had become major, self-sustaining activities.

In their deeper and not directly observable levels, cosmological physics and particle physics—I'll ignore the overlap for now – conjecture entities which are quite abstract, that is, they have effects in the directly observable levels of concrete reality but they are radically different sorts of entities. This actually occurs even at all levels where there is a quantum effect.

The wave-function of quantum mechanics has a ‘dual’ nature of a sort only roughly similar to the dualistic natures some conjecture for body-soul or brain-mind. Interact with that wave-function thingie as if it were a particle and – abracadabra—it is a particle with particular location. Interact with that wave-function thingie as if it were a wave and – abracadabra—it is a wave with a particular momentum. It’s possible this is telling us something—maybe there is some substantial truth and not just an analogical truth in my claim that concrete flesh-and-blood human beings are frozen soul. That’s a matter not to be settled, so far as I can tell, until we have a vocabulary and a way of using it that we can test our ways of speaking about the full spectrum of being. I certainly don’t claim to have such a vocabulary nor such a way of using it and feel strongly this will result from a multi-generational effort by a good number of explorers and thinkers.

I’m moving fast and furious rather than carefully and so I’ll move on to discuss some comments made by William James in *The Meaning of Truth* [78]. First, he tells us:

Abstract concepts, such as elasticity, voluminousness, disconnectedness, are salient aspects of our concrete experiences which we find it useful to single out. Useful, because we are then reminded of other things that offer these same aspects; and, if the aspects carry consequences in those other things, we can return to our first things, expecting those same consequences to accrue. [page 246]

I have talked often about the mind’s movement from the concrete up to the abstract and back down to another, different but similar, concrete thing or relationship of concrete things. The difference is that I claim it corresponds to real being, that is, the things and the other things, as well as the relationships, at the concrete level aren’t just ‘thought about’ using the abstractions, they are shaped from abstract being which corresponds to those abstractions which are far from ‘merely’ mental. In our acts of ‘thinking about’, we are imitating the Creator’s acts of creating concrete things by shaping them from abstract being.

Again quoting William James from *The Meaning of Truth* [78]:

Without abstract concepts to handle our perceptual particulars by, we are like men hopping on one foot. Using concepts along with the particulars, we become bipedal. [page 246]

This is true but also sticks to the view that there is being, real stuff, and then there are magical incantations which help us describe and maybe control that real stuff, but those incantations are connected to the real stuff only through the human being, our bodies and especially our perceptual organs being in contact with the real stuff and our minds being able to grab hold of the magical words which allow us to generate human abstractions about the true reality, the reality of dirt and water and flesh and blood. No.

Again, no. As I've said before, James and his followers came to understand deeply and truly the bottom-up processes by which we can make sense of empirical reality. James seems to have rejected the possibility that we are, in a manner of speaking, building up into an existing world, however tentatively we perceive and conceive that world, when we engage in those bottom-up processes. Both the philosopher James and the mathematician Hamermesh above see the patterns of the abstract in the concrete thing but don't pursue the possibility that both are forms of being, different points on a spectrum of created being as I've claimed before. That spectrum of being is necessary for a world, a universe ordered to be a moral narrative. That spectrum is necessary for a human being to become a true person, and entity which shares the fundamental properties of a world: unity, coherence, and completeness.

Let me try to pull this line of thought together a little.

In the modern world, we've learned lessons such as these:

1. space and time can be one structure,
2. the very stuff of stars and rocks and human flesh were shaped from some strange stuff in the early seconds of the expansion of the universe and that strange stuff seems to be abstract in such a way as to be describable only in terms of what might be called 'demanding' mathematics,
3. the constituents of matter behave in ways that force us to give priority to relationships over stuff, and
4. there are numbers far greater than what we call 'infinity'.

In understanding this sort of exciting and disturbing knowledge, in understanding the narrative physicists have proposed for this universe, in understanding the evolution of life and of the human brain in particular, in

understanding the appearance of the human mind in history, I've come to believe that created being is created being is created being. I've come to believe we should take quantum physics and cosmological physics and particle physics seriously—concrete, thing-like being is shaped from some more abstract sort of being.

It's good to appreciate the ways of building knowledge of the empirical realms of being by bottom-up means. It's good to appreciate the value of applying abstractions to extend and deepen that knowledge. Yet, we achieve the widest and deepest understanding of this universe if we avoid the easy path of "understanding empirical things, by studying those things and applying abstract thought during that study." To be sure, there is much that can be accomplished by traveling that path, but there's a harder path by which we seek to understand what is the relationship between the abstract and the concrete rather than thinking the abstract to be no more than a tool useful in understanding the concrete. Is abstract thought, even mathematical thought, no more and no less than magical incantations by which we gain some sort of occult control over rocks and flesh and energy? Is the abstract no more and no less than wizardly wisdom? In opposition to such ways of thought, implicit or explicit, I claim that created being lies on a spectrum going from the fully abstract, the truths God manifested as the truly raw stuff of Creation, to the fully concrete, the rocks which are frost-heaved each year through the New England soil.

Let's have the courage and the faith to respond to created being in its deepest and widest form, the totality of created being.

# 171 What is? What Can Be Measured? Who Cares?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1215>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/03/17.]

This article, *One Thing Is Certain: Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle Is Not Dead* at <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=heisenbergs-uncertainty-principle-is-not-dead>, gives an interesting summary of one important aspect of what is called Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle.

[T]he uncertainty principle comes in two superficially similar formulations that even many practicing physicists tend to confuse. Werner Heisenberg's own version is that in observing the world, we inevitably disturb it. And that is wrong, as a research team at the Vienna University of Technology has now vividly demonstrated.

Led by Yuji Hasegawa, the team prepared a stream of neutrons and measured two spin components simultaneously for each, in direct violation of Heisenberg's version of the principle. Yet, the alternative variation continued to hold.

What is this other formulation of the Uncertainty Principle which is only superficially similar to Heisenberg's formulation?

The same year [as when Heisenberg proposed his Uncertainty Principle], Earle Kennard, a less-known physicist, derived a different formulation, which was later generalized by Howard Robertson:  $s(q)s(p) \geq h/4\pi$ . This inequality says that you

cannot suppress quantum fluctuations of both position  $s(q)$  and momentum  $s(p)$  lower than a certain limit simultaneously. The fluctuation exists regardless whether it is measured or not, and the inequality does not say anything about what happens when a measurement is performed.

I'm still in the process of learning some of the technical aspects of quantum theory. I think a serious understanding of those technical aspects will lead to more disciplined ways of writing and speaking about some particular aspects of the concrete forms of created being which, so to speak, came boiling out of the complex events simplistically labeled the Big Bang. I learned my basic views of quantum physics first as prejudices which were not well supported by serious knowledge, but I learned my prejudices from men who understood quantum physics, sometimes as physicists and sometimes as philosophers and sometimes as both. I can still recall Fr. Stanley Jaki, the Benedictine polymath who had a doctorate in physics in addition to the more traditional degrees of a Catholic priest, standing in front of a group in a large meeting-room at UMass Amherst and telling us that the Uncertainty Principle was unbeatable because it was a basic principle of being in this universe and not a problem of measurement inaccuracies due to disturbing the entity being measured. I can't remember him saying more than that to that gathering of scientifically literate non-physicists. I can't even testify that I remember his words accurately, but I remember the clear gist of what he said and Fr. Jaki was a man with an irritable manner when it came to matters of principle in theology and science alike. But my taste in 'popular' science also runs to books written by highly-regarded scientists writing for other scientists from other specialties as well as scientifically literate laymen.

So it is that I have understood for a couple of decades that there is an uncertainty principle which deals with more fundamental issues than the disturbance of an entity during a measurement process. This doesn't mean I was clear it was separate from Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, but I knew something substantial about the issue.

I'll state matters in my currently clumsy terms. A quantum entity, described in terms of a wavefunction, has a coherent set of aspects which we think of in terms of position and momentum. Position is a particle-type property, momentum is a wave-type property. By the very nature of a wave, its attributes are found over the entire region of what can simplistically be

called its region of vibration. This means that momentum can seemingly be understood as a wavefunction aspect and position as an aspect of a concrete thing and that means we don't really understand either aspect.

I'd hardly be original in claiming this tells us that the 'wavefunction' stuff is defined by groups of aspects which don't quite correspond to this concrete level of thing-like stuff, which is particle-like to our perceptions though we know of things such as vibrating drum-heads. That level described by wavefunctions is a more abstract level of being, in my way of speaking. This means that there are some more abstract properties in that more abstract realm of being in which wavefunctions can be found, so to speak, and when shaped to a more concrete form, these properties show up as the properties of mass-energy, fields, and—in some way not yet apparent from gravitational theories, spacetime. That is, those more abstract properties can be shaped to the more concrete properties described so well in classical physics. This points to some confusion—quantum physics first developed because what I'm calling "more abstract" realms of being have direct effects in this "more concrete" realm. Those abstract forms of being down just disappear in favor of more concrete forms of being, they continue to exist in the most thing-like of things.

The abstract realms of being, including even the realm of truths manifested by God as the basic stuff of created being, are present in this universe which seems to first perceptions to be so concrete. In fact, this universe seems so concrete that many thinkers, and many non-thinkers as well, have tried to explain the immaterial aspects of this universe by positing immaterial substances, explaining what I see as human relationships to the various entities and relationships of this universe by positing some mind-stuff or soul-stuff.

I've written often of this and will refer the reader to Chapter 169, *From Abstract Being to Concrete Being and Narratives*. This current chapter provides a very simplified overview of my view of being and a simple comparison to the view of being of Plato and the naive view held by working scientists during their 9-5 moments.

After a little contemplation, most thinkers with any scientific literacy will understand that I'm making obvious the way in which science works, moving up to the more abstract to develop more powerful concepts and skills and then moving down to apply what has been learned to the concrete world. At the same time, I'm recommending that this process can be used across fields, not to make political science a branch of physics but rather

to allow political scientists to acquire some potentially useful concepts and skills. Even more importantly, I'm claiming this process of movement from concrete to abstract levels and back again is a true reflection of the nature of created being and not just a human intellectual strategy.

Returning more strictly to the specific subject of this essay, I'm suggesting physicists have one foot in the concrete world of momentum-location of a classical sort, one foot in a more abstract world in which they formally use wave-like attributes such as momentum and particle-like attributes such as location and don't quite know how to translate these formalisms into an appropriate understanding of momentum-location in our concrete universe. In Chapter 90 written early in my career as a blogger, *Shaping Our Minds to Reality*, I addressed this issue. At the risk of bad authorial manners, I'll repeat the quote from a good and accessible book written by a man both theoretical physicist and Anglican priest:

The wavefunction is the vehicle of our understanding of the quantum world. Judged by the robust standards of classical physics it may seem a rather wraith-like entity. But it is certainly the object of quantum mechanical discourse and, for all the peculiarity of its collapse, its subtle essence may be the form that reality has to take on the atomic scale and below. Anyone who has had to teach a mathematically based subject will know the difficulties which students encounter in negotiating a new level of abstraction. They have met the idea of a vector as a crude arrow. You now explain to them that it is better thought of as an object with certain transformation properties under rotation. 'But what is it *really*?' they say. You implore them to believe that it is an object with certain transformation properties under rotation. They do not believe you; they think that you are holding back some secret clue that would make it all plain. Time and experience are great educators. A year later the student cannot conceive why he had such difficulty and suspicion about the nature of vectors. Perhaps we are in the midst of a similar, if much longer drawn out, process of education about the nature of quantum mechanical reality. If we are indeed in such a digestive, living-with-it, period, it would explain something which is otherwise puzzling. A great many theoretical physicists would be prepared to express some unease about

the conceptual foundations of quantum mechanics—in particular, about Copenhagen orthodoxy—but only a tiny fraction of them ever direct serious attention to such questions. Perhaps the majority are right to submit themselves to a period of subliminal absorption. [117] [page 82]

I don't really have a lot to add except the suggestion that scientists might have headed off-track on dealing with this problem. They perhaps need to ascend to a higher level of abstraction than even that wavefunction of quantum mechanics. Arguably, they are doing so in string theory and superstring theory and awesome string theory or whatever, but there's little evidence so far that they've made progress in the basics—strings do allow some tentative understanding of the different masses of some particles otherwise the same. That's an important problem but string theory seems to be generating more fancy equations than insights.

Anyway, my goal is merely to raise the issue of proper abstraction when we encounter conundrums such as those faced by modern quantum theorists. I don't think much real progress will be made until a Newton or an Einstein arises, one who sets out accepting reality rather than trying to explain it away with too many well-formed, but ultimately questionable, assumptions about the nature of that reality. Then some of the conundrums might be restated as an acceptance of reality along with a statement of what truly needs to be dealt with by creative minds. The most powerfully creative mind will merely be idling at a high rate if it's trying to answer a question raised by the sudden emergence of a new level of being and trying to answer that question in terms of being as understood before this interesting surprise.



# 172 Frozen Soul and Other Delicacies

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1257>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/05/03.]

What do you do with a frozen soul? You could lick it because, speaking in general terms, a Popsicle is as much a piece of frozen soul as a human being is. And so are rattlesnakes and monkeys and rocks hurtling through space. You can also saw frozen soul, beginning the process of making a house for sparrows. That leads to the insight that you can hammer a spike of frozen soul driving it straight so boards of frozen soul are held in place.

Some chunks of soul are less frozen than others. Some are described well by quantum mechanics as being some sort of strange vapor which might condense into a liquid or ice with any of a variety of properties and locations. Frozen soul also interacts with spacetime in ways that make the entire topic still stranger from the viewpoint of embodied creatures who detect something else in their own selves and, perhaps, a lesser something in other sorts of created beings. We're surrounded by vagueness and strangeness, abstractions and soul-stuff, when we try to understand the more fundamental stuff from which ordinary or concrete stuff was shaped. Stranger and stranger and stranger, surpassed only by outright weirdness.

When God chose to create, He manifested certain truths—perhaps an infinite number of truths—as the raw stuff of Creation. How do I know this? I don't. I'm speculating, working up a plausible story based upon the evolutionary and developmental nature of this universe as modern empirical knowledge would have it, history and Biblical exegesis as well as physics and biology. I don't wish to either greatly qualify or excessively constrain any view of the 'truth' value of these great mounds of empirical knowledge,

themselves not well-explored in true scientific, that is—systematic, ways. This body of knowledge, partly digested and occasionally plundered and wrongfully exploited by ideologists, is the best knowledge we have outside of a very small body of truths revealed to us—but even those truths were and are revealed through the eyes and ears and brains of the embodied creatures which we human beings are, and ultimately that process of revelation is describable in the terms I'm explaining in this essay.

The intellectual enemies of religious believers and also of some skeptics who believe in something more than this material stuff aren't those who acknowledge the importance and goodness of matter and physical energy but rather those who talk in such terms but litter their talk with reductionistic words such as 'just' or 'only', most especially when those words are implied rather than stated explicitly. We should remember that many who claimed to be believers in a Creator-God have also spoken in such reductionistic terms of matter while claiming to believe in some sort of a higher world. I'll leave that thought hanging and go on to deal with the totality of things and relationships and events in this universe. That totality implies a greater scope to created being than does any sort of reductionism. We start with what we can see and touch and explore, but soon enough realize that even the most vulgar entities in this universe show that evidence of something not reducible to pig-flesh nor granite nor ionized hydrogen gas. Something so simple as a journey to somewhere tells us the road, dirt and rock or asphalt, is more than 'just' a road made of one or more of those forms of matter. That journey also tells us the traveler is 'more' than a slave to his genes, more than a 'mere' product of evolutionary forces, biological and cultural, more than even a 'mere' product of his personal development. As the road is that road-stuff but more, so the traveler is his genetic-stuff and his soma-stuff but more. He is a product of various developmental and evolutionary processes. All that stuff and all those processes are more than 'mere', more than 'just'.

Extrapolating backward in time is nearly as foolish an endeavor as extrapolating forward in time, but some good can come from it, some ability to understand at least some aspects of Creation and to maybe anticipate potential opportunities or problems. This sort of foolishness can be great fun but it's also necessary for the founding of a civilization, an activity perhaps possible to conscious intention for the first time in history. We live in an age of not only heightened self-awareness but also an historical self-consciousness which renders some modern communities minded in the way

that individuals first became minded at some time during the development of the human race—I've conjectured this had happened about the half a millennium before the birth of Christ in some of my writings because of the sudden appearance, or at least sudden recording, of self-aware and abstract reasoning in several regions—Greece and India and Israel and China and perhaps others.

In any case, some modern men have minds allowing for an understanding of abstract forms of being and also events which must be seen as abstract such as the one we refer to as the Big Bang. I call this an abstract event for the simple reason that it left behind some concrete evidence of what happened, but the event itself occurred before mass and energy had settled down to a state where human observation, by way of sight or hearing or touch, could have happened even in principle. Electromagnetic energy was bound up with other sorts of entities in such a way as to exclude even a hypothetical vision of the events in the first few hundreds of thousands of years after that Big Bang.

If we imaginatively travel backward in time toward that Big Bang, we see mass and energy melt down towards strange states which I interpret as being more abstract versions of the various sorts of mass and energy. For example, weak nuclear energy and electromagnetic energy melt into a form of energy labeled 'electroweak'. This doesn't happen because of some approach to a mysterious creation-event but rather because of a compression into a tiny region or, more or less equivalently, because of an unimaginably high temperature. What compresses? What turns up the burner?

Let's first think of the process in temporal order, from the Big Bang forward. The 'stuff' of this universe expanded out of that very tiny region in an event which can be described as explosive though it was not like an explosion that shatters a seam of coal in a mine-tunnel. It was an explosion in which our spacetime were shaped into a particular form and then participated along with the more palpable stuff which are more particular or more concrete forms of being. That change of state was a great expansion or, equivalently, a cooling down. I often speak in terms of a freezing of more abstract forms of being. I'm only somewhat joking when I say instead: a freezing of soul or soul-stuff. I think this sort of abstract being was the intuited state of created being which was the point of discussions of 'soul' or even 'mind' by the more clearheaded thinkers of ancient and Medieval and modern times. We, and all the other entities of this universe, are shaped from this abstract being, this soul-stuff, but it's still with us, part of us, as

clay is still part of the bricks of our houses and walls.

In fact, we can view the Big Bang as a change of state at least analogically similar to the explosive weather events which occur when warm, moist air moves up the slope of a mountainside and water begins to cool so that the moisture condenses in the form of rain and/or snow.

As I see it, that change of state during the Big Bang was from a more abstract form of being, let's call it vapor in warm air, into a more concrete form of being, let's call it condensed water or even ice-crystals. So it is that I say that concrete stuff, water or ice-crystals, is frozen soul, vapor or water in a highly energized state of being. We human beings are frozen from the same soul-stuff as the most humble entities in this universe but we are in a form that makes us capable of exploring Creation, of struggling toward an understanding, even—in principle—of encapsulating in our own being the acts of our Maker in shaping the created being of our universe and of all Creation. Each human being, however humble, is born a potential image of his Maker and can become a better image by actively responding to the opportunities and problems which he encounters when living his humble life.

# 173 Studying Steam When All You Have is Ice

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1292>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/06/03.]

I've often claimed that more particular, more concrete forms of being are shaped from more abstract forms of being, themselves tracing back after some number of stages to the truths God manifested as the raw stuff of Creation. In the spirit of meta-physics as properly conceived, in my opinion, by Aristotle and some of his predecessors, my claim is based upon an abstraction from the best physics of my day, supplemented by some general concepts from other fields, such as the understanding of this world as one of evolution and development which has come from Darwin and his successors.

The specific claim in this essay comes from my understanding of the discovery of modern cosmology and particle physics that forces and particles melt into more general forms at extremely high temperatures or, equivalently, extremely high densities. There's more to it than that, but I wanted to bring up the subject because I noticed two articles about states of matter which are difficult to reach, difficult but not impossible, to explore empirically.

First, there's an article about trying to explore a state of matter which exists at temperatures or densities whose existence would have been denied by Einstein, let alone Newton or Aristotle. In a very short review, *Synopsis: Deconstructing the Quark Gluon Plasma* found at <http://physics.aps.org/synopsis-for/10.1103/PhysRevLett.108.212301>, we can read:

Understanding steam would be really difficult if one only had access to cubes of ice, yet this is exactly the challenge con-

fronting researchers studying the quark-gluon plasma (QGP), a liquidlike state of matter obtained from colliding atomic nuclei at relativistic energies. The constituents of the plasma are quarks and gluons that are momentarily liberated from the colliding nucleons, but the strong nuclear force freezes these particles so rapidly into protons, neutrons, and other stable hadrons that it is difficult to measure them directly. To understand the microscopic constituents of the plasma (quarks and gluons), experimentalists need to know how to interpret what they can actually measure (the relic hadrons).

The article goes on to talk about a proposed theory which might be testable with current particle physics facilities.

The second article, *Exotic Particles, Chilled and Trapped, Form Giant Matter Wave* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2012/05/120524112511.htm>, tells us:

Physicists have trapped and cooled exotic particles called excitons so effectively that they condensed and cohered to form a giant matter wave.

...

Excitons are composite particles made up of an electron and a “hole” left by a missing electron in a semiconductor. Created by light, these coupled pairs exist in nature. The formation and dynamics of excitons play a critical role in photosynthesis, for example.

Like other matter, excitons have a dual nature of both particle and wave, in a quantum mechanical view. The waves are usually unsynchronized, but when particles are cooled enough to condense, their waves synchronize and combine to form a giant matter wave, a state that others have observed for atoms.

There are different sorts of steam in the physical world and the scientists doing the work discussed in the above article managed to separate an exotic sort of steam playing a major role in at least one important process, photosynthesis, and then they froze that steam to study further the properties of the colder, liquid form of the stuff.

The principle I’m claiming to be true is one of the most important in my worldview. It is not just an add-on but is necessary to my way of seeing the

world as unified, coherent, and complete, combining the revealed truths of Christianity as well as the empirical knowledge built up over the course of human history by various sorts of scientists, mathematicians, philosophers, theologians, poets, historians, and so forth. In a word, I seek to reunify human knowledge of our one Creation so we can understand it as such. Having a richer and unified understanding of being, which is the primary work of metaphysics, is a necessary part of this effort.

Again, the claim is:

Being lies on a spectrum going from the abstract (very hot) to the concrete (frozen). The more concrete forms of being are shaped from the more abstract.



# 174 Moon-dust Really is More Ethereal Than Earth-dust

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1307>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/06/19.]

While examining samples of moon-dust, scientists discovered the stuff is a bit unusual, even by the standards of those who study ethereal stuff and relationships on a regular basis. Moon-dust, seemingly macroscopic stuff, shows quantum properties of the sort usually found only in such entities as individual atoms or subatomic particles. It seems that some dust on the surface of the moon is so thoroughly pulverized as to be small enough that it exhibits some quantum properties. Remember that quantum properties come from small energy transfers or related transitions—small is defined in terms of, as one example, the energy it takes for one electron to move to the next ‘orbit’ as it kind-of circles a nucleus. That’s a pretty small amount of energy but such wee bits of energy are apparently large enough to affect this moon-dust.

This was even a little surprising to me with my understanding of created being as a spectrum from the things of a concrete realm of being, such as ordinary dust, to abstractions, such as quantum wavefunctions. To be sure, quantum effects can be seen at the macroscopic level in at least a few cases under study, perhaps even in some parts of the human brain so finely balanced that an orbital transition of one electron can change the overall state of that macroscopic system. Recently, I’ve read that quantum effects play a role in photosynthesis. Chapter 366, *Creation and Freedom*, was originally written, in 2007, in response to a claim of Henri Bergson in *Creative Evolution* [10]. In that chapter, I wrote about scientists producing in a lab, in 1995, a “state of matter predicted decades ago by Albert Einstein

and Indian physicist Satyendra Nath Bose.” In this state of matter (close to a temperature of absolute 0), an assembly of atoms behave as one.

At that, few have expected to find a large mass of stable material which exhibits weird quantum effects on an ongoing basis. The article discussing this weirdness in some moon-dust is: *Nanoparticles Found in Moon Glass Bubbles Explain Weird Lunar Soil Behavior* at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2012/06/120613102442.htm>. The article speaks in a very general way of the reasons the pulverized dust can remain in its strange state. Under the conditions we know of on the earth, the dust wouldn't remain in such a state. The dust would recombine and become normal dust with macroscopic properties which don't allow quantum effects to show through.

What does this mean? If anything.

This moon-dust is thing-like being which exhibits some of the nature of more abstract forms of created being such as that we know as quantum wavefunction. I've claimed in my writings that the abstract being from which thing-like being is shaped remains in that thing-like being. We and the things around us are yet the truths manifested by God as the raw stuff of Creation, the stuff from which all created being is shaped. Moon-dust provides an interesting and unexpected support for the Thomistic claim that “Things are true” and also of my additional claim that “Truths are thing-like.” For one of my earliest, but still relevant discussions of this issue of abstract and concrete realms of created being, see Chapter 159, *Negative Theology in Physics and Metaphysics*. A somewhat more advanced viewpoint, with simple graphs, is developed in Chapter 169, *From Abstract Being to Concrete Being and Narratives*.

The abstract stuff from which we're shaped is still here and particularly here in moon-dust.

# 175 More on Matter as Frozen Soul

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1346>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/07/17.]

There is likely a tendency for scientifically literate laymen, such as myself, to think of quantum effects in terms of the forces and particles of interaction, of potential, rather than in terms of what some might label 'brute matter'. Miracles of scientific measurement and experimentation are almost to be expected nowadays and, lo and behold, we learn in the article *Viewpoint: Matter Waves and Quantum Correlations* found at <http://physics.aps.org/articles/v5/70>:

[R]esearchers now have efficient tools in their hands to probe light fields for quantum signatures. Remarkably, these correlations have now been measured for matter waves too.

In other words, scientists now have reliable ways of showing that the seemingly inert stuff of rocks and flesh has wave-like, quantum properties. To be sure, this quantum nature of even rock-like substances showed up in the distributions of radioactive decay (think half-life) for all sorts of dense, heavy matter, but this expansion of experimental measurement emphasizes that matter is not what we naively think it to be, not what even so sophisticated thinkers as Newton and Boyle thought it to be, no, not even what more recent thinkers such as the Curies or Bohr thought it to be.

Most importantly, it emphasizes that matter also participates in a world of relations and of those metaphysical and concrete processes which are acts-of-being. In philosophical terms, the world is relationist and existentialist

and not essentialist. Matter is being reshaped as it interacts with other bits of matter, with the universe as a whole, and with itself.

See Chapter 156, *A Christian View of Einstein and Bohr's Debate on the Meaning of Reality* for an early discussion of this issue.

## 176 Are Entities Limited to Properties of Their Parts?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1440>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/11/23.]

Can we derive the properties of complex entities from the particles or lesser entities from which they are built or from which they grow? The modern man tends to answer, “Yes,” even when he’s an accomplished thinker in a field which involves higher level analysis of empirical or abstract knowledge. This idea, underlying various sorts of reductionism, is an assumption, an unwarranted assumption so far as current knowledge of created being goes, though it is denied by a good number of scientists in fields such as neuroscience and cosmology and mathematics. Clearly, there are many thinkers in the humanities as well as various sorts of creative writers and artists who also deny reductionism is a valid way to approach being in general. I’m lumping theology and philosophy in with humanities for this discussion. Reductionism can be a very effective way to approach being constrained to one level of being. In Chapter 272, *Human Moral Nature: An Overview*, I provide an overview of created being lying on a spectrum of different levels ranging from very abstract to concrete, thing-like being.

Let me quickly discuss a couple of anti-reductionistic findings from physics, the first being a recent result.

The BaBar Collaboration conducts experiments and analyzes the results at the BaBar detector at *SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory*—see <http://www6.slac.stanford.edu/>. Some of the physicists in the BaBar Collaboration have recently found direct evidence of asymmetric time-reversal in decays of the B-meson. In the overview article, *Viewpoint: Particle Decays Point to an Arrow of Time* found at <http://physics.aps>.

[org/articles/v5/129](http://org/articles/v5/129), we can read:

Time moves irrevocably in one direction. Things get old, decay, and fall apart, but they rarely ever reassemble and grow young. But at the particle level, time's arrow is not so clearly defined. Most collisions and other particle interactions look the same whether run forwards or backwards. Physicists have, however, identified a few reactions that appear to change when time is reversed, but the reasoning has assumed certain relations between fundamental symmetries of particle physics. The BaBar collaboration has now observed time-reversal violation directly and unambiguously in decays of B mesons. The measured asymmetry, reported in *Physical Review Letters* [footnote elided] is statistically significant and consistent with indirect observations.

Why is it that we could have at least some asymmetric time-reversal at the particle level but no evidence of any such time-reversal at the macroscopic level? Indeed, we have no evidence of complex thing-like being, as such, engaging in any processes of time-reversal, though symmetric time-reversal is allowed by the mathematics. Why is it that things age but don't grow young, Humpty-Dumpty becomes a puddle of goo surrounded by egg-shell fragments without the process ever going in reverse? After all, in a local sense, many of the most important, and certainly most readily quantifiable, of the physical events of our universe are well-described by the equations and reasoning procedures of Newtonian physics under most conditions and special relativity under the remaining conditions. Newtonian physics and special relativity are both symmetric in time, indifferent—so to speak—between movement 'forward' or 'backward' in time.

We have to, and should, move forward optimistically, assuming that what we know to such extraordinary precision, such as particle interactions described as QED, is true, truly true, but we have to also realize that there are holes, complexities, and unknown regions beyond the frontier. Moreover, Newtonian and special relativity physics describe stuff subject to global interactions not so clearly subject to the laws, or more general rules, of the constituent stuff. Even QED describes the stuff of, say, semiconductors but doesn't tell us anything about the larger-scale events which occur when that stuff functions as the stuff of computers. When we general-

ize from our yet incomplete knowledge, we are making assumptions. When we do it well, we travel, we can hope with some sureness of foot, in that field of metaphysics considered at best a questionable human field of thought by advocates of some viewpoints such as ‘scientific materialism’. It’s disturbing when those advocates, including some very competent and insightful scientists, deny metaphysics by engaging unconsciously in a sloppy form of metaphysics.

Many scientists and philosophers speak and write as if the relentless movement of macroscopic entities and processes forward in time is a necessary consequence of the second law of thermodynamics. It’s probably not a law, though likely a ‘contingent law’, that is, a law given the way in which our universe is expanding as well as the initial conditions at the start of that expansion. Roger Penrose has presented pretty solid arguments that the second law of thermodynamics is actually a result of the accidental (in a philosophical sense) configuration of the stuff of this universe at the time it began to expand, the time of the so-called Big Bang. Yet, it does seem to be true that, at the macroscopic level, “Time moves irrevocably in one direction.” This is a level where the direction of time as we know it is established, though there might be a second establishment in the domain of the universe.

Let me address what might be happening in that domain with an analogy which I don’t think will work in the end, but it might guide us in the direction of finding better ways of thinking and speaking and writing about that arrow of time which we seem to be riding. I think the way in which the so-called Big Bang is presented has implicitly prejudiced the thinking of even serious scientists and philosophers. Rather than thinking of that Big Bang in terms of the spacetime which resulted from the ensuing expansion, think in terms of the abstract spaces which correspond to states of being. The universe is a strange sort of projectile which has been shot in a very particular direction into the spacetime which resulted as that strange projectile began to expand into that space of states of being, the space of configurations. In terms of concrete being, we could speak weirdly but usefully of that projectile being shot into nothingness in terms of concrete being, into a space of abstractions which can’t be directly perceived or explored. The path of that projectile, indeed the complex narrative occurring as the projectile hurtles away from its initial state of being, can’t be derived from the properties of the projectile and the various particles and other entities of which it is composed. The universe is projectile, itself passing

through various states of being—where ‘itself’ is defined by what can truly be studied by particle-based reductionistic ways of thought, and also the path which adds great complexity, and certain well-defined characteristics, to the totality.

I discussed the strong hints that conservation of energy isn’t a law for the universe as a whole in Chapter 193, *A Universe is More than it Contains*. My discussion played off a comment by P.J.E. Peebles in *Principles of Physical Cosmology* [109]:

We see that the faster decrease of [the radiation density of a relativistic universe modeled as a gas] compared to the mass density of a nonrelativistic gas is the result of the pressure work done by the expanding radiation. However, since the volume of the universe varies as [the third power of the expansion factor of the universe], the net radiation energy in a closed [and expanding] universe decreases as [the inverse of the expansion factor of the universe] as the universe expands. Where does the lost energy go? Since there is no pressure gradient in the homogeneously distributed radiation, the pressure does not act to accelerate the expansion of the universe. (The active gravitational mass due to the pressure has the opposite effect, slowing the rate of expansion. . .) The resolution of this apparent paradox is that while energy conservation is a good local concept. . . and can be defined more generally in the special case of an isolated system in asymptotically flat space, there is not a general global energy conservation law in general relativity theory. [page 139]

We live in a world where a building can be reduced to brick and timbers and copper wires and PVC pipes but the properties of those particles don’t sum up to the properties of a building. In the simplest possible terms, many of the properties of the building come from the directed activities of carpentry and plumbing and pavement construction as well as the use of the building. Other properties come from the context of the hidden or visible utility systems and roadways and the various surrounding social and economic and political systems. I don’t mean to return to any sort of design theology, only to point out there are a variety of realms and levels of created being not directly observable in the particle interactions as electromagnetic radiation separated from matter in the early millenia

of the universe's expansion nor in those of the sun's nuclear reactions and the resulting electromagnetic events. Some of those realms and levels of created being can only be known and explored by way of the abstractions of mathematics and by way of other abstract concepts corresponding to aspects and parts of our universe.

Is it unreasonable to assert that a human being can have some degree of true freedom even if he's made of substances and biochemical processes which are fully deterministic? It's interesting that physics itself doesn't support any reductionistic view of our universe or the entities which are part of it. There are more intuitive arguments and perhaps some fairly tight empirical-level arguments at the level of human nature which provide plausible space for the freedom of a creature of flesh and blood, some of those arguments being provided by neuroscientists or other scientists.

We have every reason to believe we have some small but significant freedom and it's a serious error to argue that the freedom we detect in our human lives must be illusory because our bodies are made of stuff which seems to be subject to a strong variety of determinism.



# 177 What is Created Being?

## Really, what is it?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1480>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/01/04.]

We tend to think of created being as concrete stuff, matter and energy and fields. Neutrinos and quarks and protons. Rocks and hydrogen gas and bacteria. The energy of explosions of various sorts. Fields such as those of the magnet and of quantum interactions. A little knowledge of the history of philosophy and science and technology will let us see that this listing of stuff is somewhat problematic. Some of the most important items on this list of concrete stuff have been added since Newton although it's possible the changes really began in the Middle Ages as scholars debated the nature of infinity and tried to determine if Aristotelian physics could be true; that claim depends upon how some complex and complicated statements are to be understood.

As I've been developing a Christian understanding of being, I've combined the basic insights of the school of St. John the Evangelist and the insights of St. Thomas Aquinas with modern knowledge I generally describe symbolically but truly as being that of Einstein and Darwin.

I have written before of the primacy of relationships over stuff. In fact, fields have the air of relationships not yet settled down into concrete entities, settled down or collapsed in useful but problematic terms in quantum mechanics. In an essay from early in my blogging career, see Chapter 156—*Einstein and Bohr's debate on the meaning of reality*, I wrote about Einstein's refusal to accept quantum mechanics as anything but an incomplete view of reality. In the book, *Critique of Scientific Reason*, the philosopher Kurt Hubner talked about this debate, claiming:

Einstein was claiming that reality consists of substances which remain unaltered by their relationships with other substances while Bohr was claiming that it is the relationships which are primary and those relationships bring substances into existence.

In that chapter, I set out to, in a manner of speaking, discipline modern empirical knowledge to Christian truth which mostly means seeing Creation as being a story told by God for purposes partially, but perhaps substantially, revealed in the Gospels, the communal memories of the incarnate Son of God. So it is that I came to see that not only are we men creatures but so is everything which isn't God. Since things come from relationships, such as those described by quantum fields, we can see a modern justification for the claim of Aquinas: "Things are true," and also for my additional claim: "Truths are thing-like."

Created being, in all its forms and in all its realms even the most abstract, is the manifestation of thoughts God had; it is, so to speak, the setup for the telling of the story of the Son of God making of Himself a sacrifice to the Father. All of it is created because all of it must be manifested by God. None of it, not even such simple truths as " $1 + 1 = 2$ " exist outside of God unless He manifests it in such a way that it becomes an object of love to Him, a thing-like entity which shares, but only in certain ways, in the being of the Creator. Creatures can see abstract truths because we are shaped from such truths and those truths remain part of us and part of what lies around us. Human beings are those who have come to truly see these sorts of truths because we have brains and hormonal flows and so forth which naturally encourage totemic behavior: see Chapter 251, *Darwin, Einstein, and the Totemic Mind*.

We creatures have no part in being outside of what God created and then shaped in various sorts of acts-of-being. We can't shape our minds in response to other than what we can experience in or through the concrete, thing-like being of this universe. Through this thing-like being, we can see even the most abstract truths God has manifested as the raw stuff of all created being.

Created being is created being which is in turn: stuff and relationships and narratives. Stuff and love and stories in a manner of speaking.

So it was that one of the most famous and most important of scientific debates, that between Einstein and Bohr, was really a debate about the

nature of being. Eventually, it became clear that Bohr had the better argument, one equivalent to the metaphysical claim: “[I]t is the relationships which are primary and those relationships bring substances into existence.” Einstein’s argument was equivalent to the metaphysical claim: “[R]eality consists of substances which remain unaltered by their relationships with other substances.” What seems remarkable, or at least should seem remarkable, is that the physics community lined up behind Bohr, most physicists lining up within a few short years, because of the empirical evidence plus the specific theories and equations which were drawn from that evidence. Science had settled a metaphysical question, a fundamental question about being, and it had discovered an answer given a long time ago by St. John the Evangelist and then, set in the context of a philosophical system by Aquinas.

Relations are the primary acts-of-being; stuff comes into existence as a result of relations; and stuff begins to move, forming new relationships, and causing streams of events which evolve and develop into coherent narratives. All of this is created being. God’s love created all contingent being. We change the state of an atom by observing it because any observation is an interaction, the forming of a relationship. We can change others by loving them. We can all be changed by participating in a proper, morally well-ordered story. That is the purpose for which God has created this world and all the other realms of created being even the world of those raised to live with Jesus Christ for time without end.



# 178 Are Communities a Form of Created Being?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1505>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/01/26.]

[I've found over the past two decades that many of my fundamental ideas can be seen in the novels I've finished and put on my website thus far. I think I can say that exploration of communities, what they used to be and what they now are, what they can or should be, was a major theme in all of my novels published to date and maybe more so in the conversion novel I'm working on, as of early 2013. It's interesting, at least to me, that I wasn't consciously aware of many of the ideas I was developing while I was writing novels, as well as a few short stories which seem to have disappeared from my computer's memory. I was unaware of the complexity of the moral conflicts in *The Hermit of Turkey Hill* [36] until a friend read the manuscript and told me it's a 'hard book'. That was years after I'd finished writing it.

See Section 2.2, *Novels*, for a list of my downloadable novels. Short descriptions can be found on page *Unpublished Novels* at [http://loydfueston.com/?page\\_id=18](http://loydfueston.com/?page_id=18). Some readers might better understand, or even enjoy, these ideas in the form of moral fictions which are decidedly non-didactic.

For the remainder of this essay, I'll be assuming an understanding of being as discussed in Chapter 169, *From Abstract Being to Concrete Being and Narratives*. The reader who wants to understand as much as possible might be advised to review that chapter.]

Philosophy begins with a sense of wonder at what is but only becomes true philosophy when coupled with an active exploration of being. That is,

in a formal sense, all philosophical schools and traditions—even such modern specialties as the philosophy of beer—are founded upon metaphysics, an understanding of being. In this sense, created being is understood in positive terms and God’s necessary Being is understood by way of what might be labeled ‘negative metaphysics’, metaphysics which can speak of God only by pointing out the ways in which His own Act-of-being is different from the lesser acts-of-being which we can study in one way or another. By His own Act-of-being, I refer to God’s very existence. The use of this term is indicative of the general scope of the term ‘act-of-being’. It’s not merely an act of creating a material universe nor of sustaining it; it’s the act of existence. And it’s a way of speaking which has annoyed many thinkers over the centuries. Etienne Gilson made the seemingly strange claim: out of all modern philosophers, it was the atheist Jean-Paul Sartre who best understood and accepted this Thomistic concept.

Being is at least what we can touch and point to and study by the methods of physics and chemistry and other empirical sciences. I’ve claimed, partly upon Biblical grounds and partly upon my experiences as a creature, that being is also what moves and interacts and forms relationships and various sorts of narrative streams including the morally ordered narratives which we can call stories. I’ve claimed that relationships are primary, not concrete and thing-like being and not even some general sort of stuff. Thing-like being comes into existence as a result of relationships and can be further shaped by relationships. See the Gospel of St. John or the letters attributed to him or his followers. See Chapter 156, *Einstein and Bohr’s Debate on the Meaning of Reality* for a debate on this important aspect of being from the viewpoints of two prominent physicists. Chapter 169, *From Abstract Being to Concrete Being and Narratives*, is a more extensive, more recent, more complete discussion of various aspects of being; perhaps it comes closer to a good understanding of created being. I write in a different and perhaps more accessible way of what I mean by ‘abstract being’ in three shorter essays found in:

- Chapter 172, *Frozen Soul and Other Delicacies*;
- Chapter 173, *Studying Steam When All You Have is Ice*; and
- Chapter 175, *More on Matter as Frozen Soul*.

I would claim that what we perceive, in a general understanding of perception, is some form of created being despite the possibilities of delusions and hallucinations and the misunderstandings of our own perceptions. We need to be careful, to properly analyze our perceptions of reality; nowadays, we have a great advantage in having so much information on this subject from the empirical research and disciplined analyses of human perceptions and processing of those perceptions. We know a lot about the weaknesses and tendencies to error in our seeing and hearing and so forth, but that isn't a matter to worry about. After all, if we can identify our weaknesses and errors in seeing and hearing, then we can make the appropriate corrections. If we can't see Jupiter's moons too clearly, then we can build telescopes and other instruments, even including flyby vehicles. If I know, and I do, that the floaters in my eyes start showing when I'm tired, then I adjust and consciously try to ignore the small objects or the insects coming from me out of the corners of my eyes. I then rest and my refreshed eyes will filter out those floaters.

Science, physics and chemistry and biology, can tell us much about being and, as I noted above, can help us to adjust for biases and other problems in human perception, more generally—in our minds and hearts and hands. I may create confusion by sometimes using science in the German sense: any disciplined and orderly field of study, but, here, I'll use science in the more limited sense though even in that limited sense there are fields of study, such as history, which straddle fields of study more strictly limited to the concrete realms of being and those fields which try to access, often the wrong way, more abstract realms of created being. (Some fields of science more narrowly understood also have to deal with the abstract, such as physical cosmology or evolutionary theory.) Of course, most literary scholars or historians would be surprised to hear their non-empirical ways of thought described in this way.

Increasingly, science in this narrower sense also tells us much about more abstract realms of being and even about the narrative forms of being in this concrete realm and in the more abstract realms as well. Complexity theory gives us some good examples of ways in which physicists and mathematicians and chemists and others are exploring the formation of complex entities of a sort which naturally participate in narratives, streams of physical events directed forward in time so that even moral purpose becomes possible. I'll state explicitly my claim that we should regard not only relationships but also the narrative aspects of our world as forms of being.

There is no chain of stuff-like created being, going from the higher ranks of angels down to living creatures and then things in the mortal realm. There are instead multiple networks of being which can be charted in this sort of way:

very abstract being => ... => relationships => ... => stuff

very abstract being => ... => relationships => ... => humans

very abstract being => ... => relationships => ... => narratives

stuff and humans and narratives => a world

Don't take the above too seriously yet. It's only indicative and a more realistic group of charts would be more like a plate of spaghetti than a neat schematic. If I don't produce that more realistic, richer and more complex, chart soon, I would hope someone else does.

We should question what physics and chemistry and biology and other sciences in the more limited sense tell us about being. I claim they tell us about some essential aspects of being, as well as a large number of contingent aspects, that is, aspects which could have been different. Again, the better image would bring in streams flowing from abstract regions, which streams are outside of the study matter and methods of those sciences so disciplined and so capable of helping us to understand concrete realms, the sciences which are, more or less, quantitative.

Now that I've confused matters a little, I'll draw some of the threads together to explain why communities are a form of true being, as much a form of being as the forms of being in the entities studied by astronomers and geneticists and chemical engineers. In other words, there isn't stuff, thing-like being, that God created and then relationships and other 'immaterial' non-thing-like forms of being. So far as we creatures are concerned, there is only what God created, that is, what He manifested in this particular Creation. If we perceive communities, if we perceive married couples, if we perceive the universe itself, as true entities, then they are formed from created being; they are not assemblages of things brought together as if business partners bound only by the contract laws of modern, liberal nations. There are no magical forces to be added to what God created so

that, “abracadabra!”, there is now a bride and a bride-groom, and a married couple where once there was a woman and a man.

We modern believers in a radical and incoherent individualism deny too easily our raw perceptions of communal entities. We ignore the underlying being which can't be explained to any significant extent by assembling our understanding of the constituent members and other parts. This is strange on the part of sacramental Christians; after all, some of the special bonds coming down to unite man and woman as a married couple, individuals as a Church, and mortal men as sharers of God's life are brought about by those acts we call Sacraments. The more general, less special bonds are still knowable as the glue of a sacramental world.

We perceive the abstractions of time and space without being able to fully justify either one. We take their existence as some sort of raw truth. In recent centuries, human beings of all sorts have developed high levels of skill and some rather fantastic instrumentation for exploring empirical reality. We humans have also developed the tools of mathematics and general reasoning to analyze at least some small parts of the mountains of empirical facts and to create some serious bodies of knowledge. Not only do communities exist as entities to study, entities with their own properties not definable by summing up the properties of their parts, but the very effort to explore and analyze and exploit, properly and improperly, our world has led to the formation of fantastically complex communities of a sort not seen before, such as those of science or those which formed by mostly peaceable means as explorers and pioneers from different cultures came together to form, say, Kansas City. Cities larger and more complex than Babylon grew up rapidly by the efforts of those who, not long before, hadn't known of the existence of the very sorts of human beings laboring by their side. When such efforts worked, the result was far more solid than a band of radical individuals working together for their own self-interest. This isn't always to the good. The political community named *United States* has grown into a morally disordered nation and the very reality of this community is what will make it hard to reform. It might well turn out that the path to reform, to moral re-ordering, will lead to a great loss of wealth and power and perhaps a (probably temporary) breakup into multiple countries more coherent and better organized than the current perversely adolescent giant.

This understanding isn't the result of an ideological commitment on my part. My emotional attitudes incline me to a very stable and traditional viewpoint, but my greater commitment is to be open to what is revealed as

God tells His story.

We all bring a story, adequate or not, to our explorations of the world around us, a circular activity since that world is a story being told by God. We bring a story and begin to fill in details and to fix some problems with that story. For the most part, men and women, boys and girls, inherit most of the story in which they find themselves. But...

Every so often, we find out something that should lead us to start revising our inherited stories, including the grand story which forms the communal mind of a civilization, the grand story which Jews and Christians consider to be the story truly being told by God. This doesn't mean that Jews and Christians think they accurately know or fully understand the story God is telling, but it does mean we each feel we understand some very important aspects of that story.

# 179 Why We (Mostly) Don't Need Categories in Metaphysics

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1774>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/02/06.]

In Chapter 53, *How a Christian Finds Metaphysical Truths in Empirical Reality*, I argued that Christians should respond confidently to what lies around us, to our concrete and thing-like realm of Creation and to all the other realms which remain yet in our universe which is our world when seen in light of God's purposes. I concluded that chapter by claiming:

Contingent being, that which is not God, is a coherent collection of manifested thoughts of God. The workings of evolution, natural selection and genetic processes, are among those manifested thoughts as are the quantum processes which bring matter into being and the processes which bring spacetime into being and shape it, the historical processes which have shaped human communities and the artistic processes which have shown us the beauty in Creation.

I'd like to elaborate on one aspect of traditional thought in general and traditional metaphysical thought in particular. In doing so, I'll be overlapping Chapter 53, *How a Christian Finds Metaphysical Truths in Empirical Reality*. Please bear with me.

Traditional metaphysics deals with abstract categories and I've argued against the use of categories and categorical reasoning: see Chapter 299, *Sex and Categorical Reasoning in a World of Evolution and Development*. I wouldn't really recommend a categorical rejection of categorical reasoning, only a realization that such reasoning and the related slotting of entities

and relationships and so on into categories are dangerous in the way of fast-setting concrete. They give us frozen images of a dynamic Creation, sometimes good and useful frozen images but frozen nonetheless.

But there are many who think well so long as they have a schema with nodes drawn from well-defined categories, some of those men can be truly considered great thinkers or doers.

For those who have studied at least lightly the field of modern dynamics: categories are like a relatively tight cluster of points on a Poincare section, the tight clustering would represent a temporarily stable or quasi-stable orbit through the state space of the underlying dynamic system. Any efforts to predict the state, or 'nature', of the entity being formed by and in response to that dynamic process will work until it doesn't, that is, until the orbit moves and a new point shows up on the Poincare section which, as you might guess, is a section through a space of states or phases of a dynamic process; the section is a plane through that abstract, mathematical space and shows where the orbits pass through. Conceptually, Europe moved to a new 'orbit' when the Middle Ages became the Renaissance and to another 'orbit' with the Enlightenment and so on. The analog of a cluster of points on a Poincare section is a snapshot of Medieval men and Medieval communities; we have trouble even seeing let alone making sense of other clusters from past cultures and few can even imagine the clusters which might be future cultures. In fact, the huge number of dimensions (each corresponding to a variable such as musical styles) which are involved in a state space of human possibilities would make it impossible for us to make sense of the corresponding Poincare section, **if** we could even construct it. I'll speak as if it were a simpler problem since I'm dealing with principles for now and for the foreseeable future.

We also create snapshot views of men and communities in our own age or—more plausibly—in our own culture in our own age. We idealize those views, thinking that men were ever like us. Surely, those Neolithic human beings must have been like us but without knowing so much. To which I respond that the human mind itself came into being as human beings responded to their environments in such a way that they began to generalize and eventually to think in truly abstract ways. I might be wrong in conjecturing a human mind with abstract reasoning powers appeared around 500BC, but, if so, it's an error in detail. In fact, it's doubtful that even most well-educated and intelligent thinkers have adopted abstract modes of reasoning, other than being able to recycle the thoughts

of great and long-dead thinkers: see Chapter 408, *The Need for Abstractions in Moral Self-understanding*, for my discussion of what was wrong in the thoughts of the very intelligent and well-educated Puritan leaders of New England during “the war known as *King Phillip’s War* [see [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/King\\_Phillips\\_War](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/King_Phillips_War)], a war waged by some of the Indian tribes against the European settlers and some Indian allies.” In that essay, I explain that the European colonists failed to intend (develop towards) “a proper abstraction that would have allowed a defense of their own culture but also an understanding of the human good in a different way of life, the European settlers raised their particular way of life to a self-righteous ideal. A conflict of cultures was seen as a war between God’s servants, the White settlers, and Satan’s slaves, the Indians.”

In many of those troubled times—including our deeply troubled age, human communities and the individuals which were formed by and in response to their environments were suddenly (on historical time-scales) moving through a different region of that space of the phases which are different human possibilities. A very complex space indeed.

Categories do seem to work during times of stability. Think of categorical reasoning as being cheat-sheets to the nature of a complex world ever revealing itself. I referred to these sorts of cheat-sheets from a slightly different angle in Chapter 641, *Enriching Our Moral World: Simple Is Digested Complexity*.

What we now know of reality, manifested thoughts of God, would lead us to language different from traditional metaphysical language; we need a language (and underlying concepts) of evolutionary and developmental processes rather than a language which implies that we in the midst of this grand story can see the ‘true’ structures underlying evolving life and developing social and moral structures and relationships. We need to be able to speak of that state space and the complex orbits we travel through it as individuals and as communities rather than speaking only of snapshots.

Engineers and physicists and other scientists long ago learned that their systems, a testable piece of machinery or the solar system, are dynamic and the current state of those systems are snapshots—useful in their own way but dangerous if taken as accurate descriptions of either past or future. They provide such descriptions only when seen as moving images: a snapshot of Neolithic men and communities followed by a snapshot of the period when agriculture seems to have been invented in what is now Turkey followed by a snapshot of one or another early civilization supplemented by

one of an area where civilization failed to develop and so on to the 21st century.

We should, of course, remember that this crude moving image has to be built up over various cultures as well as over time for, say, the eastern Mediterranean civilizations. These snapshots and the moving images they can help to generate must also include matters of individual intelligence and of communal intellect. As I said above, “A very complex space indeed.”

In other words, all human capacities for knowledge and understanding have evolved and developed and we can see those same capacities developing over time and across cultures if we apply our imaginations to our historical knowledge (wherein I include anthropological and archaeological knowledge).

We humans evolved in such a way that our brains can shape themselves to encapsulate reality as we actively respond to it with mind and heart and hands; that reality includes the human past or at least our best knowledge and understanding of that past; it even includes speculative knowledge and understandings of human possibilities for the future. Yet, we bring to these tasks of knowing and understanding specific ways of thinking, intuitions from our evolutionary past and also ways of thinking as individuals and as members of communities.

As a Christian trying to respond honestly to God's world, I believe that the necessary if not the sufficient rules of metaphysics can be drawn from the simple constraint that created being at all levels of most abstract to most concrete must not be in conflict with what we know of concrete being. In principle, we can only know of metaphysics what God has put into this particular Creation and, in fact, we can only know what has become known to men by a particular point in history.

The individual intelligences and communal intellects of Western, Christian Civilization have been driven forward for 1500 years or so partly by the battles between those most ready to learn from God's Creation and those most convinced that God's Creation is something we were called to bring to order. The first are convinced in one way or another that we are called to shape our minds in response to reality and the second think reality is to be ordered by transcendental ideas accessible to at least some human minds. This is clearly an oversimplification—many have mixed beliefs, part Plato and part Hume in a manner of speaking.

I'm clearly on the empirical side. After all: What reason do we have to believe that human beings, a species which arose in this concrete realm by

way of evolutionary and developmental processes, can access transcendental truths?



# 180 What is Life? A Possible Partial Answer

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1779>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/02/17.]

There are various angles to be taken about the nature of life and how it came into existence. One question in open play right now with the discovery of so many planets throughout our own galaxy and even other galaxies is: Does life come into existence as a result of processes likely to occur often or is it something likely to come into existence very rarely? A related question is: Can we even determine if life exists out there before we find a way to get to other stars?

Some of the most important issues can be labeled as ‘physics’; if these prove dominant, a proposition argued against by many scientists and some engineers, then we’ll be able to decide pretty definitively if there is likely to be a lot of life out there in this universe; if not, then we may have to regard the question as a purely empirical matter to be settled only by finding evidence of life, or lots of life, out there.

In an overview article, *A New Physics Theory of Life* found at <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-new-physics-theory-of-life/>, we can read:

Why does life exist?

Popular hypotheses credit a primordial soup, a bolt of lightning and a colossal stroke of luck. But if a provocative new theory is correct, luck may have little to do with it. Instead, according to the physicist proposing the idea, the origin and subsequent evolution of life follow from the fundamental laws of nature and "should be as unsurprising as rocks rolling downhill."

From the standpoint of physics, there is one essential difference between living things and inanimate clumps of carbon atoms: The former tend to be much better at capturing energy from their environment and dissipating that energy as heat. Jeremy England, a 31-year-old assistant professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, has derived a mathematical formula that he believes explains this capacity. The formula, based on established physics, indicates that when a group of atoms is driven by an external source of energy (like the sun or chemical fuel) and surrounded by a heat bath (like the ocean or atmosphere), it will often gradually restructure itself in order to dissipate increasingly more energy. This could mean that under certain conditions, matter inexorably acquires the key physical attribute associated with life.

"You start with a random clump of atoms, and if you shine light on it for long enough, it should not be so surprising that you get a plant," England said.

Read the entire article for a very interesting perspective on life from a viewpoint which hints of reductionism but such viewpoints have often produced good results and have been folded into larger and richer understandings.

My opinion is that this is an empirical question, though certainly one with mathematical aspects subject to theoretical investigation.

In any case, The article is about a physicist who has proposed a profoundly clever answer I find too neat and straightforward for this world, but that's a matter of intuition which, as I've explained before, is a feeling for reality built into our brains by natural selection—it reflects some serious amount of truth of a utilitarian sort which is to say that it corresponds to some aspects of reality well enough to have allowed survival of family-lines. Intuition, even that of a Plato or an Einstein, is most certainly not guaranteed to be true. Our intuitions are correlated with truth. There is no strict linkage nor is there only an accidental relationship.

In any case, I find it quite plausible that Professor England's answer might be part of a more complex answer. He implies in his words as recorded in this article that is the case and the more profound answer lies in the relationships between physical entities in this universe. Though it be quite wrong to think of the universe as being an organism, it's equally wrong to

think of it as inert, a mere setting for things to happen leading to life and then to the evolution of a great variety of species and individuals. One part of the work of Professor England is the admission that the physical universe is active in ways that lead to organization of various sorts and at various scales of spacetime.

Near the end of the article, we can read a comment by Ard Louis, a biophysicist at Oxford University:

If England's approach stands up to more testing, it could further liberate biologists from seeking a Darwinian explanation for every adaptation and allow them to think more generally in terms of dissipation-driven organization. They might find, for example, that "the reason that an organism shows characteristic X rather than Y may not be because X is more fit than Y, but because physical constraints make it easier for X to evolve than for Y to evolve," Louis said.

And this seems to be part of what I'm claiming: life, like the human mind, is shaped by active responses to what lies around it; thus it is what lies around us which gives us, and bacteria, possibilities. I should also note that my relatively casual readings in evolutionary biology, including that strain of thought found in books about the brain, would lead me to claim that the serious thinkers in the field already know and advocate what Louis says in the above quote, though those other thinkers probably haven't stated their positions in quite the clean and potentially useful way that England has of dealing with the issue. When they are truly appropriate, well-defined mathematical models of processes or entities are truly useful.



# 181 The Basic Stuff of Created Being

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1860>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/08/01.]

Very serious mathematicians of a philosophical bent of mind were trying in the late 1800s into the early 1900s to found mathematics upon logical bedrock, some of them intending to do so by first showing a few logical rules could generate the natural numbers. Those mathematicians set up proposed systems, the best of which developed elaborate machinery which included terms such as  $x(0)$ ,  $x(1)$ ,  $x(2)$ , etc. The idea was to start with nil or zero and declare a successor element to zero, “1”, and then to declare a successor element to 1, “2”, and so forth. The problem, and it was missed at first by even such brilliant thinkers as Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead, was that the natural numbers [0, 1, 2, 3...] were used as indices for symbols meant to build up the set of natural numbers from very simple thoughts of a logical sort. They had assumed the very ordering and counting processes they were trying to prove legitimate and so ended an effort to find an easy way to build at least natural numbers from the basic building blocks of nil and a successor operation. [A minor point—mathematicians don’t seem to agree as to whether or not ‘0’ belongs in the natural numbers.]

One brilliant mathematician from that time made a particularly interesting claim, used in recent years as the title of a book written by the physicist, Stephen Hawking—see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen\\_Hawking](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_Hawking). The original words of Leopold Kronecker, a 19th century mathematician of great accomplishment, were : “God made the natural numbers [or integers according to some translators, but negative

numbers add some complications to these efforts], all else is the work of man.” (See <http://www-history.mcs.st-andrews.ac.uk/Biographies/Kronecker.html>.) Kronecker “believed in the reduction of all mathematics to arguments involving only the integers and a finite number of steps.” Like the Pythagoreans, Kronecker didn’t even believe in the irrational numbers, let alone the likes of Cantor’s transfinite numbers.

Kronecker believed in the integers (or natural numbers) as the building blocks, along with well-defined finite operations, of all mathematics. I say that there are no building blocks as such—for what it’s worth, I’m much more open than Kronecker and his followers to non-finite operations in proofs and other mathematical activities. I even believe in Cantor’s transfinite numbers and other strange entities from abstract being.

Mathematics is the study of some types of abstract being, which types have increased greatly in the Modern Age. What is most important for this discussion is that mathematics concerns relationships and I’ll claim those relationships generate the number ‘9’ and those, perhaps with a few others, also generate the number  $\pi$  (3.14159...). So it is that I can claim that Russell and Whitehead and their colleagues in the decades around 1900 were on the right path except that they had too impoverished a sense of relationship as they tried to generate numbers from only a successor relationship. In fact, what is needed is the entirety of the sets of relationships which are dealt with in number theory and that implies the task misunderstood by those brilliant thinkers is ultimately no more and no less than the field of mathematics in its entirety. (Stated this way, my program seems to be similar to that of the researchers working on Category Theory, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category\\_theory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category_theory), except that I’m considering mathematics and any possible abstractions covering multiple fields to be real, if very abstract, being. Essentially, I’m trying to understand mathematics as part of a program to understand all forms of created being. I’m a metaphysician and theologian rather than a technical mathematician. Or physicist. Or historian.)

How is mathematics to be understood? By doing it.

How is life to be understood? By living it.

How is the universe to be understood? By living in it, by exploring it, by thinking clearly and exactly about it.

How is the world to be understood? By seeing the universe in light of God’s purposes or perhaps the moral order seen by many including some atheists and pagans.

This points to an answer, at least currently plausible, to the question: How can we explain created being?

I've denied there are fundamental building-blocks as such and the task arises to develop a new program which will be part of a new civilization or perhaps a revived Western Civilization. This program will itself help define the the intellect or communal mind of the citizens of this new or revived civilization. Furthermore, as a Christian, I'll claim this intellect to be that of the pilgrim Body of Christ, an intellect to be completed and perfected in the world of the resurrected—as so much will be completed and perfected.

I'll take a stab at understanding this program and can promise I'll not yet be clear and exact. That will take years, and perhaps multiple generations, of effort.

Multiple streams of abstract created being have fed into this world:

1. some abstract being shaped into matter and energy and fields,
2. some remaining relatively abstract in the form of relationships which change over time and are called stories or narratives, and
3. some remaining relatively abstract in the form of relationships we ourselves detect, and use, as our minds or souls.

Our universe can be defined as being made of mostly, perhaps entirely, the concrete stuff in the first item above. But our universe becomes a world when we also consider the more abstract stuff which I sometimes simplify (or perhaps oversimplify) as being the manifestation of God's purposes or moral order or even rationality or reason to someone with beliefs similar to those of Einstein.

I certainly think the above list is incomplete but I have no intention of building lists which are likely to have arbitrary elements until I can develop some more powerful tools, or at least point others to more powerful tools, to bring all of this into a more clear and more exact focus.

For now...

We talk and scientists do their research as if there are building blocks of concrete entities, such as rattlesnakes and stars. And human beings and bricks. These concrete entities exist in spacetime, well described so far by Einstein's General Theory of Relativity. These concrete entities are made of layers of successively more particular, that is—more concrete, bits of matter. (Many physicists would advocate speaking of energy in the sense

of energy-matter— $E = MC^2$ —rather than matter; make the substitution if you wish.) So far as concrete forms of being go, we can actually describe and quantify the transition from the most concrete of abstract being to truer concrete being. This description and quantification is the work of quantum physicists and all others (such as computer chip designers) who use the field. (Unfortunately, the systems of equations are not generally solvable by known techniques, but some powerful results have come from even the so-far limited successes of applying quantum physics in the real world. And, from a fundamental viewpoint, experiments can be done which prove quantum physics works to an extreme level of accuracy.)

Stars are complex entities, swirling magnetic fields and plasma encircling matter dense enough to undergo nuclear fusion—and this is a rather grotesque oversimplification. Rattlesnakes are complex entities, DNA and RNA and mitochondria and other forms of flesh and blood—all interacting in a remarkably complex metabolism which is something like a self-regulating system so long as you consider the environment of the rattlesnake to be part of the system—but this is also an oversimplification. Human beings have all the complexity of rattlesnakes plus they form minds which are complex systems of concrete and abstract relationships—this is perhaps the greatest of these oversimplifications. All of these entities come together in stories and in one great story that is the world.

Relationships.

We assume that human communities form by way of relationships, though we often assume wrongly it's the softer and more sentimental relationships—love in various forms—which are crucial in forming strong human communities. In fact, it's something of a truism among modern sociologists that the strongest bonds in human communities are those of dependencies.

In any case, I already noted above that I consider relationships to be primary over stuff. Stuff is formed from relationships, as we are told both by the Bible and by quantum physics. (See Chapter 156, *A Christian View of Einstein's and Bohr's Debate on Reality* and Chapter 157, *Quantum Mechanics and Moral Formation*.)

I'd like to speculate further but I'm trying to be cautious for now as I am not confident yet that I know how to advance to the next level of understanding. More powerful tools are needed and I'm exploring in the fields of geometry and topology, especially as used by modern physicists. Maybe I'm choosing the wrong tools. If so, someone will come along to

show it can be done with some fancy group theory or just simple forms of category theory or whatever.

There is something that comes to mind which might help others to bring these claims of mine into better focus. We might be able to imagine, or at least think ourselves to imagine, particles as having the sort of existence as to be able to exist independent of a greater universe—other than perhaps some sort of spacetime. I think we fool ourselves into imagining an isolated particle, let alone an isolated human being, but I can certainly convince myself that I can do so, even when I don't really believe myself.

The most fundamental relationships of our concrete universe, those of spacetime as described by the General Theory of Relativity and those of matter-energy as described by quantum physics, had to pretty much come into existence in their current form and to remain in existence for our concrete universe to come into existence and remain in existence. Without that full package of relationships, there couldn't have been, couldn't be, a single electron or neutron or electromagnetic field.

If I'm right, our ability to imagine particles existing apart from the entire universe as we know it is delusionary, though understandable. This is to say we can look at a rock and seemingly strip away all that is around it so that only the rock exists, but this is an error, perhaps useful, in our imaginative thinking. Everything gets still messier when we consider the other forms of abstract being which shape concrete entities by way of relationships, and thus do show up in physical manifestations that are explorable and maybe even quantifiable—such as brain structures.

So what could it mean to 'explain' the concrete being of this universe in terms of 'elementary particles' or the like? For the most part, it's a good strategy for exploring the concrete stuff of this universe but it's ultimately misleading. Such thinkers as Wittgenstein were close to the truth in proposing the search for the smallest building blocks would lead to the universe in its totality. My enhancement of this claim is, for now—merely, to point to relationships as being definitive of this concrete universe and to take all that creates or shapes concrete being as true being.

This isn't entirely a new claim. Some scientists and philosophers and thinkers in other fields have proposed related ideas, though more than a bit cowardly in following up on the implications. The uniqueness of my claim lies in its context as part of a greater understanding of this concrete universe as a part of a Creation, the work of the God of Jesus Christ, a Creation which must be understood by hard work, investigation of empirical reality

by open-minded theologians as well as poets and novelists and historians and painters and music-composers as well as physicists and chemists and geometers and evolutionary biologists and engineers and politicians responsive to reality. And so on. To a Christian such as me, this must all be understood in light of Christian revelation, that is, this universe is part of a Creation which was intended, and is intending in the Thomistic sense, to be the place of birth and growth of the Body of Christ—including the Incarnate Son of God and there is another world which will be the home for time without end of that Body when it contains all those resurrected to share the life of the Son of God.

An explanation of the world, the universe seen in its greater order even ordered to God's purposes, can't rely just any ideas of elementary relationships or elementary particles. Elementary relationships exist early—as a complex body of relationships—and then elementary particles come to be. Both of these are an early part of a narrative in which higher-level relationships and particles and then complex, concrete entities come into existence and begin to shape matter into complex entities, including galaxies and gorillas.

For a very preliminary discussion of some of my efforts to find more powerful tools for a more clear and more exact understanding of created being, abstract and concrete, see Chapter 144, *Adopting Mathematical Reasoning in Non-quantitative Fields of Thought*.

# 182 Created Being is Created Being is Created Being. But...

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2271>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/09/06.]

I've claimed that "Created Being is Created Being is Created Being" some number of times, but there it's a little more complicated than that. Those who've read some of my metaphysical writings might have some ideas on the topic. "Some ideas" is really all that I have.

The basic situation is this:

1. As a Christian, I believe God created what is not Him from nothingness, absolute nil and not empty space. In addition, and consistent with the Christian Testament and most of the great Christian thinkers, I believe Creation is some sort of embodiment of the Word, that is the Son of God. In my way of speaking and writing about this, I consider that God embodied some fundamental truths as the raw stuff of Creation. This raw stuff, embodied truths, is the source of all created being, abstract and concrete, qualitative and quantitative.
2. Our world of concrete things is actually a mixture of various sorts of created being, abstract and concrete, qualitative and quantitative, though dominated—in some ways—by thing-like being.

How does the raw stuff of creation, embodied truths, get to this concrete world? How does item #1 above get to item #2?

I don't really know. The first item is my way of stating the Christian belief that only God necessarily exists and that He is the Creator and Sustainer of contingent being, all that is not God. The second item is

a straightforward statement of the nature of this world in which we find ourselves, a world of pretty little girls and rattlesnakes and interstellar gas clouds and mathematical truths and love and honor and all sorts of concrete things, abstract relationships between concrete things and between a concrete thing and an abstract thing, and so on. I'm far from sure what the pathways are from #1 to #2.

It does seem clear that many modern thinkers, based upon an unreachable and undesirable goal of many physicists, think that there is only one sort of being in this world and that some single, quantitative theory of mathematics will cover everything. This is particle physics mutated into unconscious, superstitious metaphysics. It ignores all sorts of issues, including that of qualitative being vs quantitative being and abstract being vs concrete being. (It's conceivable that they are the same issue.)

This universe is such that it seems very implausible that there could be a complex soul-like entity entering this concrete (but not only) world. The Old Testament covenants of God seem to be better stated given modern knowledge as something like this: God in His freely chosen role of Creator has constrained Himself in that role to act according to His acts-of-being. In other words, He doesn't act in one way when He had determined the nature of created being and then take on the role of a magician to perform miracles. This doesn't deny miracles but rather redefines them as acts of the Creator within the rules He Himself set; those miracles might be highly unlikely but possible within the laws He set up to govern thing-like being and other forms of created being.

We can now say, with something approaching certainty, that thing-like being, matter, comes into this world by way of some process which shapes some more abstract form of being, quantum wavefunctions, into that more concrete form. Various sorts of particles combine to form ordinary matter along with the leptons, most famously the electron. There are also force carriers such as the gluons which hold together quarks in protons and neutrons, the photons which carry electromagnetic force, the graviton which carries gravitational force. There are also many strange beasts in this zoo of particles. In any case, all of this stuff forms the matter, the ordinary stuff, of our world of thing-like being.

It would be reasonable to think that qualitative being would have a similar, though not quantitatively expressible, system—truly elementary qualitative bits of being, probably mostly relationships, which combine to composite forms of qualitative being. At the same time that qualitative

being is not likely to be at all quantitatively expressible until events occur and, say, love leaves behind its tracks, it would seem to me that it's time for philosophers and theologians to move to use of what might be called qualitative tools of modern mathematics. These would add a large amount of disciplined analytic power to our efforts to understand, most importantly, human communities in their full-blown modern complexity. For some reason, social scientists and the occasional physicist who tries to analyze human political structures or the like are inclined to try quantitative modeling, which has a place in any overall understanding but can't provide the basic framework for analysis and understanding.

I've argued that moral order is built upon more fundamental forms of order, such as that of primitive colonies or herds of animals. Love itself might be a higher-level, non-quantitative relationship of a complex and sophisticated kind, but—again—even love leaves behind evidence at least somewhat quantifiable in its effects upon human events.

We need to address these issues to understand forms of created being other than physical stuff and its constituents. We need to begin exploring use of forms of mathematics which are used already for qualitative analyses of abstract spaces or abstract properties of geometric entities and the like—topology and category theory and various forms of exotic geometric studies and others.

This will result in a more profound understanding of being but might well leave the radical empiricists and quantitative analysts standing tall in one way—the past, what has happened and left a record of structures and relationships and events might well be subject to quantitative analysis. It might be only the slippery present and the future which holds qualitative being.

[As a very relevant side-comment, I'm working on a book which will present a very basic look at the use of qualitative mathematics to discuss human being, individual and communal. In effect, I'll be trying to provide a way of discussing communal human being as real, not just a nominal way of talking about a gathering of individual human beings.]



## Part V

### What is a Universe?



# 183 Introduction: What is a Universe?

In this part, I've collected essays or articles from my weblogs, *Acts of Being* at <http://loydfueston.com/> and *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* at <http://loydf.wordpress.com/>, in which I deal with the nature of a universe. Mostly, these writing lay the groundwork for an explicit understanding of 'universe' and that understanding is still developing in my mind and will be so long as I live, God willing.



# 184 Symmetry-breaking, From Physics and Mathematics to Metaphysics

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=47>. It was finished and uploaded on 2006/12/05.]

In my first book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], I danced around an analogy that I can now see a little more clearly though I'm beginning to fear it's more than just an analogy. Matter, particular being, results from a broken symmetry of metaphysical truths. In this claim, I'm basically exploring an expansion of the symmetry breaking which underlies modern cosmology, particle physics, and quantum physics. I'll assume a lot on the part of the reader of this entry, but I will say that the intuitive idea of symmetry should be enough to understand what I'm saying. For example, a sphere is a symmetrical object in three-dimensional space under rotation because it's the same object no matter how you turn it. On the other hand, it changes in some sense when it is moved to the left or the right. In modern physics, mathematical descriptions of, say, electromagnetism and the weak nuclear force (responsible for the explosive power of nuclear fission) are such that they are broken or defective versions of a symmetry which is assumed to provide the mathematical description of a more general force labeled as 'electroweak'. This would be equivalent to breaking up a sphere into two pieces unlike each other and neither like a sphere.

In that book, I followed the standard cosmological model, the so-called Big Bang, back in time and projected that beginning of the expansionary phase of our universe was also a shaping by God of a more general sort of being, a shaping which was—at least in some ways – a breaking of the

symmetry, the sheer elegance, of metaphysical truths. The best and most important example is that the principle of unity became gravity. This is the best and most important example just because it is likely the only metaphysical principle that ‘decayed’ into something specific in this particularized universe. At the least, this would indicate the importance of gravity.

My main motive for pushing further in this direction has been stated in prior blog entries and partially in my book *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41]: I do not view God as a processor of knowledge and truths and ideas which somehow pre-exist Him but rather as the Creator of all, including truths. This doesn’t lessen their status as truths. It merely recognizes that the term ‘all-powerful Creator’ means just that. And I think that just that implies that truths are created thing-like. And this claim runs parallel, in my way of thought, to the Thomistic claim that things are truth.

Things are true.

Truths are thing-like.

But, though created, truths are not particular in the same way as things. Truths are more elegant, more smooth, more regular. We could say more symmetric. Things, including living creatures, come to be when truths are broken down in some way, when that elegance, smoothness, regularity, is shattered in some way; when the symmetry is broken.

We are formed at the margins of order and disorder. We are jagged creatures, forming by processes that often leave us rather grotesque in our intermediary stages. Our moral selves are diseased in some parts and robust in other parts, but we can often be the hosts to cancerous processes in those moral selves, in our souls and our minds.

If we were better ordered, we would not go through these particular life-processes, but it’s not clear in what sense we would be alive. We would be crystalline structures, mathematically elegant. Can we imagine the Son of God bothering to incarnate Himself in a world of entities resembling theorems of mathematics? I can’t, but I’m a creature of flesh-and-blood. That gives me some strong prejudices but I believe those prejudices to be at least partially confirmed by one rather obvious fact: God chose to make this world and not that more elegant and more symmetric world. Or rather, in terms of my worldview as expressed in *To See a World in a Grain of*

*Sand* [41], God first created that more symmetric world, a world describable as a manifestation of a metaphysical system, and then He created this world by breaking some of those symmetries and shaping this physical universe, a universe which becomes a world when seen in light of the Creator's purposes.

Now I'm stuck because I believe that we exist to be prepared for a truer life as God's companions. If we came from a breakdown of symmetry, then we might first think that our healing would lead to a restoration of that symmetry, but that can't be. At least I don't think so. Life is factual and personal, not symmetric. And now the reader aware of the history of human thought can see that I've restated, in terms of modern physics and mathematics, the age-old cartoonish dilemma between a version of 'to be' and 'to do'. In terms of this dilemma, shown most clearly in Herbert Read's fable in novel-form, *The Green Child*, the perfect being is (maybe) a crystal—frozen in its perfection and symmetry for time without end. Doing is seen as being made possible, and necessary, by the sorts of change that involve pain and decay.

Perhaps this is a false dilemma? Perhaps there is some state of dynamic being that surpasses the mixture of order and disorder we find in this life and also surpasses any human conception of the order hinted at by the concept of symmetry?

It's time to talk about God. Usually we ascend to some greater understanding of God by starting from His self-revelations, most perfectly the Son of God Himself. We try to come to some deeper, creaturely understanding of God by considering those revelations through analogies drawn from God's Creation, which is an image of God Himself, but really just an image of—in a manner of speaking—a few of God's thoughts. After proposing some analogies describing God and based upon aspects of His Creation, we begin the process of qualifying or even denying those analogies. This last process leads us into negative theology, where we begin to make strange statements of the sort:

God is perfectly simple.

Roughly speaking, the negative theologians of the Middle Ages made this particular statement to correct wrongful thoughts about God which might come from Aristotelian explanations of movement—movement was possible only to entities having parts and thus subject to creaturely change, including decay.

We are at a stage of human thought where many of our most basic metaphors have been overthrown by modern empirical research in history and literary studies as well as physics and biology. Our stock of revealed truths which came from God in a fairly direct way is small and now our stock of speculative truths of God the Creator is known to be wrong in some deep sense—as will always be ultimately true of any creaturely speculations. Take the above statement of negative theology: God is perfectly simple. This statement doesn't particularly impress me because I don't hold the Aristotelian concept of motion. On the other hand, it still points to a basic truth, ultimately the idea that God, unlike us, isn't embedded in durational time. But it doesn't work for me as a corrective because my metaphors, poorly formed as they are for now, don't seem to need such a corrective.

The correctives I need are for my preferred metaphors dealing with order and disorder. To be sure, I speak in these terms when discussing Creation and creatures, particularly the human aspects of Creation. And yet I believe, and have stated in various places, that we use our firm knowledge and our speculations about Creation to better understand God and what He expects from us. My metaphors, based on truths about empirical reality and speculations from those truths, should lead to new ways of understanding our treasure trove of revealed truths. For example, a more accurate understanding of human nature and how the human race came into existence will help us better understand what the Son of God did by His Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection.

## 184.1 More on Symmetry-breaking as of 2011/06/13

As of 2011/06/13, I would add three perhaps clarifying comments:

1. The concept of breaking symmetry seems to me to be a way of describing some ways, but not all, of moving from more abstract forms of being to more concrete forms of being. Breaking symmetry is to the movement from abstract forms to concrete forms as mathematics is to metaphysics. At least, sort of.
2. When I say God creates truths, I mostly intend to say He manifests some particular, probably absolutely infinite, set of truths as the raw

stuff of created being, the most abstract and fundamental level of created being, what I called the *Primordial Universe* in *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41]. I don't have a clue of how to speak about the truths to be found in the fullness of God, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, in His transcendent fullness.

3. In the years since I first wrote this posting, I have raised some possibilities about discussing not only abstract being but also the other world shaped from abstract being, the world of the resurrected or Heaven. See Chapter 191, *What are the Thermodynamic Properties of Heaven?* for a mere hint of how we can discuss Heaven in terms which make sense to modern men.



# 185 Why I Misuse the Term 'Universe'

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=59>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/01/11.]

In my book *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], I used the term 'universe' to mean pretty much the Einsteinian universe: all that is bound by the same gravitational field as each mortal man, the Sun, the other stars in the Milky Way, the other observable galaxies, and so forth. This is not quite the usual definition, at least for philosophers and students of the Greek language. The traditional definition of universe is:

**universe** All created things viewed as constituting one system or whole; the whole body of things, or of phenomena; the *to pan* of the Greeks, the *mundus* of the Latins; the world; creation. [140]

In this more typical definition, the universe is seen as being "All created things". Clearly, a Christian cannot accept this definition unless he's willing to say that the World of the Resurrected is in this universe or willing to speak of this universe as being something radically different and more inclusive than the term designates when used by modern thinkers. It seems to me that it makes sense to use the term 'universe' for the maximal gravitationally bound system. This definition captures what most modern thinkers are targeting with the term, certainly most physicists. And so there might be much outside of the universe which can be plausibly conjectured by disciplined speculation, but that much is not gravitationally bound to our particular thing-like realm of being, our concrete realm of being.

If we trace the development of the universe back in time, we approach the so-called Big Bang, often wrongly seen as an act of creation. From inside

the universe, we couldn't see a true act of creating a universe from nothing if only because we couldn't see nothing. What we see is a change of state and we can only speculate on the state of this universe before that event. In fact, we can only speculate as to whether we could even describe that state given what we know from inside this universe, this phase of Creation as I will call it at times.

My speculation is based on the story of this universe as reconstructed by physicists and astronomers. Following that story backward in time, we can see thing-like being melting away to those subatomic entities explored by particle physicists, but also including fields and energy. At some point accessible only to human imagination, these three types of entities, particles and fields and energy begin to melt down into...

What? Well, first of all, note that gravity is not part of this melting process. It remains intact so far as theorists currently know. They may or may not find a way to make gravity melt down in their theories, equivalently—to combine general relativity and quantum mechanics into one theory. I doubt if they will, so far as thing-like being is concerned, though there might well be a way to combine them on the other side of that so-called Big Bang. But I doubt that as well.

Actually, as I understand the views of Roger Penrose, he thinks gravity 'held' the degrees of freedom of this universe at the beginning of this phase of expansion—that is, that gravity held matter in the low-probability configuration that was a low-entropy state. This low-entropy at the beginning of the universe brings us the 'laws' of thermodynamics and the sorts of processes which underly life. This sort of a view might be analogical to my reason for conjecturing gravity doesn't melt down into a generic sort of stuff along with electrons, strong nuclear forces, quarks, electromagnetic fields, and so forth.

My conjecture is this:

God is the Creator of truths, including metaphysical truths, and not just the Creator of thing-like being. On the other side of that Big Bang, lies a form of abstract being which could be regarded as the manifestation of truths God chose for this Creation, all of it and not just this universe. Gravity is likely the particularized form of some metaphysical principle of unity.

In *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], I referred to this prior state

of this universe as the Primordial Universe and conjectured it is the abstract and fundamental stuff of all Creation. The World of the Resurrected, not subject to the same processes of development and decay, is also shaped from that abstract stuff which is the Primordial Universe.

To be more exact, there might be other phases lying before the Big Bang but after the Primordial Universe, but that's not an important qualification for this discussion.

Before speaking further, I'll quickly address the question:

How did Christians speak before Einstein gave us a coherent definition of the universe as a single gravitational system?

Traditionally, Christians thought in terms of what I call the Aristotelian Cosmos, because that Greek thinker pulled together the ancient pagan ways of thought into a coherent system and not because he was the discoverer of that model which was the Heavens, the earth, and possibly Hades/Hell. This means pretty much what you might think. The Heavens were the realm of the blessed—those beyond the reach of forces of decay (and development). The higher the Heaven, the greater the bliss. Hades or Hell was the realm of the damned, those who had decayed to some state where they could feel naught but pain and anxiety. The earth was the realm of change and development and decay as we know it.

This traditional model, the Cosmos borrowed from the pagan philosophers, is essentially a static model. Change might be ongoing in the terrestrial realm, but even the earth is itself a setting which can change cyclically but always comes back to being what men have always experienced. The Cosmos was a setting for various stories, moral and otherwise but didn't really have a story of its own. This is perhaps the greatest difference between the Cosmos and the Einsteinian universe which can almost be described as being itself a story.

The universe is set into a greater context in the Christian view: Creation. So far as I can speculate, all of Creation, all created being, comes from the Primordial Universe, the manifestation of the truths, mathematical and other, which God chose. Chapter 186, *The Cosmos of Thinkers Prior to Einstein* will discuss what this really means, though those familiar with modern work on the foundations of mathematics might be able to guess.



# 186 The Cosmos of Thinkers Prior to Einstein

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=66>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/02/06.]

There was no one Cosmos common to all thinkers prior to Einstein but there were some general beliefs held by all, or nearly all, thinkers in the West prior to Einstein—including most early modern scientists. This is not to say that there was no thinker who suspected reality to be richer, in some sense—deeper, than what could be directly seen. But those suspicions led nowhere. Heraclitus, the pre-Socratic philosopher, suspected that the apparent stability of things masked a deeper reality in which change was ongoing. In *The City of God*, St. Augustine noted the earth is clearly very old and he speculated that species can transform into other species—though he refused to back down on the special creation of human beings.

So, Augustine had a critique of natural knowledge that anticipated Darwin by 1400 years and it led nowhere. In fact, many thinkers over the centuries have read the *City of God* while not giving any evidence that they noticed some of the outbreaks of creativity. In a similar way, philosophers and theologians over those centuries made critiques of the mainstream views of infinity, time, space, and so forth; critiques that pointed towards the discoveries of Cantor and Einstein and Planck and perhaps Gödel. Those critiques just sank from view. Apparently, thinkers during those centuries had no hooks upon which to hang those ideas and readers of those critiques paid them little heed even if their eyes happened to pass over the proper page.

There was no magical transition point when all of a sudden men thought in a ‘modern, scientific’ way about their physical surroundings, no magical

point when an unexpected mutation produced creatures we can label as true Scientists. Early scientists held beliefs now considered superstitious, though those beliefs might well have been reasonable in the context of the totality of scientific, philosophical, and theological knowledge of those times. At that, new knowledge led to a critique of general views of reality, a critique which did not at the time lead to a new, coherent view, what I called a ‘worldview’ in my book *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41]. Over the intervening centuries, perhaps Kant produced something equivalent to a worldview but he made the very serious mistake of taking the laws, time-space structure, and perhaps the stuff of this universe as being necessary in their forms if not their particular configurations.

There were many problems in the ways that scientists and others viewed reality as they tried, and failed, to digest modern, empirical knowledge. For example, some of the greatest scientists and philosophers of modern times—those in the generation prior to Einstein, believed in an ether which filled space and was so rigid as to be able to vibrate trillions of times a second to transmit electromagnetism but also so light and flexible that the planets moved through with no measurable friction. It’s at least arguable that scientists prior to Planck should have long ago realized that continuous, non-discrete, energy levels are not consistent with stable atoms.

Man is a creature who moves through time with at least some self-awareness as well as a peculiar version of animal awareness of the surroundings. I’ve spoken elsewhere of man’s nature as a creature which seeks narratives as a means to morally order his surroundings. As background to those narratives, a serious thinker holds—however obscurely and implicitly—a view of reality as a whole, what I’ve called a ‘worldview’. You can’t help but to try to relate the stars to rattlesnakes if only to claim they are made of radically different sorts of stuff, one being eternal and unchanging and the other subject to earthly laws of death and development.

There have always been a multitude of worldviews, but I’ll be speaking only of one pre-Einsteinian worldview, a non-existent straw-man to be sure but one which makes it easier to speak of the totality of changes which Einstein has forced upon us.

Let me describe a few aspects of this Cosmos which seem particularly prominent in one or another body of thought which was not ‘Einsteinian’ in its empirical assumptions. I’m merely trying to describe the situation in general. A more thorough discussion would likely require years of study and careful thought.

1. All of Creation is to be found here, in what can be perceived, at least at a distance. The Heavens, perhaps even God Himself, lie beyond the moon, up where there is no change or decay, but it might be possible for a man to journey there in his mortal body and see the angels or perhaps the throne of God. If man has any component which is not bodily, then that component might belong naturally to that supra-lunar region when not tied to a body of clay. That immaterial component of man might even be inclined to visit that supra-lunar region if it is properly oriented.
2. All substances are found in a layered way, a great onion. Earthly things, mere matter—inert and lifeless in itself, are found between the ghostly existence of Hades and the ethereal realms where dwell the purer spirits, including perhaps human spirits released from their bodily prisons. It seems natural to believe that any given created substance can interact with all other created substances. Substance is seen in an oddly non-particularized way. Through the entire age of general awareness of empirical research, there are those who believe in a soul-stuff or mind-stuff that can interact with the human body but somehow remains invisible to scientific instruments.
3. Time and space are metaphysically necessary aspects of created being.
4. The type of substance we call ‘matter’ is inert and needs to be moved or shaped by immaterial beings or ‘energies’. The human body is inert but can be moved by a soul. Planets would have been inert if not inhabited by a god or other spirit in the way the soul inhabited the human body. Planet-moving spirits have been discarded more recently but the idea of a soul inhabiting the body retained by those who aren’t aware that the two ideas were part of a single, arguably consistent worldview.
5. Anything that exists, even the Almighty Himself, is made of some kind of substance. Since God is made of some sort of stuff radically different from the stuff of this physical universe, He is often pushed off to the distance, perhaps to sit on a throne in Heaven.

When this general set of worldviews began to unravel, few there were to even consider a general re-thinking of the situation. This is at least partly

because of the wrongheaded arguments that moral philosophy and physics and theology are completely separate ‘fields of knowledge’ that cannot be woven together to produce a coherent understanding of Creator and Creation. Men no longer even have a coherent understanding of human nature or human society, and that is hardly surprising.

We are lost in the Cosmos as Walker Percy said, but he didn’t help matters any. He was sometimes described as a Thomistic Catholic, but looking back to the years when I read several of Dr. Percy’s books, I fear he was probably reading Kierkegaard while thinking he was reading Aquinas. Kierkegaard re-discovered some of the insights of St. Thomas Aquinas but his attacks upon essentialist ways of thought were brutally unbalanced so that he showed no understanding of the importance of substance in this universe created by the God who is His own Act-of-being. Without an appreciation of substance, a thinker will lose sight of the goodness of Creation and will fall into the blackish moods common to Luther and Kierkegaard, Barth and Percy. But I digress, however usefully. . .

## 187 The Einsteinian Universe

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=78>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/02/24.]

Einstein gave a great gift to rational thinkers, Christian and non-Christian. He gave us a universe, that is, a coherent definition of a universe. And the definition is proving to be quite a bit different from the traditional metaphysical definitions. In fact, the simplest way to think of Einsteinian Universes as a class is to think in terms of the gravitational field. That which can be found in the same gravitational field as the earth is part of the same universe as the earth.

The usual definitions for universe involve all created being or even all created and divine being. Some nowadays think in terms of causal relatedness, but there remains a good possibility that parts of the universe which emerged from the so-called Big Bang are not causally related to other parts. This would mean they are no longer causally related even so far as gravity goes but, by definition, all parts of the universe—this phase of Creation—would have been bound together; else they would be parts of different phases of Creation.

Clearly, I'm stretching language to the breaking point, but speculative thought can do that. Or, in Nietzsche's terms: speculative thought can involve dangerous balancing acts on a high-wire. Again, in Melville's terms, one who would find truth must leave the safe harbors and head out into the open seas, willing to brave the storms and the insanity induced by the inhuman vastness.

In any case, the known facts about the so-called Big Bang imply strongly we're in a specific phase of Creation and we can't do more than speculate on the form of general being from which this realm of galaxies and spiders expanded nor can we do more than speculate on the other forms of particular

being into which that general being can be shaped. But we do know that gravity plays a unique role in this universe: unifying. It would seem true almost by definition that the definition of this highly particularized phase of Creation would revolve around gravity.

At this point, it would become important to know what gravity really is and it may seem strange but modern physicists admit to not knowing what it is. Is it a force in the same sense as electromagnetism and the weak and strong nuclear forces? If so, could it be merely a particularized version of an abstract being which is the foundational stuff of all matter and all forms of energy and fields? In terms I proposed in my book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], is it possible that gravity emerged from the Primordial Universe in the same way, and the same sense, as other forms of physical being? In those same terms—No.

In my worldview, gravity is a particularized version of a general metaphysical principle of unity while there is no such simple principle which seems to apply to the other forces of this universe. In some sense, gravity pre-existed this universe, this phase of Creation. I might well be wrong, but my story, that is—my explanation of reality, is consistent and coherent and presents this universe as being complete in some meaningful sense. This universe isn't complete in the sense of being all of Creation but it's complete in itself as a story. In theological terms, it will achieve the purposes for which God created it.

At this point, the reader who's read more of my entries, or my book, will be realizing that I'm serious about God creating truths in the very same act in which He created the stuff from which this universe, and the universe of the resurrected, are shaped. What I call the Primordial Universe is the mysterious stuff on the other side of the so-called Big Bang, the stuff that the thing-like stuff of this universe melts down into if we follow the development back in time and then speculate on a continuation of those processes.

Thing-like being developed as some strange stuff began to expand from the event first labeled the Big Bang by Fred Hoyle who wished to ridicule the model. Time and space as we know them also began during that process of expansion which was also a process of shaping. Yet, I should perhaps be a little more cautious. It remains still possible – though a bit unfashionable the last I knew—to speculate that the Big Bang was a rebound from a Small Slam and that the universe is in a state of oscillation though perhaps it can only collapse and expand a small number of times. Yet, this wouldn't

change the principle I'm expressing that the spacetime of this universe is part of this universe not a framework built from absolute truths.

The very nature of the Einsteinian Universe, as the largest possible gravitationally bound system of which we are part, tells us that it doesn't necessarily include everything. And we can't even necessarily see or otherwise interact with all of that gravitationally bound system. The journey backwards in time towards the beginning of this expansionary and factually-shaped universe points to greater and more general possibilities once the adventurer asks himself the question: What lies on the other side of the so-called Big Bang?

But let me state the matter in opposition to the five points I raised in Chapter 186, *The Cosmos of Thinkers Prior to Einstein*.

1. As I already discussed above, this universe is a highly particularized phase of Creation and not all of Creation.
2. The universe seems to be homogeneous. From the viewpoint of a physicist, the stuff in far-away galaxies is the same stuff as here on Earth, the physical laws in far-away galaxies are the same laws as here on Earth. This would be true even if some physical laws or constants have developed over time because physics as we know it would have to assume that the same meta-laws of development apply over the entirety of the universe. Or else, it would likely be the end of science as we know it. Regularity is the key to science, that is systematic investigation and thought. It doesn't matter – in principle—how many levels of parameters there are in the laws which express that regularity, although meta-laws would add immensely to the difficulty of exploring and understanding the universe.
3. Time and space seem to be dimensions in a highly particularized universe, arbitrary in both the details of their interrelationships and also—maybe—their very existence. The geometries which are used in theoretical physics are varied and there is no one geometry or other branch of mathematics that suffices for all work in that field. Kant and others, perhaps even Newton to some extent, were wrong in assuming that our world is necessarily a three dimensional Euclidean place moving through an absolute and uniform time. Some speculative work in physics and some modern work in the philosophy of science point to the same claim I've made that time and space are

creatures—as St. Paul simply assumed. We don't know what being is like on 'other side' of the Big Bang.

4. 'Matter' is not inert and not a pure object which is independent from minds or souls as they exist in this universe. Matter seems to be a partially frozen form of some sort of strange being which we can somewhat see, in a speculative way, by following the development of this universe back to that beginning of its expansion, the so-called Big Bang. Matter heats up as we go back in time in our imaginary journey, different sorts of basic particles beginning to melt into each other. Different forms of energy and fields also seem to melt into each other. In my book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], I speculated that matter, energy, and fields all melt down into some strange sort of being which doesn't exist in any space or time as we understand space and time. In fact, in cosmological physics, that sort of extreme temperature and extreme compression are different terms for the same states. Soul-like and mind-like aspects of the human being are aspects of a dynamic form of being—partially frozen that creatures like us could exist.
5. The Creator of this sort of a universe would have to lie beyond or above or outside time and space and—in my opinion—could not have substance as the ground of His being. I've adopted the Thomistic existentialist view that God is a pure Act-of-being, His own Act-of-being, the Supreme Act-of-being. For reasons I won't go into here, St. Thomas compromised his existentialism by considering the possibility that some types of substance, soul-stuff, could be subsistent—that is, it could continue to exist indefinitely once God had brought it into being. I'm more consistent in claiming that all creaturely being, all substance exists on an ongoing basis only as a result of acts-of-being which are only possible to God Himself. In Chapter 156, *A Christian view of Einstein's and Bohr's debate on the meaning of reality*, I went even beyond this to speculate that relationships, inside of Creation as well as from God to Creation, are primary. Rather than saying that things exist and then have relationships, I am willing to follow radical quantum theorists, such as Niels Bohr, in claiming that—at some very basic level, relationships bring substance into existence. More than that, relationships continue to shape substances in very deep ways

so that a human being does become one of many possible entities depending upon his relationships to God, to other human beings, to his physical environments.

I've stated that my views are highly speculative but this is necessarily so. Neither facts nor theories can cohere by themselves. Speculative thought is the glue—obviously, 'grand' theories, such as the Theory of General Relativity, have important speculative components.

Without speculations, ultimately grand speculations on the meaning of all Creation, our knowledge remains fragmented. We can easily return to a state of intellectual barbarism without responsible worldviewing, and I know of few modern thinkers who are attempting to do what was done by Plato and Aristotle, Philo and Augustine, Aquinas and Kant. The problem is particularly noticeable in Christian thought where few have realized that, as Pope Benedict told us in his first encyclical, the teachings of the Church are made up of both revealed truths and speculations. Right now, the Church is teaching a body of thought which—in its entirety—makes no sense in light of modern empirical knowledge. Catholic and Protestant theologians and philosophers are all obscuring those revealed truths which they should be illuminating by honestly dealing with knowledge of this phase of God's Creation.



# 188 Defining Principalities, Powers, and Invisible Hands

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=80>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/03/05.]

I've been thinking about Principalities, Powers, and Invisible Hands for a good decade or so, not every day but often. My academic background is in mathematics and I've read fairly broadly in 'chaos theory' and related specialties. For example, I've read some of the works of John Casti and Stuart Kaufmann, two experts in self-organizing systems. Along with the other pieces of my eclectic knowledge, this is feeding into something of an understanding of the issues involved. I'll be speaking entirely of human societies in a general sense.

Human beings are dependent, rational animals [91]—dependencies of this sort can be more generally labeled as 'social'. Our very dependencies upon each other make us very aware of each other's actions. We imitate very readily. We imitate unusual inflections or unusual use of words and often very quickly. We're not so different as we might imagine from schooling fish acting as one unit and it's somewhat surprising to learn from scientists that such coordinated action comes as each fish reacts only to its neighbor. There is no global control and yet there's global coordination.

We human beings also can form large-scale coordinated units just by imitative responses to our immediate neighbors. I don't have any problems imagining this, in analogy to schools of fish. Obviously, there will be some delay for more complicated individual behaviors and also some great uncertainty or confusion in the large-scale coordination if there are competing behaviors.

So far as I know, even mathematicians and other scientists who've stud-

ied this phenomenon, a type of self-organization, haven't come up with a good vocabulary for their quantitative purposes. And they may not, at least not for some future generation of thinkers who've more fully absorbed the discoveries of modern empirical science.

The development of modern science has been well-documented and it tells us that understanding comes only with the development of the vocabulary and concepts which can be generated by metaphors and analogies. Why do we need to speak as-if? Shouldn't it be possible to develop words and concepts that correspond directly to real-world entities and actions and relationships? Human experience to-date would indicate the answer to this latter question is, "No," a rather emphatic negative at that. I've discussed the often slow and sometimes funny ways we move towards better language for speaking of newly seen empirical facts and the new concepts they generate in Chapter 72, *Why Do We Need to Speak As-if?* and Chapter 90, *Shaping Our Minds to Reality*.

# 189 Henri Bergson: Almost Seeing a World

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=104>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/08/22.]

The claim in the title of this entry is currently a vague idea, one based on a recent reading of *Time and Free Will* [11] and a currently ongoing reading of *Creative Evolution* [10]—I'm about halfway through. [Note: I did finish it not long after writing this weblog entry.] A little intellectual history:

1. Etienne Gilson studied under Henri Bergson.
2. At some point, perhaps after finishing his studies with Bergson, Gilson discovered St. Thomas Aquinas and had an ah-ha experience in which he realized that Aquinas was a radical existentialist, oriented towards strong reliance on empirical knowledge, who seemed to make more sense of the world than other philosophers.
3. In various writings, Gilson drew out what he thought to be the true thought of Aquinas and saw him as being far more consistent and coherent than the more modern existentialists, such as Kierkegaard and Sartre—though he did express some serious amount of respect for the philosophical thought of Sartre, a lesser amount for the thought of Kierkegaard.
4. During the 1960s through the 1990s, Alasdair MacIntyre constructed a narrative of a major line of moral and ethical thought in the West (roughly speaking, the line beginning with Aristotle and running through St. Thomas Aquinas). He ended up a Thomist and claimed

that the noisy incoherence in public moral conversations is due to traditionalists having a radically different vocabulary and set of concepts from the modernists (whom he separated into two groups of genealogists and encyclopedists in his Gifford lectures, published as *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* [90]). We moderns in different groups talk past each other, not having a clue at times what the other is really saying.

5. Starting around 1985, I was still crawling around on hands and knees in my efforts to develop a robust mind after years of American education and life in corporations. I started reading MacIntyre, first *After Virtue* [88] and then, upon publication, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality* [89]. In the meantime, during a business trip to a city which yet had civilized bookstores, Sydney, I obtained some of his earlier works in which he had started with the Greeks, trying to understand what was inadequate in Aristotle. He finally decided that Aristotle was close to seeing the truth but his ideal man was the proud gentleman of Athenian society, missing an appreciation of his own dependence upon others (see *Dependent Rational Animals*, a book version of Professor MacIntyre's Carus Lectures.)
6. Being monolingual, as Aquinas also was so far as scholarly languages go, I read *Summa Contra Gentiles* in English, a scattering of other translated works by Aquinas, MacIntyre's books in the order in which they tracked his movement towards Thomism, and a number of historical and interpretive books by Gilson. (MacIntyre moved towards the Catholic Church in parallel with his movement towards Thomism but he has insisted the two journeys were independent, a claim which seems implausible.)
7. As I was reading philosophical and theological works, I was also reading many of the more serious but accessible works on modern physics and biology, including not only some written for literate non-scientists but also those such as Weyl's *Space-Time-Matter* [147] (which is actually outside of the mainstream view of general relativity) and Dirac's *Principles of Quantum Mechanics* [28]. On first readings over the course of several years, I struggled to get anything at all out of these classics of science, but finally began to understand a bit. I was also starting to read some works in mathematics, the most important to

date of which proved to be some of Chaitin's articles and books on random numbers.

8. Starting out to write a simple book to let my fellow-Christians know they don't have to fear modern science, I found myself writing a book which created what I call a worldview. In my case, this was a very preliminary narrative of Creation, as a Creation with a Creator. The foundation is Christian revelation, most importantly that the Holy Trinity is one God, a Creator. The basic tools of narrative understanding were derived from Thomistic existentialism and applied to modern empirical knowledge. The universe, defined first in a coherent and dangerous way by Einstein, becomes a world when seen as created by the God of Jesus Christ for His pleasure and to meet certain ends such as producing companions for His Son.

Bergson had many profound insights into reality, which I'll discuss in later entries. Oddly enough, while seeing much that lay outside of the playing field of pragmatists, such as William James, he also didn't see even a universe let alone a world or the greater Creation of which this universe is only a phase. This is a little surprising only because Bergson anticipated so many other aspects of the more complete quantum theory and the more general theory of relativity that Einstein was working on when *Creative Evolution* [10] was published.

In *Creative Evolution* [10], Bergson saw that philosophers crippled themselves by accepting a division of labor that left them the job of cleaning up the statements of scientists. What is the job of philosophers? Well, the more serious philosophers will try to make sense of it all. That does involve some clean-up work. For example, back in the 1960s, Stephan Toulmin told theorists in evolutionary biology that they would do well to replace the concept of 'random' with the more complex and meaningful idea of 'unpredictability at points of interaction between two complex but well-determined systems'. The more important task for serious philosophers—in my opinion—would build upon work by mathematicians in the years following Professor Toulmin's critique: randomness is a form of factuality. (Gregory Chaitin has been generous in acknowledging the contributions of those who anticipated the insights into randomness which he and Kolmogorov proposed independently around 1965, but he doesn't seem to know about Toulmin's contribution.)

And what can we do with the insight that we can avoid an irrational understanding of ‘randomness’? First of all, we move on to try to understand ‘factuality’ and then try to understand the universe on that more basic understanding. What sort of a universe is factual in such a way that much is unpredictable? When we ask this question, we can see that many thinkers worked themselves, and continue to work themselves, into dead-ends.

A lack of emphasis on the concept of ‘universe’, redefined from ancient misunderstandings in the work of Einstein, will cripple a body of philosophical thought even when it contains serious and worthwhile insights. From ‘universe’, a Christian—and perhaps a thinker from another faith—can move on to develop a ‘worldview’ as I define it, that is, to see a ‘world’: a universe seen in light of moral order.

# 190 Seeing a Universe and Then a World

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=107>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/08/31.]

I have read a lot of vague arguments that claim to shoot down scientific attacks upon Christianity. I have read a smaller number of very good arguments of that sort. From a certain viewpoint, those arguments—good or vague—are beside the point. We can divide human knowledge in various basic ways, and I've done so in *Four Kinds of Knowledge* which can be downloaded at <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/know.pdf>. This book speaks of revealed truths, empirical scientific knowledge, empirical practical knowledge, and the speculative knowledge that ties them together. Of these four, revealed truths deal with the only absolute truths, but it's quite true that speculative knowledge, philosophical and literary, is the glue that lets us see a world.

And that's the point. Pragmatists, such as William James in a clear way, but most modern thinkers to some extent, recognize only knowledge that arises directly from empirical data. This is a somewhat grotesque characterization of some bodies of thought both subtle and powerful, but useful for the purposes of this discussion which is about the problem faced by most philosophers and theologians and scientists: a universe can't be constructed from pieces. A universe, conceived as an entity as was done in the General Theory of Relativity, can be both itself—subject to scientific and philosophical analyses, and also home to a variety of entities—also subject to scientific and philosophical analyses.

As I often do, I've run roughshod over a great deal of complex history. Einstein himself only gradually came to understand he'd developed a theory

which could describe a single gravitationally bound system or the entire universe. And that points towards the question raised in the very title of Part V: *What is a Universe?*

To focus the point a little more: we're all pragmatists now. We all believe in environments fragmented and isolated from each other, sometimes by infinitely deep chasms. We Christians try to live on the Mount where Jesus spoke and we look across the various chasms to the interesting but contingent realms of cosmological physics or evolutionary biology or human history.

The incoherence in the Christian worldview in recent centuries is little different from the incoherence in scientific views until Einstein and his successors forced us to think in a more disciplined manner, to recognize that we need to define 'universe'—however tentatively—before we speak about it. Neither Christians nor scientists (yes, I know there is great overlap) had a clue what they were really talking about when they said the word 'universe' before Einstein provided a tentative technical definition and also an authoritative general definition: our universe is all that is bound by a common gravitational field. "A common gravitation field." Yep, that's the starting point for Christians to reconstruct their view of God's Creation and to make it consistent with empirical knowledge in its current state. You might say that gravity is a physical shaping in this world of the metaphysical principle of unity which was manifested by God in what I call the Primordial Universe, the underlying stuff of all Creation.

Start with a pile of the stuff of matter, energy, and fields. Add the most sophisticated form of Newtonian dynamics (some version of Hamiltonian or Lagrangian formulations of physics), toss in several tablespoons of statistical physics and chaos theory, and cook it all with the so-called laws of thermodynamics, and... You don't have a universe. You have a puddle of stuff. A universe exists as an entity and not just a container for the stuff inside of it. Nor can that stuff exist in the way of pragmatic speculation.

To make sense, a humanly conceived universe must correlate with our perceptible reality as built up from the pieces—but it's not reducible to those pieces. It's more than just the sum of those pieces. The history of human thought tells us prophets and poets and theologians had intuitions of a universe, or cosmos, before such could be defined. But a serious definition came only when science, studying the pieces, gave us the tools which Einstein used so well. Still, Einstein made a great leap of faith, faith that the cosmos was rational.

But this is still not enough. A universe is a very fragile entity if only because it has no reason to exist. ‘A reason to exist’ is a purpose which can’t be internally generated. It must be set from outside that universe. It is at this point that Christians can begin their work of making sense of the huge piles of modern empirical knowledge, not truly knowledge to be sure until it is part of a more coherent, more unified, more complete whole—a world which is ordered to the purposes of the Almighty.



# 191 What are the Thermodynamic Properties of Heaven?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=110>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/09/23.]

A silly question in a way, but also a serious one. In fact, it's a question forced upon us by the importance of cosmological physics as popularized by the so-called Big Bang. Live in the Big Bang world, die in the Big Bang world. Even be resurrected in a world part of the same Creation as the world of the Big Bang.

God shaped this universe out of some very strange stuff that was not matter nor energy nor fields but became each of those by way of what physicists call the breaking of symmetries and by an expansion which led to a great cooling. I've written a number of entries on this and related topics and I'll not go into details here but I'll say that Roger Penrose, the British mathematician and physicist, has shown that that strange stuff had a huge number of possible initial states and God (yes, he used the G-word in this context though I don't know what his beliefs are) chose a very, very unlikely initial state. In a way, this is beside the point since any particular universe, even one beginning in a more 'likely' state, would be nearly impossible at that point of shaping and it was literally impossible from the creaturely viewpoint for anything to have existed in the first place. Substance is not self-creating nor self-sustaining.

Let's just move on to a fact explained by Professor Penrose in his wonderful but demanding book, *The Road to Reality* [113], but also discussed in his earlier books, *The Emperor's New Mind* [111] and *Shadows of the*

*Mind* [112]—also a bit demanding. Despite the name *Laws of Thermodynamics*, the ‘law’ that says entropy increases is not a law. Entropy tends to increase, rather relentlessly, in the universe as a whole, though life-forms exist by reversing that process locally. The reason for this tendency is that particular configuration of the universe at the time of the so-called Big Bang. Entropy was extremely low at that point God chose from the absolutely infinite sea of chaos I call the Primordial Universe.

It might seem surprising that this universe was at its lowest point of entropy, or its highest state of order, back in those early seconds when no things or thing-like matter had yet condensed out of that ball of fire which was far, far hotter than the sun. Yet, that’s the case. Entropy was very low. Disorder was very low. Order was very high. Very little energy was in the form of low-frequency and long-wavelength radiation that we know as heat or degraded, high-entropy energy.

Entropy had to increase and order decrease. This is the movement towards heat death that is sometimes discussed on documentaries on television. As it turns out, life on earth organizes itself as the physical environments take in the relatively ordered, relatively low-entropy, radiation of the sun and degrading it to heat. On the whole, entropy increases, but an amoeba or a gorilla or a sequoia tree is an island of order in the midst of this process of degradation of order. Life as we know it exists only because it can produce ‘heat pollution’ by degrading low-entropy energy. I might get back to this subject eventually. For now, I’ll again refer the interested reader to Professor Penrose’s *The Road to Reality* [113] where he discusses this seeming contradiction in the nature of life on earth.

I’ll speak about the problems this presents to Christian thinkers who consider Heaven to be a real place and a part of Creation. Other Christians who wave away concrete discussions of Heaven might wish to consider the possibility they’ve conjured Heaven away, turned it into a dreamland that’s not really part of Creation.

If we stick to the terms used by Professor Penrose and other modern physicists, it would seem we have to imagine Heaven as being a new world in which entropy is such that it doesn’t increase or decrease. It remains constant. Can such a world be a world of life? Would it be a frozen or crystalline world? I don’t know, but it doesn’t seem to endanger my faith to ask such questions. In fact, asking such questions leaves me more settled than avoiding questions or waving them away with vague suggestions that “such questions are beyond us.” I admit the value of a simple faith for many

believers but I think that history tells us that there are many, including the authors of the Torah and St. Paul, who are willing to deal with the difficult questions. My own experiences tell me that those with simple faiths aren't doing so good a job of raising their own children to be Christians, not in this world of National Geographic specials about human evolution or NOVA specials about the universe filled with stars and seemingly empty of angels.

Suppose we try to look for more general possibilities rather than assuming that God will fine-tune the recipe He used for this world when He shapes Heaven. Suppose the concept of entropy isn't necessary to describe a world in which human beings could exist, once formed by the processes of this universe. I don't know what sort of a world would have no entropy. I don't know if any world suited for humans, even perfected humans, could operate without entropic changes. It certainly seems that changes in entropy are part of the struggle between order and disorder in this universe in which we are being born and formed. In fact, as St. Paul tells us: "[T]he creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the Spirit groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." [Romans 8:20-21]

This is the problem with knowing more about this world. We now know enough to speculate on the nature of Heaven, but that's a good thing – once we Christians regain our faith and confidence. The ancient and Medieval Christians could also speculate on the nature of Heaven. After all, they'd learned from the great pagan thinkers that Heaven lay on the far side of the moon. What they knew of Heaven was largely wrong, but they didn't make the error of putting infinite chasms between Heaven and this world. We modern Christians tend to believe that knowledge of Heaven is impossible to men, that Heaven lies in a realm so different as to be pretty much non-existent. We should have faith that Heaven exists, as the Lord Jesus Christ told us, and we should realize that any Heaven suitable for human beings is a part of Creation and has to be subject to serious human speculation.

In ages of greater faith, Christian theologians and poets, such as Dante and Milton, didn't hesitate to speculate on the nature of Heaven while recognizing that the truth of the matter lies beyond any certainty on the part of mortal men.



## 192 One for the Empiricist Views of Mathematics

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=160>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/06/10.]

See *Astronomy study proves mathematics theorem* found at [http://space.newscientist.com/article/dn14064-astronomy-study-proves-mathematics-theorem.html?](http://space.newscientist.com/article/dn14064-astronomy-study-proves-mathematics-theorem.html?feedId=online-news_rss20)

for a case where astrophysical research helped to prove an extension to one of the most important theorems in mathematics (*The Fundamental Theorem of Algebra*—see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fundamental\\_theorem\\_of\\_algebra](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fundamental_theorem_of_algebra)).

The title of the article is slightly askew because the work by an astrophysicist provided the missing half to a proof, where the other half had come out of work by algebraic theorists.

This is one more case where efforts to understand or explain a physical phenomenon led to some insights into seemingly very abstract regions of mathematics. Since at least the time of Archimedes, research in physics and mathematics has always at least overlapped and sometimes, as in the case of Archimedes himself and Newton, been inseparable.

In my way of looking at Creation in its totality, this sort of overlap between physics and abstract mathematics is an indication that there is no firm and absolute line to be drawn between the concrete and the abstract facts/truths of Creation. The proper physics of our universe is a particular instantiation of a metaphysics which is manifested in the more abstract phases of Creation. See Chapter 569, *Abstract Mathematics and the Real Presence of Jesus Christ* for a discussion of this issue from a slightly different perspective.



# 193 A Universe is More than it Contains

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=163>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/06/18.]

In order to move on in my work, I've been studying advanced physics and mathematics when time is available. Recently, I finished reading *Principles of Physical Cosmology* [109] by P.J.E. Peebles, a distinguished authority in the field of general relativity. He has various interesting comments and insights, but one insight is particularly fascinating to me given my reasons for achieving a deeper understanding of modern physics so that I can better understand God's Creation. In the following quote, square brackets are used to include my explanatory insertions. As Professor P.J.E. Peebles tells us:

We see that the faster decrease of [the radiation density of a relativistic universe modeled as a gas] compared to the mass density of a nonrelativistic gas is the result of the pressure work done by the expanding radiation. However, since the volume of the universe varies as [the third power of the expansion factor of the universe], the net radiation energy in a closed [and expanding] universe decreases as [the inverse of the expansion factor of the universe] as the universe expands. Where does the lost energy go? Since there is no pressure gradient in the homogeneously distributed radiation, the pressure does not act to accelerate the expansion of the universe. (The active gravitational mass due to the pressure has the opposite effect, slowing the rate of expansion. . . ) The resolution of this apparent paradox is that while energy conservation is a good local concept . . . and can be defined more generally in the special case of an

isolated system in asymptotically flat space, there is not a general global energy conservation law in general relativity theory.  
[page 139]

Firstly, a disclaimer: we don't yet know the exact geometric properties of the universe, or rather—the region of the universe which is visible to us. It's not even certain we have a complete inventory of types of matter and forces in this universe. It might be that we do live in a universe that conserves energy at the 'global' level, but there's no 'law' mandating such and a good chance that we live in a universe where certain types of energy can go away at the level of the universe.

Given that disclaimer but remembering that there is no "general global energy conservation law in general relativity theory," we can see that a universe can be described in which all localities do have an energy conservation law while that universe doesn't. While those 'conserving' localities make up the universe in some strong sense, the universe as a totality can have properties different from what would be implied by an effort to construct the universe using only its localities. In other words, the universe as a totality is itself an entity and may have properties not found by assembling it, tinker-toy fashion, from its 'pieces'.

There is an element of weirdness here, a seeming violation of our understanding of the ways in which larger and more complex entities are 'built-up' from their components. It almost seems as if there's an analogy between the universe and a living creature, especially a social creature. We don't have any 'common-sense' intuition that a man or an elephant can simply be built out of its components but that's potentially dangerous because much of the individuality which is striking in man and elephant comes from the historical nature of such creatures, from their context or even embeddedness in a greater world. We human beings, along with at least social creatures, exist more as boundary phenomena where our organ-based physical selves interact with our environments and perhaps more. If that's true of the universe, what is its greater context? My worldview provides some ways of answering that since I speculate that the universe is only one phase of a far greater Creation, but those are vague possibilities and would require a major effort to develop—perhaps an effort beginning with years or even decades of study.

# 194 Finding the Foundations Supported by the Whole

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=171>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/07/17.]

I've just finished reading Roberto Torretti's *Relativity and Geometry* [133], a philosophically oriented discussion of the foundational ideas of Einstein's two theories of relativity—geometrical and physical. Over the course of the book, as he discussed those foundational ideas of relativity, he builds up to a conclusion which is true enough, but does beg some questions. He points out that Einstein was able to avoid the philosophical assumptions of empiricism, axiomatic systems, and conventionalism.

So what did Einstein do, what sort of thinking did he engage in while being such a creative storm in theoretical science? More generally, what does it mean to think so that we're not unduly bound by empiricism, axiomatic systems, and conventionalism? Is there a more positive way to speak of such a way of thought?

Torretti gives one example of one mathematical physicist who was not able to escape the bonds of conventionalism circa 1900. Poincare was in a position to develop a full-blown special theory of relativity before Einstein did so, the great French scientist held a conventionalist viewpoint. In fact, he's one of the thinkers mentioned in a Wikipedia article, *Conventionalism* – <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conventionalism>, where we can read the definition:

Conventionalism is the philosophical attitude that fundamental principles of a certain kind are grounded on (explicit or implicit) agreements in society, rather than on external reality.

In an article on *Empiricism* – <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Empiricism>, we can read:

In philosophy, empiricism is a theory of knowledge that is practical rather than abstract, and asserts that knowledge arises from experience rather than revelation.

Finally, in this article on the fundamental concept of *axiom* – <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Axiom>, we can read:

In traditional logic, an axiom or postulate is a proposition that is not proved or demonstrated but considered to be either self-evident, or subject to necessary decision. Therefore, its truth is taken for granted, and serves as a starting point for deducing and inferring other (theory dependent) truths.

I should point out that our primary knowledge does arise from experience and that there are truths which are so self-evident as to be built into the very functioning of our physical bodies. There are also social aspects to the specific problems chosen by particular scientists, to the way they state even the most abstract of truths, and so on. However, we seem to be able to somehow access domains of knowledge of abstractions, generalizations from our experiential knowledge, that includes possibilities not known to be realized and even possibilities which can't be realized in our universe. I'll leave that issue undeveloped in this chapter. It's developed in various ways in the various chapters of this book, perhaps most intensely in Part III, *The Human Mind as a Re-creation of God's Creation*.

Einstein was pursuing a better formulation of the truth about the physical world and was first led on by the conflicts in the basic assumptions of reality between Newtonian mechanics and Maxwell's statement of electromagnetic theory—the impossibility of reconciling Galilean relativity with Maxwell's equations was perhaps the major problem. After the special theory of relativity was established, he wanted to reconcile inertial mass with gravitation mass (weight). Einstein achieved that second goal by developing the general theory of relativity and, perhaps to his surprise, found that he'd developed a theory that could be used to define and describe a universe as well as various strange objects inside the universe – such as black-holes.

We can think of gravity as that which unifies our universe and it will be no longer surprising that a reconciliation of inertial mass and gravitational

mass leads to Einstein's field equation giving a relationship between the shape of space-time and the distribution of matter-energy for an 'isolated' gravitationally bound system which can be merely a black-hole or it can be an entire universe or it can even be a more ordinary object in this universe which can be treated as gravitationally isolated. As Wittgenstein might have said: Einstein had penetrated to the foundations and found they were being supported by the entirety of the structure. Einstein himself has been quoted as defining a scientist as an unscrupulous opportunist, a way both humorous and dramatic to say that good science is often the result of seeing the importance of an unexpected result and exploring it in a fruitful manner. Some of the dramatic examples are in the experimental fields but the fruitful explorations of Einstein's field equation from the general theory of relativity provide another good example. While it was interesting and important that observers were able to see light being bent by the sun's strong gravitation field and most of the perihelion shift of Mercury was explained, the real action was along another line of development starting with Schwarzschild's early solution of the field equation which eventually was seen to be a description of a non-spinning black-hole. The ante was upped when Friedman found a solution which proved to be for an expanding universe with a bounded space-time. Other solutions were found, including that of Godel in which the entire universe rotated and could be detected as rotating and in which time could move in either direction.

Not only had 'universe' been defined in a scientific manner, but a small number of possible universes had been described, one of which – corresponding to Friedman's solution—is at least similar to our universe. Not only had general relativity given a way of defining a universe—at least one sort of universe, it had given a field equation, in fact—a way of thought, that allowed multiple universes to be defined. In a sense, Einstein had not only found a way back to the so-called Big Bang, he had found a way to pass through it and explore parts of what I call the Primordial Universe, the manifestation of truths that God had selected for Creation, from which truths He had shaped this particular universe.



# 195 Coherence and Truth

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=346>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/12/11.]

There's a question which has bothered me for a while:

How could the ancient and Medieval thinkers have seen clearly so many truths about human nature and the rational nature of this universe (though they didn't have this modern concept in quite this form) when they had such an incomplete view of basic physical reality?

In fact, many of their specific views were wrong, even their most basic views of physical matter or forces, of the nature of the planets and stars, of life and of many basic aspects of the substance of human nature. Yet, great thinkers produced great insights, such as that of Aquinas that the human mind forms in an organic way in response to its environments.

Part of the answer is that coherence matters greatly even if the thinker has inadequate or even wrongful knowledge about his environments and what lies beyond those environments. Coherence of a theory or individual speculation would have to be defined in terms of substantial agreement with the body of empirical knowledge as known in that age and place.

There are obvious examples of coherent and surprisingly valid theories coming out of limited and sometimes defective factual knowledge of reality. The clearest example might be that of Newton's theory of gravity. Sometimes, popular science books will discuss Newton's theory of gravity as being an approximation to the more powerful and more 'exact' general theory of relativity. Not completely wrong but not the best way of viewing matters. Newton's theory is locally indistinguishable from Einstein's general theory of relativity. So long as we don't look too far in space-time

and don't look at objects of immense or highly concentrated mass, we see a universe in which gravity is described very well by Newton's theory.

The extraordinary success of modern physics and mathematics in describing our universe gives us hope that we can develop a more coherent general understanding of the universe. Most who discuss human knowledge look horizontally, so to speak, being impressed or not by the expansion in our ability to predict events in the heavens and by our amazing technology but often they remain convinced that the abstract truths drawn from Creation by traditional metaphysicians and theologians remain valid and complete. In fact, those truths remain valid in the limited sense that they are coherent in and of themselves though not able to describe the universe as understood in the light of modern physics and mathematics.

Coherent in an age that believed that matter had a stable existence, if only at the level of unseen atoms, traditional ideas of this universe are incoherent now that we know matter is held in existence by events and constraints understood very well in formal terms by quantum mechanics. Matter is not what Aristotle or Augustine or Kant thought it to be. For that matter, time and space are not what they thought them to be. A century after Einstein, it seems yet true that time and space are a single structure of space-time best described for now by those non-Euclidean geometries of gravitational theory. Most traditional 'proofs' for the existence of God rely on an understanding of infinity which is invalid in this age when even freshman college students might learn how to prove that there are infinities which are 'bigger' than the ordinary infinity of 1,2,3,... Yet, I think there are some deep truths in those proofs that might be recovered by a new generation of theologians and philosophers who are educated in transfinite set theory and other branches of modern mathematics and science.

Let me try to form a more explicit hypothesis of what's going on. The following is a description of the levels of created reality as found in my current views:

1. The most basic level of created reality is the **Primordial Universe** which is the abstract stuff which God created from nothingness. This abstract stuff is a manifestation of the truths God chose for Creation.
2. From that Primordial Universe, God shaped this **particular universe** as a totality in a more limited way. Seen in light of God's purposes for this universe, it becomes morally ordered and I then re-

fer to it as a ‘world’. With this terminology, our world isn’t necessarily unique. For example, God could have created a separate world for the resurrected.

3. The stuff of this universe is shaped into **things and living creatures** which also have existences separate from the universe. Alternatively, we could say the universe has a nature of its own and isn’t just a collection of things or a container for holding space-time and things.
4. **Living creatures** are interesting in their own regard as highly specialized thing-like beings but I’m mostly concerned with man, in fact, mostly with those aspects of the human organism labeled ‘mind’ or ‘moral nature’.

Levels 3 and 4 are at least partly reachable by our senses. Ancient thinkers and even some poets of prehistorical peoples had intuitions that something existed which is at least similar to Level 2, but it was Einstein who first defined the universe in rational terms—the Aristotelian cosmos was described by way of a sort of indefinite inclusiveness. Einstein expanded human reason so that it could better deal with that Level 2, this particular universe, and he did so by also expanding human reason more deeply and more broadly into Level 1, a level of being spoken about in dream-like or poetic terms by some like Plato and ignored by many others, even some known as metaphysicians. With quantum mechanics and many developments in mathematics, reason broadened still further and expanded more deeply into that Level 1, the realm of abstractions.

I repeat: We have the great opportunity of developing a more coherent understanding of the universe. But this is not a matter of simply trying to fit a new view of created reality into some sort of pre-existing, general-purpose human mind. We have to begin shaping our minds by responding properly to God’s Creation, to the vast piles of modern empirical knowledge and to those many piles of traditional knowledge which remain valid. It’s not modern empirical knowledge which is true or false according to whether we can fit it into the categories and relationships which we’ve inherited from earlier generations of thinkers. It’s our minds which are true or false according to whether we reshape them to the demands of modern empirical knowledge. Even the ultimate truths that the Transcendent God revealed to us will become false if our minds remain shaped to views of His Creation which are incoherent.



# 196 Modern Madness and Realms of Knowledge

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=359>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/12/20.]

This article: *God Or Science? A Belief In One Weakens Positive Feelings For The Other* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/12/081215121559.htm>, ends with these paragraphs:

“What is really intriguing is that the larger effect happens on the opposite belief,” she said. “When God isn’t being used to explain much, people have a positive attitude toward science. But when God is being used to account for many events—especially the things that they list, which are life, the universe, free will, these big questions—then somehow science loses its value.”

“On the other hand, people may have a generally positive view of science until it fails to explain the important questions. Then belief in God may be boosted to fill in the gap,” she said.

The most obvious implication of the research is that “to be compatible, science and religion need to stick to their own territories, their own explanatory space,” Preston said. “However, religion and science have never been able to do that, so to me this suggests that the debate is going to go on. It’s never going to be settled.”

The study appears in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*.

This sort of study supports a conclusion I arrived at years ago – that modern man has separated his understanding of his world into mutually

exclusive domains of knowledge. To separate knowledge in this way is to separate the world into mutually exclusive domains of being. Only one domain at a time can be real and other domains retreat into a dream-like existence. Some can manage to live in one domain at a time but those will usually do so by giving up the truthful aspects of the other domain. You can have atheistic curmudgeons and nutty Christians and those who think political or social claims trump science and religious traditions but few there are in these modern times who can live in one world that is reasonably complete in acknowledging the claims of empirical knowledge and religious revelations or insights, of esthetic instincts and practical knowledge whether of growing food or holding together communities.

Science and religion don't "need to stick to their own territories, their own explanatory space." That way lies cognitive dissonance. I've spoken of this problem in Chapter 577, *The Only Sane Christian in the Modern World*, and also in Chapter 91, *A Thomistic Take on Madness and Modernism*. Years ago, I also wrote a darkishly comic novel dealing with this issue, *A Man for Every Purpose* which can be downloaded at <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/aman.pdf>.

What is needed—ideally—is a single view of physical reality which men of good faith can agree upon. That single view can be the foundation of speculative knowledge in all those specialized fields we create because of human limitations. This website has been created by the belief that the best such single view is a Thomistic existentialism updated to account for modern empirical knowledge. St. Thomas pointed us towards a greater sort of sanity.

## 197 Being and Natural Law

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=364>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/12/22.]

I've written of this universe and its stuff as shaped from the manifested truths of the primordial universe. Looking at this from another direction, the claim becomes: there are no natural laws but only properties of particular sorts of being including their forms of interaction. What we see as abstract laws, mathematical or metaphysical, are those manifested truths or at least some approximation to them. Those truths are not laws imposed upon inert matter but are rather the stuff from which God shaped this universe and its matter and space-time. If we think in terms of the concrete being of this universe, it's possible to think of those truths as deeper levels of created being.

This understanding of natural laws makes little practical difference to us as we go about our days trying avoiding the damage of gravity or the damage from an excess of energetic electrons. It also makes little difference to most scientists or engineers in their theorizing or experimenting or constructing of accelerators or bridges. Yet, when we try to make sense of it all, when we try to discover meanings, it's important to realize that being should be at the center of our attention and mostly the act-of-being which brings into existence.

We do not live in a universe where inert matter, energy, and space-time have specific laws enforced upon them as if the laws could have been different for that particular universe. We live in a universe where manifested truths have been shaped into specific forms of more concrete being. That being is matter and energy and space-time and also all the laws and facts which relate them. When we find that concrete being behaves according to 'laws', we're actually achieving deeper understandings of being. In a useful

manner of speaking we're penetrating to the levels of being which are those manifested truths from which it has been shaped. That is: natural laws are not external to things, natural laws as we know them are part of this universe and the created being within it. In this, they're not so much different from the behaviors and other aspects of concrete being which have more of a factual smell to them. That is, the law-like behavior encoded in the field equation of the theory of general relativity is not so much different from the gravitational constant as some would imagine.

# 198 As the Universe Ages, It Forgets What It Once Was

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1280>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/05/25.]

Cosmologists study the universe at a level where records vanish, as we learn in this article: *Best Time to Study the Cosmos Was More Than 13 Billion Years Ago* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2012/05/120522180624.htm>. The physical world, with its stars and galaxies and background radiation fields, doesn't leave us some sort of permanent record to study at our leisure. Information can disappear in various ways.

New calculations by Harvard theorist Avi Loeb show that the ideal time to study the cosmos was more than 13 billion years ago, just about 500 million years after the Big Bang. The farther into the future you go from that time, the more information you lose about the early universe.

"I'm glad to be a cosmologist at a cosmic time when we can still recover some of the clues about how the universe started," Loeb said.

Two competing processes define the best time to observe the cosmos. In the young universe the cosmic horizon is closer to you, so you see less. As the universe ages, you can see more of it because there's been time for light from more distant regions to travel to you. However, in the older and more evolved universe, matter has collapsed to make gravitationally bound objects. This "muddies the waters" of the cosmic pond, because you lose memory of initial conditions on small scales. The two

effects counter each other—the first grows better as the second grows worse.

Loeb asked the question: When were viewing conditions optimal? He found that the best time to study cosmic perturbations was only 500 million years after the Big Bang.

This is also the era when the first stars and galaxies began to form. The timing is not coincidental. Since information about the early universe is lost when the first galaxies are made, the best time to view cosmic perturbations is right when stars began to form.

The information about the more raw levels of thing-like being disappear as it develops into larger and more complex structures. When gas clouds collapse to form stars and galaxies, the information about those clouds disappear.

As much as you might know about the entities and events at an advanced stage of a narrative, a story, you can't always form a good idea of the earlier stages of the story. Anyone who's read many biographies will know that there are those who pass through crisis points which don't allow predictions of where that character will be heading when he's past that cusp. If you start at the maturity of that character, you don't always have a clue what his childhood and young adulthood was like. This is true of a simple function which has an immediate change in direction, such as  $y = |x|$ , which has a discontinuity at 0, that is, there is no unique tangent. It's also true of those who pass through an important moral decision of certain sorts. For example, Adolf Hitler started life as a rather ordinary fellow and made a decision, or likely a series of decisions, which led him to a politics of hatred and exclusion. He headed off in a radically different direction from the prior trajectory of his life. There are entities, in the history of men and in the phystory of our universe, which have stable development paths. And there are periods where most entities have such paths. Take an ordinary American born in the period 1940-1970 or so and, with high probability, his general path through life, his political and business and charitable and religious activities, could be predicted. The general cluelessness of most such Americans in the event of dramatic changes in circumstances could have been predicted by those who knew history at a grander scale. What about those born into a society which had first stopped moving forward in significant ways, even in the physical prosperity so beloved by most men,

and then passed through various crisis periods? A flattening and then erratic movements in various directions.

Various structures, from the moral character of individuals to that of various levels of communities, have formed in ways and under conditions which couldn't have been predicted by following the trajectory of events in the 40s and 50s and even the 60s though there were strong hints of coming troubles in that latter decade and weaker hints for the more knowledgeable and more sensitive in the earlier two decades.

If you have no recorded information of structures and the circumstances and the states of individual entities before a crisis point—a discontinuity, it's hard, and sometimes impossible, to recover that information.

Discontinuities. Nonlinearities. Cusps.

There are many ideas explored by modern mathematicians and physicists which were well known under other terms by insightful historians and poets back when science was passing through its own Garden of Innocence when the universe seemed to behave in ways that seemed to be more rational. Functions describing physical reality were smooth, infinitely differentiable, well-behaved in most important ways. A scientist so clear-headed as Laplace could convince himself the future of the universe is fully predictable so long as you have a complete knowledge of the current state of that universe.

In fact, the world is chaotic in the scientific sense of being well-determined, though perhaps not fully determined, but having an unpredictable future. I've discussed this before from a slightly different viewpoint, but one closely related to that of the study discussed in the article I referred to above: *Best Time to Study the Cosmos Was More Than 13 Billion Years Ago* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2012/05/120522180624.htm>.

Though the universe is moving through some sort of, as yet poorly understood, space of states, there is a time-symmetry to many physical process that leads to the strange situation of the past being as 'unpredictable' as the future, in some ways and for certain ranges of time in the past.

As I noted in my first published book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41]:

There's a pretty good way to generate physical events which are chaotic by some realistic and practical standard. The measurements of those events will be a stream of numbers random

by some standard, sometimes quite high. You can simply put two independent systems in contact with each other and observe or measure what happens at the interface. That's all. It's a trick used in some of the simple experiments used to generate so-called chaotic motion. For example, take two pendulums with different periods of oscillation. Link the bobs of the pendulums and put one or both in motion. The two pendulums will clearly not be able to move as they would if each moved freely. In fact, the resulting motion will be chaotic, basically unpredictable. Equivalent experiments can be done with electronic components or even with simulations of the independent systems in software. There's nothing mystical involved in generating streams of physical events which are unpredictable or chaotic, generating numbers which are random by some low standard.

Chaotic motion can be visualized as an orbital path that never quite returns to the same point and is unpredictable beyond some length of time in the future or in the past. If you were to graph the orbits of such an object, and the orbiting earth is such an object, you would get a blur of orbits that lie close to each other and cross over often but no particular orbit is the same as any other. That sort of movement is patternless to human perception and measurement though usually staying within some tight boundaries. Physicists have shown by way of demanding computer simulations that "the orbital movement of planets in the solar system is chaotic. . . which makes practically impossible any precise prediction beyond a few tens of millions of years. . ."

The early results of Professor [Jacques] Laskar's research (his first simulations of the solar system [were carried out] in 1989) indicate that a mere 15 meter error in measurement of the earth's current position makes it impossible to say if the earth's orbit will be stable 100 million years from now. Because the equations of dynamics are symmetrical in time, this means it's also impossible to prove the earth's orbit was stable more than 100 million years in the past, with that range of ignorance moving with us so far as the future goes and also moving with us so far as the past goes. A few years later, Gerald Sussman

and Jack Wisdom of MIT showed that after only 4 million years it is not possible to predict the orbit of the earth, or any of the planets of the solar system, with any confidence.

Undoubtedly, results will have been tightened up in the technical literature to which I have no access. But the principle is what's important.

In a sense, knowledge is constantly coming into view ahead of us and constantly disappearing behind us. To be more explicit, this means that, despite common sense, we cannot prove by mathematical means that the earth stayed in its orbit 4 million years ago. So far as the equations go, with initial conditions provided by the current state of the solar system, the earth might have crashed into the sun or gone shooting past Mars 4 million years ago. Common sense sometimes tells us things that mathematics cannot.

You shouldn't imagine that this situation occurs only at the level of planets like the earth. The sun itself is traveling a chaotic orbit around the center of the galaxy. Our galaxy, the Milky Way, is dancing around various gravitational centers of local clusters of galaxies and larger-scale clusters of galaxies.

[In that book, I go on to a discussion that confuses predictability and determination, but the real issue is knowledge and predictability, chains of causality are sometimes unknown to us, whether well-determined or a bit looser than that.]



# 199 Theories, Meta-theories, and Meta-etc

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1403>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/09/11.]

I've written of the desirability of using tensor-type thinking in qualitative fields where there is, even in principle, no way of particularizing the tensor equations to equations which could actually be used to calculate numbers. A reminder: by intelligent use of tensors (call it reasoning in more abstract spaces by way of differential geometry if you wish), Einstein was able to derive a description of theories of gravity (or of spacetime) which would satisfy his equivalence principle so that Maxwell's equations and other established laws of physics, even Newton's laws of motion and of gravity at the local level, would be satisfied in all frames of reference, even those which were accelerating. To be sure, the acceleration had to be accounted for in applying most laws, but that was hardly an obstacle to Einstein's work. At the same time, Einstein himself—so far as I know—never developed a specific set of equations describing a gravitationally bound system.

The first to do so? While at the front lines in World War I, the German astrophysicist Karl Schwarzschild particularized the field equation of general relativity into a set of equations describing a system which was spherically symmetrical and which could be quantitatively solved. Professor Schwarzschild died in an epidemic shortly after mailing his solution to a journal.

There is little in this discussion that should be of surprise to my regular readers but I find it valuable to restate in terms of my worldview truths already part of at least some of our accepted ways of thought. Subtle

differences, sometimes more than subtle, will emerge over time or perhaps will be obvious immediately.

Terminology of this sort, meta-this and meta-that, is used and abused and generally meaningless, but I'm claiming it can be used to say something meaningful about the knowledge of the spectrum of being from abstract to concrete. As we travel roads through this spectrum, we need to explore, map, experiment, to propose various sorts of theories and meta-theories, and test it all, subject it to the selective processes which can take place when an honest and reasonably well-formed mind uses reality as the first test, more complex worldviews as successively advanced tests as the explorer moves through life and through his small part of Creation. We actually don't have to bootstrap and may not be capable of it in any case. We start off in life with something akin to a worldview, such as a baby's strong belief in continuous existence of objects and also various levels of conscious and unconscious prejudices (in a neutral sense) of how to make sense of these confusing signals coming in through our eyes and ears. It's probably better to say, analogously, that we start off with a capability to learn symbols of various sorts and, culture permitting, we learn some system of hieroglyphics or a phonetic alphabet or whatever, and some will move on to develop higher skills of literacy and the sorts of conceptual skills related to literacy. There might still be only a few truly powerful and creative thinkers, but it becomes possible for good quality minds to explore the thoughts of a Plato or a Poincaré and to come to some serious understanding. In fact, there are many with good quality minds who can correct the creative thinkers or expand their results in many ways even though they might not be able to develop a new way of thinking from scratch.

Meta-theories play a role in all of this, the creative thinking and the proposal of new understandings and the teaching of any understandings which have legs. They play a role because human thinking and all that comes from it is an effort to shape a mind which corresponds to Creation or some part of it. Meta-theories are efforts to understand at relatively more abstract levels of created being and thus are a part of reality. Remember: abstract levels of created being are still real and aren't just imaginary efforts to understand some alleged 'true' reality of a concrete sort.

The human mind mostly enters abstract regions of created being on a speculative basis—after all we don't directly see the particles of modern physics nor the groups of modern mathematics nor even the patterns of history; we should think of those regions as places where we explore, map,

experiment as we try to achieve more profound understandings of created being. This isn't pure speculation as most would think of it because speculation as I conceive it is more a glue tying together different parts of concrete being, of abstract being, of concrete and abstract being. This is why I can see true freedom on the part of creative thinkers or doers or artists at the same time I propose they are doing 'no more' than trying to imitate the Creator in His acts-of-being. Our very creativity is within the constraints of reality.

I'm writing about speculation and speculation mixed with theory and both mixed with fact. The foundational idea remains as I've stated it often: created being is a spectrum ranging from the concrete stuff of this universe up to the abstract sort of stuff it was shaped from, some of that stuff being part of the story of the so-called Big Bang, and the more abstract stuff from which that was shaped right up to the primordial level of created being, the truths God manifested as the raw stuff of His Creation. Our minds, our ways of thinking and remembering should correspond to created being, to reality so long as one realizes reality includes some very abstract realms of created being. Thinking isn't something transcendental to created being, something which renders judgment upon Creation or any part of it. Thinking is, in a manner of speaking, the soulish aspect to created being. Moving forward from God's creation of the raw stuff of Creation to God's shaping of the concrete realm of flesh and blood and rocks, we can follow God with our minds and our hearts and our hands, imitating God as He goes about His work. We're children who pick up a stick and move it in ways analogous to our Father as He shapes stars and abstract realms of mathematics, making up our stories to explain what He does and what we try to do in imitation of Him. Over time, if the intellectually and pedagogically talented members of the Body of Christ do their jobs, we'll refine those stories and the underlying thoughts and feelings and acts so that they correspond ever better to God's own works of creating and shaping, His acts-of-being.

Our speculations, including the speculative levels of theories of even the most concrete matters, are always about levels of abstract being as well and, in some strong cultural and implicit sense if not in an explicit sense, also about the entirety, the whole ball of wax, all of Creation. We can have a theory which covers some part of being in a more abstract realm and that theory can be particularized to cover some part or aspect of the concrete realm of created being which is our universe.

In the relatively distant past, I've dealt with the idea of a more gener-

alized selection theory of which Darwin's would be a particular family of theories, not a particular theory. This is where my thoughts had turned several days back. 'Natural selection' can be stated, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, in this way: those organisms which survive to reach the age of reproduction have a chance to reproduce, may the luck be with them. It needs to be particularized to make total sense—as Darwin did himself in an exploratory way, crippled by lack of knowledge about DNA and by the lack of perspective which comes with time when we can accustom ourselves to a way of thought.

Let me present a list showing some examples of selection processes organized according to some basic attributes of such processes:

1. Selection processes with goals
  - a) Brain development
  - b) Most scientific research projects
  - c) Writing serious novels
  - d) Growth of a human community—short-term
2. Selection processes without identifiable goals
  - a) Darwinian 'evolution'
    - i. Natural selection (for survival)
    - ii. Sexual selection (for specific reproductive opportunities)
  - b) Growth of a human community—long-term

Here's the same scheme in a rough:

At least I think it's understandable. Note that I didn't place the development of a worldview in this scheme, despite the fact that I've described the process in this essay in terms of selection. I'm uncertain about the correct scheme for understanding selection processes and uncertain about some of the examples I've used above, but I'm very uncertain about how to classify the development of a worldview.

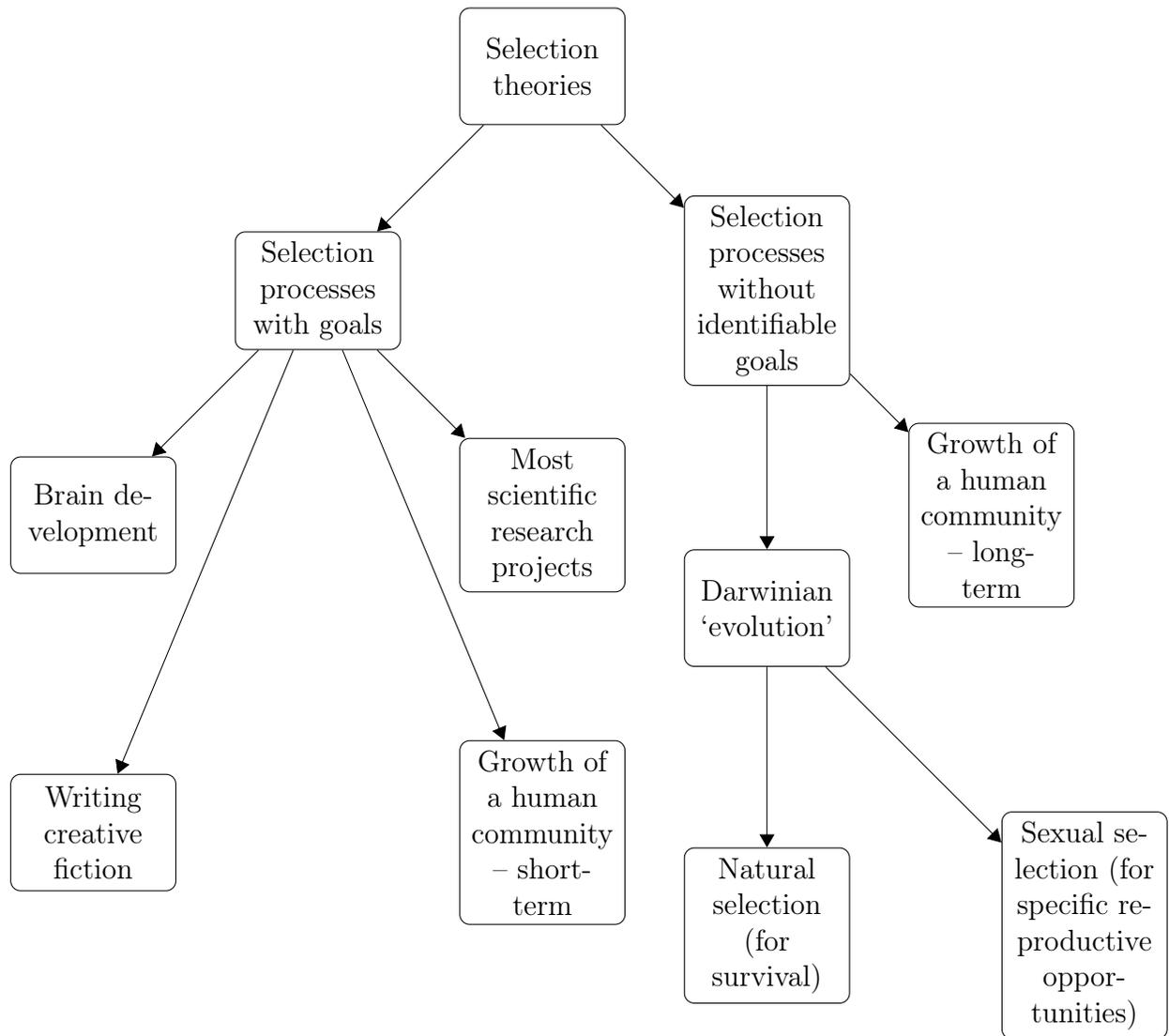


Figure 199.1: Darwinism as a Partially Concrete Selection Theory

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# 200 More Evidence of Higher Organization in the Universe

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1490>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/01/14.]

There is a good possibility for interesting science in the field of astrophysics and the closely related field of physical cosmology. It seems that something exists that couldn't possibly exist under current theories: a structure of quasars that extends to distances which seem far greater than possible under current understandings of the expansion of this universe along with the abstract nature of spacetime as well as mass-energy-fields. (I assume the distances stretch beyond those of cause-and-effect relationships under current models of the expanding universe.)

The article, *Biggest Thing in Universe Found—Defies Scientific Theory* at <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2013/01/130111-quasar-biggest-thing-universe-science-space-evolution/>, discusses this finding which is potentially fruitful if it be as disturbing to our understandings as it first seems.

Talk about a whopper—astronomers have discovered a structure in the universe so large that modern cosmological theory says it should not exist, a new study says.

...

Astronomers have known for years that quasars can form immense clusters that stretch to more than 700 million light-years across, said Clowes. But the epic size of this group of 73 quasars, sitting about 9 billion light-years away, has left them scratching their heads.

That's because current astrophysical models appear to show that the upper size limit for cosmic structures should be no more than 1.2 billion light years.

"So this represents a challenge to our current understanding and now creates a mystery—rather than solves one," Clowes said. . . .

The titanic structure, known simply as the Large Quasar Group (LQG), also appears to break the rules of a widely accepted cosmological principle, which says that the universe would look pretty much uniform when observed at the largest scales.

"It could mean that our mathematical description of the universe has been oversimplified—and that would represent a serious difficulty and a serious increase in complexity," Clowes said.

[Quotes attributed to "study leader Roger Clowes, an astronomer at University of Central Lancashire in England."]

There are two major qualifications which any reader should bear in mind. First, these interesting results might disappear with further research or analysis. The seeming anomaly might prove to be easily explainable with a relatively modest modification to current understandings. Probably not but, in any case, I'm hoping that these researchers have discovered something interesting because that leads to fruitful periods of struggling to re-understand the universe or what it contains.

Secondly, I am most certainly not implying even the possibility of mystical or magical forces but am speculating these researchers might have found pointers to some higher-level, 'abstract' principle of physics which can lead to more profound understandings of the universe itself, not just the universe as an ensemble of what it contains.

In Chapter 193, *A Universe is More than it Contains*, I put forth the claim that the universe is itself an entity and not just the sum of its contents. My claim and discussion were based upon a discussion by P.J.E. Peebles in *Principles of Physical Cosmology* [109] in which that prominent cosmologist summarized a discussion of some equations modeling the expansion of the universe: "[W]hile energy conservation is a good local concept. . . and can be defined more generally in the special case of an isolated system in asymptotically flat space, there is not a general global energy conservation law in general relativity theory."

I'm not proposing answers and I'd say that even the most solid answers we now have will be shown as doubtful before long. The first and second clauses of the prior sentence are closely related.

What we need, what we no longer have from Christianity and can't possibly have from a properly disciplined physics, or any other strictly empirical science, is an overall understanding of Creation, as we Christians would say. That greater understanding, whether Christian or other, comes from acts of imagination as much as acts of analytical understanding of empirical knowledge. It's the authoring of a story which corresponds as well as possible to the true story which is this world, the universe seen in a purposeful light, whether the light of the God of Moses or the Triune God of Jesus Christ or the principle of rationality which was Einstein's Old One. Still more wondrously, Christians or others who see God as a true Creator can see Creation in all its realms from this realm of concrete, thing-like being through various realms of abstraction right on to the raw stuff of Creation which corresponds to the truths God manifested as sufficient and proper for the stories He tells.

To a Christian, physics and evolutionary biology and all other 'purely' empirical sciences should be used, must be used, in this effort to achieve a greater understanding but those empirical sciences can't by themselves produce anything corresponding to a greater understanding. At the very least, a faith in the all-powerfulness of rationality or some other idea of necessary order is required, a faith I think to be beyond the capabilities of even the greatest of modern pagan thinkers (such as Nietzsche and Sartre and Einstein).

The goal for a modern philosophical or theological thinker is to find a narrative line, one which presents us with interesting and meaningful questions as much as, perhaps more than, answers. For now, with all the decay of the West largely attributable to the decay of the Christian intellect, empirical scientists and others have inherited enough of an overall understanding of that which they might not call Creation but with which they can work half-blinded, guiding themselves through the process of exploring created being and putting it into some sort of a meaningful context and asking good questions when new discoveries are in conflict with existing understandings.



## Part VI

# Freedom and Structure in Human Life



## 201 Introduction: Freedom and Structure in Human Life

In this part, I've collected essays or articles from my weblogs, *Acts of Being* at <http://loydfueston.com/> and *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* at <http://loydf.wordpress.com/>, I deal with human nature, especially in the physical foundations and the ways in which we have a limited but true freedom in this mortal realm.



# 202 Darwinism is More Sexual Than Natural

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=21>. It was finished and uploaded on 2006/07/28.]

No, I don't claim Darwinism is sexy, only that Darwinism is sexual. And it's more accurate to say evolution is more sexual than natural, since Darwinism—as many use the term—is at least arguably an ideology only accidentally connected to a valid field of study. Perhaps it's more fair to say that most human beings with some knowledge, but perhaps not much, of Darwinism will think of it as being natural selection, however defined in more rigorous, 'scientific' terms. The problem is. . .

When you put our thoughts and words about evolutionary processes in the context of a society with a high proportion of superstitious, irrational Christians and another high proportion of superstitious, irrational anti-Christians, then you end up with a difficult situation, one where it's hard for the unbiased experts to speak a properly qualified truth and just as hard for the unbiased laymen to hear any such words. There is a corollary to Gresham's Law which tells us the unintelligent drives the intelligent out of the public sphere when discussions draw much interest and many participants, at least when those many participants have more enthusiasm than knowledge or thinking skills.

Let's take a more modest and reasonable approach to this quick discussion of Darwinism. Good evolutionary thinkers will let their readers know that natural selection, as people usually think of it, is not the dominant type of selection even in the original, pre-genetic, form of Darwinist thought. That is, Darwin was an excellent naturalist and a wonderful writer on natural sciences if not so good an abstract thinker. He knew the argu-

ments for some form of inheritance mechanism in the body, from his own perspective and that of the breeders he dealt with. The so-called ‘modern synthesis’ was the effort to integrate modern knowledge of genetics with Darwin’s theory of evolution, which really wasn’t so well-formed. Again, Darwin was not a competent abstract thinker, as he himself realized, but he was a good naturalist and assembled arguments which eventually made up the pieces of a more coherent theory of evolution, though it’s perhaps more accurate to speak of a family of theories of evolution, some of which are merging into a complex, rich mess which includes two sorts of processes. There are very specific processes with at least something of a physics-like cause-and-effect structure. There are also chains of events which must be understood by way of developing narratives.

But what was the main ‘driving force’ of that Darwinian theory of evolution. It wasn’t natural selection but rather sexual selection. Nature, in an analogical manner of speaking, doesn’t really care if you survive past the ages of optimal reproductive activity. It is the ability to reproduce and not the ability to survive which is at issue. Moreover, in that same analogical manner of speaking, nature doesn’t care about the individual and evolution works with groups, with breeding populations.

At this point, a social and moral conservative of Catholic beliefs, and I am one of those, might be inclined to point towards the traditional Catholic family. That family had lots of children and a few would become priests or monks or nuns. Despite having some members who took on vows of celibacy, those families tended to grow over time, to produce many children from one generation to the next. That traditional family was certainly more successful in the most brutal Darwinist terms than the modern sorts of families advocated in liberalism. It is a sign of a deep, deep dishonesty on the part of so many modern evolutionary thinkers, such as Stephen Jay Gould, that they could advocate a death-culture liberalism while so strongly advocating a view of life as being a struggle for successful reproduction.

In any case, I wish to expand the viewpoint a little. It is not just the traditional family in modern terms, the so-called nuclear family, that is central to this issue. The breeding population in which that nuclear family was embedded is the true subject of a rational, non-ideological theory of evolution. That true breeding population is not defined in the same way throughout history, not even throughout modern Christian history. One of the problems which has led to the short-term attractiveness and very short-term viability of our culture of death is the loss of any well-structured

breeding population, extended family or religious community or tribe. The so-easily condemned and potentially jingoistic or bigoted understandings of breeding populations, no intermarriages between Blacks and Whites as one example, at least allowed the development of coherent social relationships of the sort which lead to children. However morally undesirable bigotry might be, it doesn't seem much of an improvement, if any at all, to move towards a breakdown in all the relationships which define true breeding populations. A nation or ethnic group or any other well-defined human population most certainly is not acting morally, by any rational standard, if they don't produce children. They're acting in an irrational manner by pure biological standards which would tell us morally well-ordered populations have to survive to remain such. You have to exist before you can be moral.

I should make one additional point. I am not arguing here for a return to a traditional Christian moral viewpoint. I'm simply making an appeal for evolutionary thinkers and so-called Creation Scientists alike to try to purge themselves of their ideological delusions. After all, any way of thought which produces biologically implausible views of human social life is clearly an ideology with delusionary components, even if that view also contains some great truths, from empirical science or from the revelations of the Creator.

Creation Scientists forget that even direct revelations from our Creator must be perceived by way of human physical senses, if only the eyes that see the words of the Bible, and then understood by human thought processes which seem to involve mostly, and perhaps only, physical brain processes and relationships to other created things where those relationships might be in the present or the past. Many evolutionary thinkers have adopted an overly harsh view of the origin of species while ignoring the reality of the evolution of morality itself; morality develops naturally as creatures develop into social groups. I wouldn't claim that morality is a necessary result of biological evolution, but I am claiming it to be, by definition, a necessary component of social living whether we are speaking of rats or wolves or human beings. Many evolutionary thinkers hold both that harsh, and supposedly realistic view of life alongside a liberal, individualistic view of human life that ignores the need for viable breeding populations in human society.

Reproductive fitness for human beings has a large social component which has been largely destroyed in many modern societies, including American society.



## 203 What is Original Sin?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=43>. It was finished and uploaded on 2006/10/09.]

As I noted in my book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], the term ‘original sin’ points to a fundamental truth about the human condition, but it seems to miss the target by enough to mislead a good number of Christians. Maybe human beings have always had trouble distinguishing between revelation, empirical knowledge, and human speculation. Or maybe we have far greater problems because of our deep illiteracy as a culture. In either case, ‘original sin’, mostly a doctrine about the condition of a creature—man, has become a matter of revelation in the views of many who consider themselves to be defenders of traditional Christian thought. This is strange. While revelation is necessary to tell us our exact relationship to God, we come to understand our own natures by observing those natures and gaining some substantial knowledge of how those natures came to be.

And yet, as I noted, the term ‘original sin’ speaks of a profound truth about the basic condition of man. It speaks of a deep sort of disorder that leads us often to act against our own best instincts and sometimes leads us to act in self-destructive ways or in evil ways towards even those we love. But the fully elaborated concept of ‘original sin’ as we have inherited it adds a variety of claims that are only one possible interpretation of the creation stories in the book of Genesis and those claims are in serious conflict with much of our empirical knowledge about man and about this universe.

That fully elaborated concept of ‘original sin’, found in the last chapters of *The City of God* by St. Augustine of Hippo, was developed using concepts borrowed from ancient myths—I might even say ‘pagan’ myths—of man’s fall from a god-like state. The Golden Age decayed to a Bronze Age and

then further to an Iron Age. In many of those myths, the entire process would start again when human beings had decayed to a primitive, pre-civilized condition.

Christian thinkers borrowed those myths but eliminated the cyclical nature. Even so brilliant a thinker as Nietzsche was not able to much damage the secularized revelation from Christ's story that the history of this world is linear. There was a one-time creation event, which we cannot see, and there will be a one-time end-of-times, which we cannot anticipate.

The linear nature of history proved a dangerous insight when combined with 2 other ideas:

1. The idea that God acts as if He is a human lawyer; and
2. The idea, already discussed, that the linear flow of history began at some high point, a Golden or Edenic Age, where human beings were in a prior state of grace, of perfection of a creaturely sort.

So far as the first idea goes: God is primarily a Creator. He is no more a Lawyer than He is a Designer. He is also a story-teller before He is either Lawyer or Designer. At least the Bible seems to tell us the Almighty tells a mighty good story, but so does our current best understandings of the nature of empirical reality.

So far as the second idea goes: our ancestors were knuckle-dragging apes and we haven't advanced so far as some people think. But we are certainly not in a steady state of decay, however much we often decay for centuries at a time. It would even seem that there is some large amount of truth in a modest theory of progress, never proposed in schematic form so far as I know but often showing up in the narratives of good historians.

I emphasize that the concept of 'original sin' is not found in revelation directly. It is a human speculation which comes from reading the Bible in light of both the true insight that man is in a radical state of disorder and two other beliefs related to the two wrong ideas above:

1. Man could not be in such a state of disorder, often including various sorts of pains and sufferings, unless it is punishment for something he did wrong. This comes from viewing God as a Transcendental Lawyer operating according to a human scale of justice. We cannot understand, limit, or expand God's justice. A human system of justice is a weak metaphor for God's justice in the same way that human

systems of thought or action are no more than weak metaphors for God's acts of creation.

2. Man was created as 'Higher Man' and is inherently a creature capable of hearing and accepting God's offer of companionship.

In fact, the developmental aspects of the worldview I developed in *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41] take care of both problems. The first problem is eliminated by the simple realization that God is a Creator of being and a shaper of particular universes. In future books and blog-entries, I will discuss the difference between God as Creator and God as Designer or Judge. For now, I'll just note that there is a difference and we do not need to assume that God would, or could, give us our just deserts in this world—whatever that might mean. We would probably be better to wonder if God is telling this particular story with all its misery and pain and unfairness just because it is His chosen way of producing the saints He wishes as His companions.

The second problem is eliminated by simply realizing our ancestors, being also the ancestors of chimpanzees, were not inherently rational nor inherently God-centered in a conscious manner. Not only are we dependent upon God reaching out to us, we are dependent upon the Almighty Lord teaching us that He is there and is reaching out to us.

My way of understanding our human selves, more importantly—of understanding our relationship to God, is very complex and is not a task to be completed in one life. Yet, I can see hints of what is involved and those hints once again come through modern empirical knowledge. By way of our disciplined exploration of this phase of Creation we call the universe, we're learning to think the thoughts God feels appropriate to us. We may well conjecture these are thoughts we will be thinking when we are companions of God in another, more peaceful phase of Creation. In any case, it's quantum mechanics that's teaching us to view relationships as being primary, though that is probably a lesson we should have learned from the Gospel of St. John as well as his letters.

Once we see our very beings as the result of God choosing to have a relationship of love with us before we even existed, once we see the universe and all other phases of Creation as existing just because they are objects of God's love, we can give up our attempts to make our own what is an ongoing gift. We do not even possess our own existence let alone any attributes that

make us suited for life as God's companions. We can realize that our beings and our various attributes, good and bad, are a result of God's chosen relationships with us. And that forces us to realize that we, as individuals and as a species, are living out a story which pleases God. Our way to God, even that lesser way to a state of virtuous paganism, leads through various environments in which order is built from the stuff of disorder.

Whatever might be possible to God, He has certainly not chosen to create a universe in which men are, or ever could have been, living in a state of grace. This is not to deny that we all receive God's gifts, His grace. This is to say that neither we nor our apish ancestors could have been the sorts of creatures capable of responding in full faith and confidence to God's offers of companionship. God might have created such beings but they wouldn't have been us.

The traditional doctrine of 'original sin' points to a great truth but it is not a very good explanation of the human condition. It is far better to retreat to St. Augustine's earlier insight. We do not sin, we are sin. We are not autonomous agents with free-wills who can chose to be sinful creatures or to be angelic creatures who reject sin once and for all. We are sin to the depths of our beings.

Only God can change this condition. We are living in a story God is telling, not one which we—or any conceivable demons—can change in any fundamental way. Even the greatest possible use of our limited freedom can accomplish little unless God chooses to leverage it as He did, over a period of centuries, the noble but humble efforts of St. Benedict and his companions. All they wanted to do was to live a Christian life in small communities and God used them not only to develop and spread the Gospel but also to salvage much of Roman technology and then to start developing it in innovative ways. Even when our actions have great effects in this world, we can't predict what those effects will be. God's ways are not our ways and yet it is our task to try to make them our ways.

It is this mismatch between what God calls us to be and what we can be by our inherent powers that can be misunderstood as 'original sin'. It is a sinful state since our Creator has called us to a better state and we are responsible for that sinful state. But we are not responsible by the criteria of human systems of justice because we did not will to be what we are and could not have been different and still have been us. We are responsible by more general criteria and yet we have no good way to say why we are responsible for what we are when we were made by Another.

We would be better off if we looked at our real situation and developed stories to explain it rather than trying to defend a view of human nature which can be readily seen to be partially right but also seriously wrong. We have a duty to move towards a new view which will retain what is right about the concept of 'original sin' while correcting what is known to be wrong. True, that view will eventually be seen to be also partly wrong but we have to recognize our creaturely limitations and work within them.



## 204 Visual Technology and the Deformation of Human Intelligence

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=11>. It was finished and uploaded on 2006/12/14.]

The recently released movie *The Nativity* has raised some questions in my mind, starting with a matter of doctrine but that's not what I come to discuss. Those unconcerned with the finer points of Catholic doctrine should bear with me for a paragraph or two as I set up a discussion about the dangers of visual technology.

*The Nativity* is said to be a reverent and well-produced movie. I have no intention of seeing it for reasons which will become obvious, but I'll take that assessment at face-value. The first problem that presents itself to a Catholic is that it apparently shows a normal birth for Jesus and the Catholic Church has strongly tended to teach that Mary remained a virgin through her entire life on Earth – not only in regard to sexual acts but also in regard to birth processes. This teaching can be found in catechisms and summaries of the faith as well as in the teachings of some of the most important Fathers. While not speaking in medical terms, those various writings were certainly saying that Jesus didn't break His mother's hymen in the way He left her holy womb. The current *Catechism of the Catholic Church* written under the guidance of John Paul II continues to teach this traditional doctrine, using a quote from St. Augustine to summarize the 'official' position.

In various writings, I've claimed that the Church's teachings include both revealed truths and well-grounded human speculations—Pope Bene-

dict XVI made the same claim in his first encyclical. Disagreement in good-faith is possible when it concerns doctrines that seem to be human additions to the faith.

In my book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], I disagreed with the general belief that we have souls which can survive the death of our bodies—bodily resurrection is the teaching of the Bible. Before I went public with such a belief, I did a substantial amount of research on the issue, reading some serious books on the history of Christian doctrines, books written by the prominent Fathers, philosophy books dealing with mind or soul, science books dealing with the same topics, and even some books of philosophical archeology on the very foundations and evolutions of the words we've inherited—psyche, anima, and so forth. And I spent much time fretting over the contradiction between the Church's general condemnations of dualism and the belief of many that the Church of the Apostles tells us we have souls made of some stuff different from matter.

But all of this is leading to a seemingly different line of thought. Consider this as some sort of transition from prologomena to the main line of argument. . .

The association of specific images with an idea or even a physical event uncertain in some way leads to a change in our thoughts, a change corresponding to literalization in many human beings. Metaphors and appropriately fuzzy images take on a specific form, hard edges and all. Anything that associates a hard-edged image with an idea will shut down the imagination which is the bridge to our deeper thoughts as we try to understand the vague or the inscrutable.

What you take in, food or images, will help to form your very being. Uncritically view a pious movie about the birth of Christ, one which shows a normal, bloody human birth and you will think in those terms – at least most will. View a movie emphasizing the brutal treatment of the Christ and that may well shape the way you think of His redemptive work. That is, it may well limit the way you think of His redemptive work and it may well encourage you in the modern heresy that we carry our crosses by merely enduring physical suffering. In any case, the brutal suffering will come to seem the point of it all.

Those more interested in literary or historical issues can easily think of the problem in those terms. Think of the movies about Abe Lincoln and then read a serious biography and you find out he was. . . A wealthy lawyer who helped NYC investors to cheat Cyrus McCormick out of his royalties

for the reaper? A willing tool of the railroads who helped establish the precedent that state-chartered corporations could exercise the powers of the state against local communities trying to protect their ways of life? But there is that one image of Lincoln walking up the hill as a surprisingly jingoistic Unitarian hymn comes on to blur the very distinction between God and Abraham Lincoln.

The true and more imaginative knowledge that comes from reading and thinking will not always puncture legends. You may read some worthwhile books and end up with a still higher opinion of George Washington and Henry Knox, of the Indian leaders Pontiac and Chief Joseph and the wrongly maligned Geronimo. You may even have to purge images from the movie *Patton* and numerous images of Alan Alda's smirking face as you discover evidence that Patton and MacArthur were moral giants compared to the civilian leaders they served under – despite the fact that their egos were just as bloated as the egos of Churchill and Roosevelt and Truman.

Visual imagery can easily prevent the exploration of new meanings which can only be expressed by way of analogies and metaphors and other softer-edged literary devices. Visual imagery can distort our views of history and—as one example—leave us Americans puzzled after every murderously unsuccessful adventure in some foreign region we don't understand. For that matter, we no longer have the knowledge or the thinking skills to understand our own country. We are incapable of purging ourselves of the jingoistic images implanted in our brains by the journalists and movie-producers who are the harlots of those who hold the reins of power. Even as we, and our children, are being skinned by the corporate and political leaders of this country, we smile and sing “His truth goes marching on” as images fill our heads of our Deity marching up that hill.



## 205 Lowering Standards Outside of the Superbowl

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=14>. It was finished and uploaded on 2006/12/28.]

In sports, we know that young people will achieve more by aiming high, by pushing themselves into zones of discomfort and even pain. No one would advocate that even a high school football player should just settle down at a performance level that's comfortable to him.

It's certainly not bad, within the appropriate limits, to encourage high accomplishments in sports (forget the steroids and the financial corruption for a minute). On the other hand, the typical American won't even try to appreciate performances by those supreme athletes of vocal performances—opera singers. We prefer juvenile performances by emotive actors to disciplined performances by adults who can project their voices without screaming. We prefer politicians and journalists who flatter us rather than honest men of moral integrity who will speak honestly. We prefer entertainers who exploit our passive couch-potato selves rather than maintaining the skills of reading substantial books or those of making our own music. When we grow white of hair, we prefer condos in Florida to the joys, and frustrations, of being full-time grandparents.

Dare I even mention that such quaint hobbies as playing the piano or dulcimer, writing verse, writing serious and substantial sermons or homilies, are rarely pursued? Crafts that demand human skills but not much in the way of human intellectual or spiritual development seem to be often practiced—I'll leave it to others to say if they are well-practiced. But it's on the sports field that we demand excellence, often far beyond the levels possible to us or to any human beings we know.

We enjoy high standards in sports because they provide us with a good show we can appreciate from our amateurish pasts as sand-lot ball-players, from our hot summer evenings of tossing basketballs in the general direction of the hoop. Why do we not appreciate a truly good singer from our weak efforts to hit the notes in our church's children's choir? Why do we not appreciate a truly good writer from the garbled one-page essays we struggled with in ninth-grade? Maybe because there is some brain-power involved in either writing or making music and we are intellectually and spiritually lazy? True, we're also physically lazy but you don't have to push your bodies through walls of pain to watch a marathon and you don't have to jump even 12 inches to watch a wide-receiver go straight up 30 inches in a crowd of 250-pounders ready to slam his defenseless body into the ground.

It takes mental effort to appreciate a substantial novel. This is true of a Dickens novel, straightforward in some senses but containing its substance at least partly in the character development that is brought about by complex plots. This is also true of a Melville novel that is far from straightforward, in most cases, and develops a complex view of some part of the world by way of unusual characters, insertions of essays or encyclopedia articles, philosophical dialogs or monologues. It also takes more effort to appreciate a Mozart piano sonata or even a Beethoven setting of a poem by Walter Scott or Lord Byron.

But I don't think it's fully a matter of laziness. In fact, a certain amount of disciplined laziness leads us into the leisure which allows us to appreciate substantial elements of human culture. The interested reader can check out Josef Pieper's *Leisure: The Basis of Culture* [114]. A certain amount of disciplined laziness is also necessary for creative writing or musical composition and also for the contemplative life, religious or philosophical.

In Chapter 349, *Morality and the Modern Novel*, I made the claim that modern human beings don't like to read true novels, substantial works of moral exploration, just because they shy away from any examination of their moral insides. We are so many Dr. Jekylls, suppressing our unconverted selves and pretending to be what we are not. The modern novel in its classic form played a role as a helper to the Bible, pointing towards the need for moral self-examination even when specific novels or Biblical passages seem to be glorifying sinful activities. Laziness played a part in the loss of our ability to read the Bible and *Don Quixote* in an intelligent way, a way that allows a living response. But I suspect that we, and our ancestors, began shying away from any moral self-examination from a feeling of self-

righteousness—we're a genial folk, surely that means we have a true moral integrity.

A writer with moral integrity, that is, a author who is truly an author and not just a writer can't back off. I'm certainly not claiming that all great writers have been morally good human beings, nor am I claiming that all novels teach moral lessons in the simplistic way. It's surprising how few of those immoral works are recognized as being great and those which are recognized as non-ephemeral works run parallel to the poetry of Baudelaire dealing with lesbians, cats, and other creatures of moral disorder. Baudelaire set out to explore the alleged beauty of evil and then marched all his lesbians to hell. Cats, being of low levels of social order by the standards of higher mammals, are not always willfully evil but they are. . . Not so well-ordered in moral behavior by the standards of men, dogs, elephants, and whales.

Cats are the most predatory of higher mammals, mammals which tend to high levels of social and moral order.

Modern men have tried to shift the balance of their natures towards cat-hood. I'll explore this more elsewhere. In fact, I've explored this somewhat in my various writings, including my book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41]. We've tried to be individuals to a greater extent than is healthy, or even possible in the long-term, for human beings.

This sort of prying into our moral natures is what's involved in serious writing, not techniques allied with the willful refusal to write "with a message". Since I'm allergic to modern educational systems and techniques, I've no intention of going near a writing school, but I'm under the strong impression that they try to relieve any true writer of that desire of true writers to tell true narratives. Despite what writing-school professors and publishers of writer's manuals preach, true narratives are—by definition – morally ordered.

Narratives have purpose and direction and those attributes are supplied by some recognition of moral order, though it might be a moral order which is decaying or never quite came into form. It might also be a moral order which the author despises. A narrative without purpose, without moral order, will cease to be meaningfully to human beings, but we modern human beings prefer purposelessness to moral self-examination. In each of our heart of hearts, we fear we are Dr. Jekyll or—if you prefer—Adolf Eichmann. We fear, if only deep inside ourselves, that we're capable of stomping a young child for the sheer pleasure of it and we know we're capable of putting our

noses to the grindstone and pursuing our careers in the interests of an evil government.

Whether an author writes history or theology or novels, he's a 'serious' author precisely when he deals with the big issues in the context of his own times. And modern human beings don't like that stuff. They gravitate towards writing which is allegedly pure, it tries not to teach messages. Modern human beings are as allergic to serious writing as I am to modern institutions. It's not just coincidence that I try to write serious books. I despise our modern school systems, academic attitudes, and moral frivolity. Our modern schools systems, nearly all of our modern institutions, are fascist – that is, they have authority structures imposed from above. Human beings are healthiest when authority structures grow naturally starting from the extended family. Despite what many people think, that is what the history of the ancient Christian churches show – they pass through periods of corruption which are also periods of bureaucracy and wrongful sorts of authority.

Human beings who adapt well to such forms of organization were described by our Lord Jesus Christ. They are the white sepulchers, pure-white on the outside and full of death and rot inside. They are also the ones who honor the prophets murdered by their fathers—even as they prepare to murder the prophets of their own age. In the modern age, human beings are squeamish and they first use weapons of silence against anyone, including any serious novelist or historian, who takes a properly prophetic stance.

As for me...

I may or may not write books which will prove to be of lasting interest, but I most certainly have the same attitudes as all those great writers who despise the modern world. I aim for high standards and those have nothing to do with the brain-dead techniques of modern fiction-writing. High standards for writers are the same as for all those who have vocations involving mind and spirit—honesty comes first, insight is valued more than flattery.

This is the problem. Higher standards are denigrated in all fields where they would be associated with moral self-examination. Great literature, especially the modern novel, explores moral order. Politics, economics, history, science, engineering, and even games also are dynamic efforts to explore moral order and to find some sort of useful and noble stability. But sports is interesting in that higher standards of a sort can still be pursued when moral order or even moral relevance are denied. American politics and

business are the same. We explicitly deny that moral order is a necessary precondition before we pursue our short-term goals.

There was some truth in the English claim that their empire was built upon the sports fields of Eton. And it's clearly true that the British Empire, even at its most evil, was built by men of little moral vision but much moral discipline.

Our political and our business worlds have decayed into battlegrounds of incompetent, greedy men, but our sports worlds have become battlegrounds of highly competent, greedy men. Now we can see a conclusion coming into form, and it's not one I had in mind in such a sharp form when I began writing this entry:

We can maintain high standards in sports while our standards are dropping rapidly in literature and history and politics and economics just because competence in sports can be appreciated by the citizens of a morally disordered society. In that sort of a morally disordered society, competence in literature and most other fields of human endeavor is mostly ignored but sometimes despised or even actively destroyed.



## 206 Social Security: It Seemed Like a Good Idea

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=55>. It was finished and uploaded on 2006/12/29.]

In my various writings, I've not had a good thing to say about the welfare systems and social security systems of our modern age. I only want to write a short entry explaining the basic principle behind my opposition to welfare systems and social security systems.

We are physical creatures, creatures who need food and shelter and physical companionship amongst various and many needs. We are not even so individualistic as are cats, perhaps the most individualistic of social or higher mammals. We have bonds of dependency, first of all those bonds formed between mothers and children. A child's love for his mother begins with his dependence upon her breasts and arms and legs. He is dependent upon her for food and for shelter and for the companionship which first shows as cuddling and cooing, not as some sort of spiritual communion.

Such bonds are the foundations of all human ties. Even our Lord Jesus Christ formed such bonds with His blessed mother during His infancy.

Our loves are not some sort of magical or 'spiritual' bonds that come to us from... Where? We are physical creatures and our social bonds, our deepest emotional ties, come first of all from our bonds of dependency. Our bonds to God Himself come through His acts as Creator of our physical selves and of the physical environments that are our homes during our mortal lives. We are dependent upon our Maker and we owe Him everything.

What are our modern bonds of dependency? Certainly, they are not bonds tying us to local political communities or communities of worship. Certainly they don't tie us to the extended family. We have even weakened

our still-existing bonds to the so-called nuclear family.

Our strongest bonds are to those Principalities and Powers which I called ‘the gods of the marketplaces’ in my book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41]. We are more dependent upon Toyota and the Social Security Administration than we are upon our siblings or local merchants or local churches or synagogues. Our souls are formed by the moral midgets of the entertainment industry and not by our priests or ministers or rabbis.

Social security and welfare systems as they exist in modern nation-states are evil because they replace our local bonds of dependencies with bonds to central powers, the Principalities and Powers in the Hellenistic language of St. Paul. For those who care about history: the first national welfare and social security systems in the modern world were built by the Iron Duke, Otto von Bismarck, as he militarized and centralized Prussia. He despised people who needed to be taken care of, but he became convinced that welfare and social security were necessary to bond Prussians to their increasingly powerful central government.

The Roman politicians who presided over the decay of the Republic into the Empire acted as if this were true, though I don’t know if they had any conscious plans to build the welfare bureaucracy that existed before Rome had a professional army. As time goes on, it seems that those early victims of the modern age—the Anabaptists, understood it better than the rest of us. The central powers are not to be trusted. Christians and Jews are very unwise to make alliances with those embryonic Principalities and Powers. But there are many in the pro-life movement as well as those fighting to retain traditional regulation of marriage who would do all over again, thinking: This time when we regain control over those Principalities and Powers, we’ll do it right and not lose control. No. Once power is sufficiently centralized, it takes on a life of its own and becomes the evil side of the Invisible Hand of Adam Smith. Centralized power will serve its own purposes, as mindless and lifeless and destructive as those purposes might be.

But that centralization of power can always be started up with a simple appeal to people’s needs. Let some politicians gain general taxation powers in a morally well-structured society and soon they’ll be saying, “We’ll set up a safety net to help only those without family or community bonds.” And soon, most will be forsaking their family and community bonds to enter the always exciting marketplaces.

[As a corrective: I’m not opposed to large-scale governments in principle

but I don't think we've yet learned how to form such governments so that they serve the needs and goals of the smaller human communities coming together to form a nation. This claim is independent of the states rights issue. If we ever get proper centralized governments, mortal manifestations of some legitimate organs of the Body of Christ, they will develop by organic processes and not by the efforts of human designers or as a matter of financial or military/police power being used to impose order from the top-down. The problem of dependencies remains and my advice is to be careful who or what you become dependent upon if you would wish to be a moral and free human being.]



## 207 The Christian in the Universe of Darwin

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=58>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/01/08.]

Darwin is no problem to Christian thought. The facts gathered by biologists—including sociobiologists and other evolutionary biologists, geneticists, and brain-scientists—are themselves no problem. Certain thinkers, evolutionary biologists and so-called philosophers, have interpreted those facts in terms of a skepticism of a sort charitably described as reductionistic materialism.

Such thinkers, as well as more pious and more intelligent materialists, are forced to become dualists just because they have no way of conceiving a coherent physical ‘place’ which might be the setting for what I have called a world—a physical universe, or Aristotelian Cosmos, seen as being morally ordered. That moral order cannot be seen in a mere collection of environments, which is what you get with pragmatic philosophies and other semi-empirical modern forms of thought which try to construct a body of knowledge from catalogs of randomly assembled facts. Even when the existence of a universe is grudgingly—and inconsistently—acknowledged, the problem doesn’t go away. You can’t force moral order upon an amoral universe or Cosmos. That order must be inherent to the universe or Cosmos. Without a coherent physical setting, you have two choices in any effort to retain some sort of morality:

1. Invent moral rules: that forces a subjectivism, likely a dualistic plurality where each human being has his own ‘truths’. The more damaging aspect is the dualistic separation of the universe from moral truths.

2. Invent a transcendent realm of truths: that forces a more direct dualism often labeled Platonic though it's not clear that Plato himself was advocating such a view.

It's true that most modern Christians and Jews have become dualists in that same sense—they see us as being individuals passing through physical 'places' which are not morally ordered as such. Consequently, they have to draw moral truths from a Transcendent realm. On their part, this strategy is superficially more plausible since the Bible seems, to modern literalistic minds, to be a set of revelations from such a realm.

Creation is morally ordered and is not just a neutral setting for human beings to engage in moral or immoral dramas. More to the point, we have moral natures because we evolved in a morally ordered universe. The facts of evolutionary biology can be brought into a coherent form so far as their moral implications go. All of those facts about rodents acting in the interests of their genetically close relatives, the fact that wolves have stronger instincts than men against killing members of their own species, the general behavior of animal mothers and especially those from the species of birds or social mammals, tell us that the moral aspects of animal natures have evolved as much as the other aspects of animal natures. The evidence strongly indicates that the universe is highly conducive to the development of moral natures.

Unlike the ideological Darwinists, including Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennet, I can legitimately engage in speculations about morality just because I work from an understanding of the physically well-ordered universe of Einstein. That Einsteinian universe can then be seen as a world, a morally well-ordered universe, in light of my Christian faith.

Without this perception of a physically well-ordered place, Aristotelian Cosmos or Einsteinian universe, any moral thinker is forced to be a dualist of some sort. A proper understanding of this physical universe, this phase of God's Creation, allows us to understand that we are moral creatures because the true Creator, the God of Jesus Christ, has created us as members of a social species living in a morally well-ordered universe.

## 208 What is a Human Being and Why Should Novelists Care?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=19>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/01/16.]

A human being is not an individual animal in the way that modern liberals imagine. A human being is an individual in a meaningful sense but he's bound into various relationships, with his fellow human beings, with other creatures, with the non-living world. He is not much a solitary comet shooting through space so that most contact with other entities will usually be at a distance or will be catastrophic. He is more a tree with his roots entangled with the roots of the other nearby trees, which entanglement takes in the entire forest.

I've spoken in my book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], of Hermann Melville's dislike of the ideas of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Along with at least Nathaniel Hawthorne and Henry James, Sr., he considered Emerson and his side-kick, Henry David Thoreau, to be morally insane. I use this example repeatedly just because it speaks to a deep problem that affects American societies, in their political and economic aspects as well as their literary and artistic aspects.

Melville considered Emerson's philosophy to be a spiritualized materialism that came from an excessive concern for comfort and safety. Moreover, he thought it masked pure selfishness, a profound lack of charity, of concern for others. To top it all, he feared that Emerson was a more typical American than we would like.

In fact, we have become so enwrapped in a certain type of mindless prosperity, directed towards maximizing marketplace activity and not directed towards human or humane goals, that we have lost sight of the need

to make sacrifices at time. The sacrifices we generally need to make are those which integrate us in human communities of various types: family and local political community and community of worship.

From the viewpoint of a true writer, one aiming to be an author (think ‘authority’), a human being is a character in a complex set of interlocking moral narratives. There is a narrative that can be called his life and there is a narrative of his family and one of his local community and a number of other narratives, some of which have only an indirect effect on an individual, though they might have helped to form the earth or the human race or Europe or France.

There are a seeming infinity of views of this complex set of interlocking moral narratives. Different authors choose different views. Jane Austen concentrated on the concrete details of what might be called ordinary lives. Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote allegories which came across as also being concrete stories but were actually loaded with symbols of various sort which manifested aspects of those other narratives in the concrete tales.

Writers play a part in forming those narratives and not just in relating them to the public. Good writers, that is—authors (think ‘authority’), can change the meaning of words and phrases, can introduce new metaphors and analogies, can even change the grammar that constrains or empowers us.

We live in an age where a genial mediocrity passes for morality and that also says something about the lack of courage and integrity of the writers we prefer to read. It’s hard to divide responsibility. A true author (whether ‘great’ or destined for the ash-bin of history) won’t compromise though he may seem to be doing that. It took a couple decades or more for critics to realize the novels of Charles Dickens were profoundly moral—and then it was too late. He was as well-established as the type of hack who flatters the public and panders to their worst tendencies rather than challenging their better selves. One difference which emerged over time was the fact that the books of Dickens were read and studied over time. Of course, his stature was helped immensely by the fact that some of his stories made good movies and musicals, even great movies and musicals in a few cases.

Narratives are necessarily ordered and the proper order for human stories is a moral order. Those of us who believe in a personal Creator believe, or should believe, that the entire universe is also morally ordered though that order might be invisible so that we know only what God has revealed to men. That moral order turns the evolving partial differential equations

of cosmological physicists into a story. That moral order also turns the brute facts of anthropologists and geologists and paleontologists and the theories of evolutionary biologists into a story of life on earth. But I speak mostly of more limited works of the imagination, ones dealing with human lives in a specific age and a particular place. Yet, that greater context flows through the most ordinary tale if it be morally well-ordered.

Modern readers have lost most of their skill, especially for reading a book in a greater context than what is on the currently open page. Without that greater context, the moral structure of the greatest of novels remains invisible. But novels written to pander to those who seek comfort and security first, and then make their moral decisions, will have a defective moral structure, quite often a moralistic or sentimental structure. And they won't be able to help the readers to change and to try to put some purpose, some truer and more demanding moral structure, in their lives.



## 209 Moving with the Grain of the Universe: Parasites and All

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=61>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/01/18.]

The website of *New Scientist* has an interesting article, *Parasites may reduce relapse in MS patients* at <http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn10964-parasites-may-reduce-relapse-in-ms-patients.html>, which tells us that investigations of third-world children with auto-immune diseases, such as multiple sclerosis, have indicated that they sometimes do better against their diseases if they are infected with parasites.

As I understand the best efforts so far to explain this:

1. We evolved as parasite-ridden creatures.
2. Parasites have ways of suppressing our immune systems so that they can survive longer.
3. Our immune systems have adjusted to this by being set at higher levels than if we were some sort of organism which was created in a pure environment.
4. Consequently, when we are too free of parasites and other infections, our immune systems will be too active and too sensitive. Auto-immune diseases such as MS or rheumatoid arthritis will become more common.

There is a social message and also a theological/anthropological message in this. The social message, stated simply, is that we should beware of any efforts to isolate human beings from the dirt and reality of the natural world.

I'm not advocating we abolish all sanitary efforts—not by a long-shot, but we should be wiser in choosing our means and also our goals. There is a lot to be said about this complex issue, but I'll leave that task to others for now.

The theological/anthropological message can also be stated simply, though I've tried to develop it in detail in my various writings, especially my book: *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41]. We are not fallen creatures so much as we are creatures integrated into a world which is a struggle between forces of order and disorder.

The paragraph above still leads too easily to a misinterpretation that portrays us as being at war with our own world. Speaking as a Christian, I feel my task is not to war against God's Creation, nor do I see Creation as being filled with evil spirits who war against us. Our task as God-centered human beings is to figure out our role in Creation, having faith that finding this role and fulfilling it as well as possible will put us in the proper relationship to our Creator and prepare us for life in the world of the Resurrected.

## 210 Are We Born With Self-awareness?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=72>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/02/19.]

I don't know where consciousness begins in the animal kingdom though most animals we pay attention to are certainly conscious in the intuitive sense of being aware of their immediate environment and not just responding to simple chemical cues. So far as I know, only human beings are self-aware in a deep sense so that it is truly a part of human nature. Chimpanzees can show self-awareness under certain circumstances but don't seem to be at high levels of self-awareness as a natural matter. When I speak of a 'human self', I mean a human being in which this self-awareness is developed to a relatively high level. As I'll discuss, we have little reason to believe that we come into this world with a well-developed self-awareness any more than we come into this world with well-developed intellectual skills.

In Chapter 211, *Can a Corrupted Language Lead to Heresy?*, I speak of the dangers to Christian belief of the modern understanding of person and I make reference to complex arguments that we can become persons, in the Christian sense, only by letting Christ infuse us and turn us into Christ-like human beings. It's best to keep those arguments in mind when reading this entry.

In Chapter 8, *Staking Your Faith on Gaps in Empirical Knowledge*, I spoke about an article in the newsletter *BrainWork* which discussed evidence that out-of-body experiences and near-death experiences seem to be the result of serious disruption of certain brain systems that regulate our awareness of ourselves as selves. There is a very interesting implication of

the very existence of these brain systems, one which is more disturbing than the likelihood that there is no human soul separable from the body—our personhood develops during our life along with underlying brain structures rather than being something which exists at our birth, let alone our conception.

I'll leave it to the interested reader to explore the scientific literature if he cares much about the details of these brain systems. Neuroscience is blessed with some top-level scientists who write books which are accessible to a literate non-expert. If you need a start, here are some names: Michael Gazzaniga, Gerald Edelman, Walter Freeman, Semir Zeki, William Calvin, and Antonio Damasio.

Those who doubt the tentative and fragile nature of our self-hood can think about any human beings they knew who suffered from Alzheimer's or Huntington's. Amongst the other problems in such disorders, we can observe a frightening loss of self-hood even when the victims are quite recognizable in their behavior and speech as human beings, although they'll be limited in both those areas by the time that loss becomes noticeable. It's possible they'll lose all human behaviors and will stop giving indications of a human intelligence being present.

The human self truly is a construction resulting from interactions of the physical human being with the environments around it and also from internal interactions of various components of that body. The brain is very important but other components and aspects of the human being are involved. Think of the human self as an onion—the brain is at the center but there are layers going out, some of those layers being closer (not necessarily in terms of physical distance) to the core regions of the brain and others being farther out and seemingly having more the role of 'taking abuse' from the external environments to protect the inner regions.

'Construction' is a bad word for the development of one of the most complex aspects of the human organism, but it makes the point. It's a little better to say that we're not characters passing through the stories that are our lives—we're formed by those stories even as we shape those stories by our own actions and thoughts, including our imaginative interpretations by which we struggle to see the moral meanings of those stories which are our lives, stories which are part of the great story God is telling, the story which is the world. We don't come into this world as pre-formed characters; our genetic and somatic heritage provide important possibilities and constraints but there is a lot of room for variation. Identical twins might be very alike

but they are far from being just two copies of the same being. Each of those twins has had somewhat different experiences, inside his body and outside, even when they were closely bonded.

There is no self which is magically attached to a body, no self which exists at the moment of birth or even at the age of 50, let alone at the moment of conception. Saul of Tarsus was not an autonomous agent as in modern liberal theories of politics and economics; the change to Paul was different from a mere selection of a different basket of life-style goods and choices. The change was deep inside of his very being.

A human being, at 70 as well as at birth, has a very complex body which provides some basic processes and some very complex processes by which a self can be shaped. Many of those processes don't work in isolation but only in response to environmental cues, including those from the mother and other human beings. We're constrained by our bodies and our environments but we're shaped within those constraints by our particular responses to the world and by the response of others to us.

Perhaps it's best, in the sense of accuracy, to regard most human beings as being immature selves with a low-level of self-awareness. This might partially explain the difficulty that most human beings seem to have in taking moral responsibility for, or even interest in, the large organizations and general movements of which they're part. Too easily, human beings merge into a herd of human animals responding to material needs or to the general movement of the herd. We need more self-awareness before we can be unselfish at the larger scale. We at least need to recognize that we are part of a herd, or several herds at different times of our day or our lives. Otherwise, we will simply act, with blinders on, to take care of our mortgages and our retirement funds, because that's what the modern herd considers to be the highest duties. Self-awareness would seem to be necessary for higher moral consciousness, but it doesn't seem to be inborn. The possibility is inborn but modern ways of living, modern ways of forming societies and educating our children, don't seem to develop the sort of self-awareness necessary to that higher moral consciousness.



## 211 Can a Corruption of Language Lead to Heresy?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=74>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/02/19.]

The answer would seem to be, “Yes”. We’ve lost our ability to say that Christ was man and God in one divine Person just because we use the word ‘person’ to refer to each instantiation of a human being. One of these two possibilities is true:

1. Jesus of Nazareth was born a human person. If united with God in some way, there was a confusion of persons or else a mutilation of the human being of Jesus of Nazareth by loss of the properties of human person-hood.
2. Jesus was born as a human body united with a divine Person but in that case He was different from other human beings who are born as human persons and are inherently persons from beginning to end of their mortal lives. He would have only been a puppet, missing this human person-hood which so many of us claim to exist from conception or birth or somewhere between.

By sheer sloppiness and lack of concern for the importance of words, we’ve lost the ability to speak in an orthodox manner. We’ve put ourselves into the position of the ancient Monophysites, as some historians tell the story. Those heretical Christians were not willfully heretical but they spoke a language which didn’t properly differentiate between nature and person. The traditional Christian formula, “Jesus had a divine and human nature in one divine Person” would translate as either “Jesus had a divine and human

nature in one divine nature” or else “Jesus had a divine and human person in one divine person”.

We modern Christians seem to be in a similar position. Using our day-to-day language, we are forced to think of Jesus Christ as not being truly man because He wasn't a human person or else to think of Jesus Christ as being a confused mixture of human person and divine Person. In such a case, the divine Person would be so overwhelming that the human person would disappear.

## 212 Alzheimer's as a Cost of Passivity and Laziness

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=71>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/04/04.]

Every time someone looks at the state of the modern mind, the news gets worse. A recent large-scale study by the American Library Association tells us that nearly all recent college graduates are illiterate at a very basic level. Epidemiological studies tell us the number of modern human beings with serious Alzheimer's symptoms is increasing rapidly. Some of us fear the situation is going to be far worse than current projections. See the website of *Alzheimer's Association* at <http://www.alz.org> for news on current and projected prevalence rates. You can also see the website *Alzheimer's information at National Institute of Aging* at <http://www.nia.nih.gov/Alzheimers/Publications/adfact.htm> for background information.

I think there is a strong connection between the decrease in literacy and the increase in Alzheimer's. Most modern human beings don't use their brains actively in the way of farmers or skilled pre-industrial workers. They pretend to a literate style of brain use, but the reality is that most of us use our brains the way a couch-potato uses his lungs and skeletal muscles.

Undoubtedly, there are some who are genetically more prone to this disease but many of the causative agents are believed to be environmental. All the factors that affect heart and lung disease, smoking and high-cholesterol and so forth, seem also to play roles in bringing on Alzheimers. In addition, many scientists think a passive life-style, especially one lived in front of the television set, puts a human being at great risk of dementia. BBC provides a nice summary discussion of a major report which showed a strong correlation between Alzheimers and TV-viewing. A correlation

might indicate a casual relationship in either direction and might also be a coincidence (unlikely in this case). The discussion by the BBC is found at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/1204894.stm>.

I'll speak in practical terms. We have a very serious situation on our hands. We can't even take care of our current population of Alzheimers patients and that population will be rising just because the Baby-boomers are reaching the age where they show the symptoms of Alzheimers. The rise might be even greater than many will think because the generation of video-games and cable-TV and dumbed-down books is reaching middle-age and beyond. We need to address this problem, one more likely to bring our society crashing down around us than the heroin problem or even international terrorism. Still more importantly, there is a deep moral problem if we're living in ways that lead to brain decay. We're not leading proper lives and the lives we're leading will threaten the quality of lives of future generations.

In this and a few entries to follow, I'm going to speculate a little freely about what's really going on and what might happen in the future—maybe the near future. But my speculations are compatible with the results of investigations into the nature of Alzheimer's and also the historical trends which are summarized brilliantly in Jacques Barzun's *From Dawn to Decadence: 1500 to the Present* [9], a history of the Modern West written around the theme of a steadily dropping literacy. A dropping literacy is part and parcel of a drop in the sort of abstract intelligence we would associate with either St. Augustine or Shakespeare or Einstein. In fact, there is reason to believe that high-level geniuses have disappeared from American society and some scientists have speculated that this might be due to leaded gasoline having caused marginal brain-damage sufficient to prevent the development of an Einstein-level of intelligence. I'm speculating that some of the causes might be cultural—the drop in quality of literacy due to our life-styles and our passive forms of entertainment.

The brain doesn't seem so much different from other organs in that it must be used, even properly stressed, to develop properly and to maintain its health after development. Use it or lose it, preceded by: Develop it at the proper time or never have it. Interested readers can refer to the works of Gerald Edelman for discussions of his very important work on the development of the human brain. Use his bibliographies as springboards to other authors. Alternatively, look up one or more of these writers: Larry Wolpert, Antonio Damasio, William Calvin, Michael Gazzaniga, or Jerome

Kagan. There are other brain-scientists who write prose accessible to a literate reader with some very basic understanding of biology, but these are writers whose books I happen to own. There is also a lot of good information and pointers to other sources of information at the website of the *Dana Foundation*, <http://dana.org>.

At about the age of three (I wrongly put this age at three months before birth in my first published book), the human being has more brain-cells than she will ever again have. If all goes well, development proceeds rapidly in response to environmental events, especially mother-child interactions—I'll explain later what happens to the 'excess' brain-cells. The language abilities and basic moral character of a child are formed in the first six or seven years of her life, a time she now spends watching various educational shows that teach her to pay attention to a single stream of thought for about 15 seconds. She also begins her life of being rushed from one activity or child-care center to another. It's also likely she'll be in the living room while the adults are watching a variety of violent sports and movies which show human bodies being mutilated and also often teach young men how to exploit young women and young women how to enjoy being exploited.

The abstract thinking abilities of the human being develop mostly in adolescence, a time when our young people are watching lots of television, listening to primitive sorts of music played electronically, sitting bored in classrooms that are one station or another of an assembly-line, rushing about from sports practice to various clubs, and otherwise exhausting themselves in activities that don't stimulate the higher regions of the brain. Imagination atrophies even before other cognitive abilities. A hectic life isn't necessarily a rich life and may well prevent the development of a rich inner-life.

One of the first symptoms of Alzheimer's in many people is the inability to set schedules or to follow remembered 'scripts'. But that inability is almost a given with young human beings in our society. We teach children to respond to adult coaches and other supervisors, not to organize their own schedules or thoughts. Socialized in this way that could be labeled 'fascist', they can be more readily processed in the public-schools and so that they can be easily exploited by our entertainment industry. I'll go out on a limb by suggesting our government and academic brain-scientists might be downplaying some of the entertainment issues because of fear of the lawyers of the entertainment industry, the computer industry, and probably the various unions and companies which profit from an increasingly

dysfunctional educational system.

There's a good book which discusses the moral and medical issues: *Endangered Minds* by Jane Healy. Pay attention to her discussions and soon you may be noticing that learning to like TV is a bit like learning to like smoking. Children will draw back and show all the signs of an animal in fear and not sure if it should flee or freeze in the hope the enemy will pass by. In the interesting and important book, *On Killing*, Lt. Col. Dave Grossman noted that tests have shown that most adolescent boys will try to shy away from the sight of violence or blood on the movie-screen. They watch because of peer-pressure from the small percentage of boys who like that stuff. It's likely that peer-pressure can also be exerted by parents and older siblings who are already accustomed to this sort of horrible and trashy entertainment. If a man is sitting beside his ten year-old son as a Terminator movie is playing on TV, then that boy will likely conclude that real men watch that sort of moral trash.

Col. Grossman expressed an opinion I've heard to be common among military trainers: young Americans have very little moral structure. As Adam Smith feared might be true in the type of society he glorified, modern Americans are raised to be no more than genial and have little real moral integrity. We shouldn't consider moral and cognitive problems to be separate. While history tells us of saints who aren't too bright and evil creatures who are brilliant, moral reasoning in a complex society requires high levels of abstract reasoning power as well as the strong character which should be built during the first seven or eight years of a human being's life. And we shouldn't ignore the fact that we pump up our GNP, providing our salaries and benefits and government programs, partially by exploiting our own children, even stunting their brain development and deforming their moral natures.

I remember reading a speculation by a brain-scientist that Alzheimers isn't an aging disease but rather a form of brain-damage caused by misuse or underuse of the brain during crucial developmental phases. The human brain is a dynamic organism in which cells and groups of cells are always trying to form connections in response to any serious stimulus. The cells and groups of cells which fail to form a lot of connections, or fail to be active at a reasonably high level, will die. If too many cells die, the brain is damaged.

The good news is that there is some serious evidence that a weak brain can strengthen by these developmental processes even during later decades.

You'll never recover fully what was lost in those early years of passivity and exploitation but you might recover a bit of brain-power. But that sort of recovery can be as painful as the process of turning yourself from a couch-potato into a physically fit human being.



## 213 Overprotected Children: Developmental Issues

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=73>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/04/12.]

I was happy to see a column by Jane Brody in the Springfield Republican on Good Friday of 2007. That column hit upon some of the same mental and emotional health issues that are disturbing me and which I discussed in Chapter 212, *Alzheimer's as a Cost of Passivity and Laziness*.

Children need free playtime, unsupervised by adults for their brains and bodies to develop properly. At the level of our animal natures, with our embodied love for children and also our concern that we ourselves be taken care of properly as we age, we should be more concerned with raising our children to be healthy, creative men and women. There are many issues here but I'll post three entries. At that I'll only cover a few of the most important aspects of this problem. To give the conclusion first: We adults need to step back and let children play in the ways that are natural to them, which means we have to let them take true risks, normal risks.

I'll start by reminding the reader of the blunt fact that our children are not ours—they belong to their Creator just as we do. Our duty is to help them grow into healthy men and women well-adjusted to the world as it exists. The world has dangers in it. For example, it has a huge and hugely varied population of microbes which cause disease. Overprotected children are known to have weak immune systems. During the next plague, bird-flu or otherwise, they might be among the first to die. Specific predictions are, of course, impossible since a particular disease organism can more readily attack those with specific gaps in their immune systems—most of which are genetic. (See *The Coming Plague* by Laurie Garrett for good discussions

of the underlying issues.) In that book, she tells us that disease experts say that the children who've died in well-publicized E. Coli outbreaks have been overprotected children with weak immune systems.

What is our response when a handful of children die, children who've been raised by parents who are more squeamish than rational? We change rules of food-handling to eliminate all microbes from the food of all our children—lessening the development of immune systems for nearly all children in our society. We act as if to turn them into men and women fit for life only under a plastic bubble.

I'm going to present a claim for which I have no evidence from scientific studies:

Exposure to real dangers, of the sorts normal children have sought as long as human beings have existed, will help to form a child's mind and body, including their reflexive and conscious attitudes towards more serious and unavoidable forms of risk.

I was a middling child so far as risk-seeking goes. That was true of my climbing and my general attitudes towards situations where falls were possible and potentially crippling or fatal. In my 20s, on a camping trip with some co-workers, I surprised some of them by walking across a fairly narrow log which was a bridge over a gully perhaps 10 or 15 feet deep. I didn't even slow down since I saw right away the log was stable and worn a little flat on top.

I'm not fully immune to vertigo when I look down from a height—and more prone to vertigo as I age. On a trip with the same co-workers the prior year, I'd not been able to walk right to the edge of the cliff overlooking the campground and restaurant area of Yosemite – we'd chosen to do more serious camping in the forests above the valley. I had to go to the edge on my hands and knees.

Yet, I had somewhat conquered my fear of height and my vertigo. I had been a real tree-climber. I wasn't as fearless as some. I went to the next branch up only if I were very sure I could get back down without too much of a risk.

I'm pretty confident that my particular level of risk-seeking and risk-aversion, when climbing or height was involved, was shaped by a couple of incidents when I was very young and not capable of judging dangers. But I was only a few years old and was never more than a quick run or a room

away from responsible adults. During one of those incidents, I'd managed to climb the shelves in my parent's old-fashioned pantry. I got to the top, looked down and saw there was no safe way down, and I screamed. It must have been traumatic because I have ghostly memories of the incident though I was pretty young and don't generally have memories from that time. So far as I can tell, I learned the lesson: don't climb up unless you have a good plan for getting back down.

You can probably teach that lesson to children wearing safety helmets and wrapped up in harnesses while they scale plastic rocks at an indoor playground. But my gut feeling is that it's not really the same lesson. It won't be burned in quite so deeply and won't lead to the same sort of a combination of confidence and caution. But note that I didn't learn to fear climbing, only that I had certain limits.

If we shape our minds and our souls, including our moral characters, by responding to real-world situations, the results will be different from the shaping which comes from responses to situations simulated by the use of technology. This isn't to say that there's no value in controlled training—there can be lots of value. But it's reality we should respond to. That reality will eventually invade our best-planned efforts to insulate ourselves from the dangers of life in this universe, and we do our children no favors by overprotecting them during their most crucial years of development.



## 214 Overprotected Children: Faith Issues

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=74>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/04/16.]

My original purpose in writing on this issue was to speak about overprotected children as being a sign that the responsible adults don't have a true faith in God. Faith certainly doesn't mandate a careless attitude towards children but it does mandate a certain confidence that God's world is good. Children are in danger when they climb trees and swim in natural bodies of water. Left to their own devices, children will make dangerous swings and unstable tree-forts. Those young boys destined to be Nobel Laureates in Physics or Chemistry might well build explosives that blow off a few of their finger-tips. This is how children develop into confident adults.

We all belong to God and this is His world, the world He shaped for shaping us in turn—among many other purposes. A strong faith in the God of Jesus Christ doesn't mean we don't learn how to control dangers, but we have to recognize that He Himself doesn't seem to place a maximum priority on our safety and comfort. And the Bible itself, Old Testament and New alike, indicate He has a liking for earthy men and women, those hardened by difficult lives where they're exposed to storms and wild animals. That liking might indicate that a proper attitude towards danger, including that which children confront during their play, is not only a sign of faith but also a way of disciplining the self so that a stronger faith is possible.

American parents have a tendency to over-protect their children and then, at major transition points, throw them out on their unprepared own. As one example, American parents do their best to protect their children from drug and alcohol abuse and then blithely send them off to American

colleges and universities, nearly all of which offer the possibilities of truly disordered lives to their freshmen. I certainly wasn't prepared for the peer-pressure and could have easily been classified as an alcoholic for my first two years of college and off and on again during my travels around the corporate cultures of Boston and San Francisco, New York City and Atlanta, ending in Stamford.

I was born in 1955, the heart of the baby-boom birthing era. The way in which my generation was raised, and the generations since, trains the youth to respond to peer-pressure and also to respond to the pressure of exploiters in the entertainment and educational industries alike. We were left vulnerable to those who serve the gods of the marketplaces, political and commercial. This feeds back into the theme of overprotected children, in fact, into a more general theme of a serious moral error we made on our own behalf as well as that of children.

Americans, and most modern human beings in the West, reshaped their societies—hence, their moral beliefs and actions—under the illusion that we can achieve safety and comfort in this world with a certainty unknown to past generations.

We assume that we can make our decisions to satisfy our desires for safety and comfort—for ourselves and our children—and we'll be able to settle the other moral issues afterward. Faith in God would indicate that we should first serve Him and then take care of our obligations to raise children to serve Him. Instead of raising God-centered children, we raise children who think that life can not only be ever safe and comfortable but also ever prosperous. It was the illusion that this was a good environment for children that led us to turn those children over to be formed by public-schools and the entertainment industry. Public administrators and corporate executives promised us all our heart's desires in return for our patronage.

Around the time of World War I, Santayana had already observed that American parents felt they had neither the right nor the responsibility to form their children's beliefs. From my observations since my entry into the Catholic Church, I'd say that's just as true of Catholics as it is of others. There are responsible Catholic parents to be sure, and also responsible parents who are Protestant or Unitarian or pagan in some sense. Even those responsible parents have to send their children out into a society of children who've been raised to be lambs to be sheared by those who so faithfully serve the gods of the marketplaces. But they're pampered lambs for sure. At least they have been up to now.

Often, it's useful to simplify complex, factual messes. Sometimes, it's necessary for us to get a handle on those messes. In that vein:

We've created our current mess, overprotecting ourselves and our children, by the illusion that we gain not only safety and comfort but also some sort of freedom by shifting our dependencies from relatives and neighbors and fellow-worshippers to large centralized powers.

Those centralized powers gain our loyalties by promises of safety and comfort. They'll educate us and cure our diseases. They'll care for us in our old age and protect us from criminals. Some of those promises have been kept, others were kept for a while, but we shouldn't have been interested in any of them. In apocalyptic language:

The gods of the marketplaces are more anxious to promise us safety and comfort while the God of Jesus Christ seems content to let us suffer at times.

We have to have enough faith in God to start the process of separating ourselves and our children from a civilization gone bad. Maybe the modern nations of the West can sustain prosperity and continue providing a bit of safety and comfort to many citizens, We shouldn't be interested. It's become hard for us to even conceive of local economies which can provide the basics of food and shelter and clothing without international corporations. We don't want to take the risks and we don't want to raise children to take such risks. We're soft. We're morally flabby. We care about God only to the extent that we get warm and fuzzy feelings from the occasional worship service. And we raise our children to be just like us – overprotecting them and teaching them to worship those gods which promise to continue providing the good life.

God or the gods of the marketplaces? The rough way that leads to salvation or the wide and smooth way that leads to a final death? If we turn to God, we can have faith that He'll toughen us up as He did long ago to that city-dweller Abraham.



# 215 Overprotected Children: Moral Issues

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=75>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/04/25.]

The issue of overprotected children overlaps with another issue that currently worries me—in fact, I think it might be the major moral issue of the modern world where many activities are organized through large-scale institutions. We have not learned how to control such institutions. We have not learned how to live as moral beings in this sort of a society. In fact, we generally cede our moral responsibility to power-hungry politicians and greedy corporate executives.

Our moral natures are adapted to the small-group living, in tribes and families, of the Neolithic Era while we modern human beings inhabit nations which are huge and may contain many parts which are larger than any nations of past eras. In these modern nations, much of the children's time is spent in activities run by those inhumanly large organizations. It's remarkable that American parents trust these organizations given what we know of the leadership of modern nations. Without so much as blinking, modern leaders can move from dropping bombs on other people's children to conducting dangerous experiments on the sexual natures of their own children. At the same time, they'll make sure the children under their care wear helmets and knee-pads every time they go out to play. They'll mandate changes to the handling of food for all children after some irresponsibly overprotected children die from relatively mild strains of E. Coli.

Unfortunately, a skeptic could plausibly argue that modern parents cede control over their children for a reason that I've discussed in other postings: we readily cede many of our moral responsibilities to the large institutions

to which we owe our loyalties, that is, the institutions upon which we are dependent. We aren't about to protect our children against the exploitations of those who provide our medical care and who promise us social security checks one day.

Those in the younger generations have been trained to move in herds rather than to find their place in a human community, though we baby-boomers suffer to a somewhat lesser extent from that same distortion of our moral characters. I'm not going to claim to know how children should be raised. I do claim there are various reasons, moral and practical, for parents and extended families or local communities to shape children to the traditions and needs of those local communities rather than letting them be shaped to the needs of the modern nations.

There is no one way to raise children, no one way for communities to organize themselves, but the moral natures of children should be nurtured. Their confidence should be nurtured and some reasonable skills should be nurtured to find new ways to live in a changing world. Some parents might well feel their children should be given technical educations and others might raise their children to be free-spirited poets or musicians. We should be flexible and creative in raising children so that they are flexible and creative enough to survive under changing conditions and to do so free of governmental or private enslavement.

We have to remember that we are a particular type of creature and our optimal character development occurs when we interact with our fathers and mothers, grandfathers and uncles, grandmothers and aunts. We need to interact with our environment to understand our role in nature. We need free-play time, rather than non-stop little-league, so that we can learn how to exercise our imaginations and to organize our own time, individually and within informal peer-groups. Even those inclined to book-learning need to learn how to learn, not how to sit passively while crap is pushed into their brains.

We've chosen to train American children to gather in groups so that they can be told what to do by adults who may be parents of some in the group but are truly representatives of the institutions which sponsor their activities. Those children have been trained to be passive, waiting for some teacher or character on the television set to draw forth a specific response. Our playgrounds are empty but for those times when children gather in uniform to play under adult supervision.

If we and our children are able to successfully deal with our mounting

problems, it will be despite the way we raise them. We have left the younger generations with the daunting task of learning how to nurture their creativity and courage, to start again the growth processes which were halted by the wrongful ways in which we Boomers were raised, the still more wrongful ways in which later generations were raised. History indicates that the children of irresponsible and selfish parents are rarely able to recover from poor upbringings. And then it takes generations to rebuild a civilization, if the underlying cultures survive at all.



## 216 What Can We Do to Maximize Brain Health?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=81>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/07/05.]

How do we get a healthy brain? Do we all have to sit around and think about the difference between the philosophy of Spinoza and that of Pascal? Do we all have to learn how to play Beethoven piano sonatas?

No. In fact, a farmer who rarely reads—except maybe his Bible – can live a moral life and keep his brain healthy by managing his farm well. Learning the lay of the land and how each parcel should be used. Getting a feel for the seasonal variations in the various parts of his property. Developing a long term strategy for harvesting trees and replanting trees, for managing water resources, and for improving his livestock, will all be profitable activities in their moral results and cognitive results as well as in his ability to make his honest living.

One of the worst positions to be in is to be falsely intellectual, a position in which many people are in. Think of all the hours our youngsters spend in school doing dumbed-down intellectual work—bad for those who should be doing real intellectual work and just as bad for those who would be better off learning basic intellectual skills while also learning the skills of a trade. Our modern schools exploit these children for the benefit of those employed by the schools and those who sell to the schools and this modern exploitation might well be more damaging than the earlier exploitation by the mills. Some of my maternal relatives in my grandparents' generation went no further than sixth-grade and nearly all of those learned to read difficult books and to think clearly in their own living-rooms—blessedly free of television sets. The men were mostly skilled metal-workers. In those

days, that meant they did electrical work, plumbing work, made parts for machines when the manufacturers couldn't deliver quickly, repaired metal roofs, and fixed appliances. Their tools and materials were more primitive but they probably used their brains more than modern workers. And some of the men with little formal education taught themselves a bit of trigonometry and some metallurgy and probably much else.

I don't wish to be mindlessly nostalgic, but I do wish to emphasize that we have many possibilities for improving our lives and we've mostly abused those to develop lives which are simultaneously hectic and passive. A young man using a simple lathe to learn how to make table legs is using his mind, learning much about the qualities of different sorts of woods and the importance of efficient set-up of work-areas and much else. A young man sitting in front of a desktop computer is learning how to download pre-recorded music or movies using programs with mindless interfaces all developed by some gnomes in Redmond or some such place. True, there are some natural programmers out there, but few and most of those aren't encouraged to develop those natural skills.

Primitive lathes and desktop computers loaded with overly visual software are not our only options, but we won't be able to find better options if we continue the destruction of our own imaginations and abstract reasoning skills, our ties to the physical world and our practical reasoning skills. If we were properly skeptical, we would notice and question the way in which the more important aspects of productive knowledge and skills are being concentrated in corporate entities.

What's most important in maximizing brain-health is what's also most important in maximizing cardiovascular fitness or woodworking skills or musical skills: use it so you don't lose it. More than that: use it intensely enough to give yourself a good workout. Use your brain so that it becomes the foundation for the mind you want. If you sit back, perhaps waiting for some magic drug that will cure a poorly used brain, then you better realize you'll have a brain which belongs to the various bureaucracies which have proven they can reshape it, to restore it to health or to be more useful to the gods of the marketplaces which they so well serve. It's amazing that so many who might be afraid of giving control of their bodies and minds over to possibly hostile entities will do so quite readily when those entities smile benignly and speak of drugs and surgery. Cures!!

Take control of your own body and mind if you would have any pretense to be free. Learn to be healthy and not just curable. If possible, find an

old-fashioned doctor who's not just a specialist in one or two pounds of your flesh or a generalist who refers you to an expert. Flee from any doctor who shows signs of having taken seriously the literature of the drug companies or the medical electronics companies.

We need to learn to live and to die in a manner appropriate to mortal human beings. It's not an easy task and it will require a lot of experiments, most of which will end in failure.



# 217 Why are Human Beings of Greater Worth than Chimpanzees or Rattlesnakes?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=88>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/08/17.]

In Chapter 564, *Christian Misuse of the Term 'Person'*, I spoke of the need for Christians to give higher priority to revealed truths even at the cost of eliminating some arguments which seem of practical value in protecting human life. That leaves open the question given in the title of this entry. Why, indeed, is human life of greater worth than the lives of other sorts of biological creatures?

Let me seemingly divert to a question which turns out to be the same:

Why did Jesus Christ, the Son of God, accept baptism?

Surely, He didn't need to be baptized. He bore our sins but was Himself free of all sin. The second antiphon for the Morning Prayer, (Liturgy of the Hours—modern Roman Catholic version) on the Solemnity of the Baptism of the Lord tells us what occurred when the sinless Lord of Creation entered those waters to be baptized by one of His own creatures:

Springs of water were made holy as Christ revealed his glory to the world. Draw water from the fountain of the Savior, for Christ our God has hallowed all creation.

Water is good in its natural qualities. It refreshes and cleans. It's all-important to life on earth because it irrigates so effectively, bringing in nutrients and carrying away wastes.

It's fitting that the Lord chose such a substance to play a role in baptism, a rite in which we're cleansed as we move towards salvation. But we must remember that water as a natural substance isn't the source of the grace which can lead us to salvation. That grace is in the waters of baptism, when united with the proper words—I baptize you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit – because that grace flows **out** of the Lord Jesus Christ and **into** the waters of the world and that flow of grace began when the Son of God let His human body be baptized with water.

Human beings, in and of themselves, are a particular species of physical animal. In a moral sense, we're not so high above our fellow-animals as some would think. For example, we have our instincts which make us reluctant to kill other human beings but wolves have stronger instincts against killing members of their own species. See *On Killing* by Lt. Col. Dave Grossman for a fascinating discussion of this entire issue.

We men are morally superior to other animals in our ability to abstract from our moral instincts and to produce moral systems of thought and behavior. This general ability to think abstractly and the consequent ability to raise ourselves above our environments, vaguely seeing the possibilities of a Creation and a Creator, is probably the reason we can please God as companions, here and in the world of the resurrected. This is a fascinating, important, and terribly complex issue which arises in many efforts to make sense of Christian revelations and empirical knowledge as part of the same story. It's important that we Christians learn how to deal with this issue if we are to spread the Good News in this third millennium after the birth of our Lord, but that larger issue is the work of a number of lifetimes and beyond the scope of this posting.

Our Creator decided to offer us that chance to be His companions on the other side of our graves and that offer was made in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Human life became qualitatively different from other forms of life when the Son of God took on human flesh, being born as the defenseless human baby who was named Jesus by His mother, Mary, and His foster father, Joseph.

The Incarnation didn't happen because human flesh was already divinized and somehow worthy of providing the stuff of a creaturely nature for Christ. It was Christ who made human nature holy in some sense by becoming one of us, just as He made the waters of the earth holy and suitable for our baptisms.

Getting back to the value of human life, this is the situation of men

without Christ:

Men tend to place a high value, but far from any absolute value  
on the lives of other human beings.

The Romans of the Republic had a harsh moral and legal code, though they tended to follow those codes far more faithfully than modern Christians follow their professed beliefs. Historians have written that those Romans knew that abortion was murder but those hardheaded and virtuous pagans could handle hard cases without feeling the need to justify themselves. They were willing to break their own laws or moral beliefs if there seemed to be a strong practical reason to kill a baby in the womb or to kill a misbehaving adult who was a threat to the clan, but they didn't feel a need to turn a crime into a social good in order to justify themselves. I repeat:

Men tend to place a high value, but far from any absolute value  
on the lives of other human beings.

That is about as good as it gets on the basis of our natural instincts and our natural reasoning. Unfortunately, we have to understand that the non-Christians of our society aren't being deliberately thickheaded or evil when they deny that all human life, all that might be human life when we don't know for sure, has absolute value. For centuries, we of the West have fooled ourselves. We collaborated with the modern Deists and other sorts of pagans in trying to keep what was good in the Christian West by deriving revealed truths through processes of natural reasoning. We continued to worship as Christians on Sunday while paganizing our political and social systems, even our basic moral codes, on the other six days of the week.

We in the modern West aren't a mixture of Christians and pagans as so many believe. We're a mixture of Christians and pagans and paganized Christians. Those paganized Christians deal poorly with the hard case morality which arises naturally in pagan societies and they feel the need to feel justified and saved in the way of their Christian ancestors. They can't just murder human babies in cases where there is some true hardship. They have to turn the murder of human babies into a social and moral good just because of the moral attitudes they inherited from their Christian ancestors, attitudes now severed from Christian belief. Now, we have some more honest sorts of pagans, not necessarily of the virtuous sort, who bluntly

deny any absolute moral rules and claim the right to use one human being as means to meet the ends or needs of another human being.

We got to this point because so many well-intentioned Christians joined in the efforts modern pagan thinkers to retain the moral beliefs of Christianity while getting rid of the Person of Christ. The absoluteness of Christian morality which comes from the Incarnation was dangerously and weakly justified on purely natural grounds.

The inevitable has happened. Nature herself doesn't give us any reason to believe human beings are so much different from other animals as we imagine. The fraudulent effort to turn some of the revealed truths of Christianity into products of natural human reasoning failed and those who see absolute value in human life now engage in ridiculous and childish arguments with those who are willing to see other human beings as means to their ends.

Human life has absolute value right from conception.

Does not.

Does.

Does not.

It's time to start with the core of revealed truths and the huge unorganized piles of modern empirical knowledge and first learn how to tell the story of Christ and His brethren in a way that makes sense of both. Once we have a plausible version of the story being told by God, the story which is our world, we can begin to live once more as Christians no matter the cost we have to pay to be true to our Savior. Then maybe we can return to the Christian vocation of spreading the Good News of Christ.

## 218 Networks of Public Spaces Rather Than One Square

There's been a buzz of sorts on parts of the Internet because of a major study written by a pro-diversity liberal, Professor Robert Putnam of Harvard. That study indicates there are some serious problems with diversity. He thinks, or maybe hopes, those problems to be of a short-term nature. There might be other ways than a simple choice between a return to tribalism and a cosmopolitanism that melts down local communities or at least renders them ineffective.

There's an overview article, *The Downside of Diversity*, on Putnam's study at <http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/08/05/news/diversity.php>. The article begins:

It has become increasingly popular to speak of racial and ethnic diversity as a civic strength. From multicultural festivals to pronouncements from political leaders, the message is the same: our differences make us stronger.

But a massive new study, based on detailed interviews of nearly 30,000 people across America, has concluded just the opposite. Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam—famous for *Bowling Alone*, his 2000 book on declining civic engagement – has found that the greater the diversity in a community, the fewer people vote and the less they volunteer, the less they give to charity and work on community projects. In the most diverse communities, neighbors trust one another about half as much as they do in the most homogeneous settings. The study, the largest ever on civic engagement in America, found that virtually all measures of civic health are lower in more diverse settings.

“The extent of the effect is shocking,” says Scott Page, a University of Michigan political scientist.

[Michael Jonas, Boston Globe, as published in International Herald Tribune on August 5, 2007]

You can get a more complete view of Professor Putnam’s work at a blog he runs, *Social Capital Blog* at <http://socialcapital.wordpress.com>. You can also find a link to the website of the journal that published the study.

I would suggest that everyone thinking about these matters consider the desirability of a social model corresponding to both the traditional ways that the insurance industry handled risk and also the Catholic principle of distributivism in economic and political systems. The general principle is that everything is localized as much as possible. Acting on such a principle would protect local customs where ‘local’ covers ethnic and cultural and religious communities and minimizes various sorts of transaction costs, only some of which can be quantified in financial terms. It would protect these more local or more focused communities so that the members may reasonably expect certain customary responses and ways of behavior during casual meetings in the store or during negotiations for the sale of a house or during dating or during the public debates in which more voices should be heard.

It would seem to me that feelings of distrust are increased when you have to expend energy and invest attention in a high percentage of your social interactions of various types. Once you start developing habits of closely examining body movements and facial expressions, vocal inflections and choice of words, you’re going to be keyed up to enter most of your social interactions as if facing a possible predator.

Let me choose a concrete example. We enter a retail store with expectations about the behavior of the clerks and cashiers. When I was growing up, prices were pretty much set in most retail stores in the U.S., most certainly in my hometown. The local grocer, a neighbor, set prices so he could support his family at a decent level. Every one knew that grocer worked long hours and was not making a killing off their trade. They did business with that grocer rather than running from store to store or town to town in an effort to save money.

Coming from a set-price culture, I found it exciting the first time I went to Tijuana where the natives or the ‘with-it’ Americans ignored price

tags or took them as the starting point for downward negotiations. When merchants and customers have different attitudes about price negotiations, there is plenty of room for one to think the other is trying to cheat, even when all participants are honest. Our fellow human beings see our habits and customs and not the underlying virtues or vices. To be seen immediately as honest, we must show the signs of honesty which a particular man or woman expects and those signs are specific to a culture.

We should maybe give up our all-or-nothing attitude towards the public square and realize that it can be hard to interact fully even with members of morally well-ordered communities to the extent that their ways of doing business and socializing are different from ours. We should maybe have networks of public squares with each ethnic or cultural or religious community having their own squares. Most of human life could then be lived in those local squares where values and behaviors and even conventions of dress and food are shared. Younger children and perhaps timid teenagers or even adults would not stray past those public squares in which there is a valid expectation that a particular set of conventions would be obeyed rigorously. In addition to those local public areas, there could be some common political and commercial public squares connecting the more particular public spaces. Few would have a need or desire to enter those most common squares, mostly the leaders of the various communities and perhaps assistants and apprentices to those leaders.

We need to feel free to experiment with our forms of community and that would require a re-localization of human life that would be dangerous to our current crop of politicians and businessmen and lawyers. The guiding principle of such a system would be: the interests and needs represented in public squares shared by multiple communities would be common to the communities and wouldn't include the more particular interests and needs of the various communities. Local communities of various sorts would feel more free to nurture their own beliefs and cultures and to protect the innocent and timid from disturbing sorts of interactions.

Could such a system exist without falling into tribalism or moving once again towards the sort of cosmopolitanism that destroys social bonds of all sorts? I don't know, but it might be worth a try to start re-building local communities and see how those various communities interact.



## 219 What is Freedom?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=98>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/09/17.]

In the modern world, we tend to think of freedom in terms of satisfying desires. To be sure, even many who live for that false sort of freedom seem to realize that we then become no more than our desires or, more horribly, the thwarting of those desires—a terrible and humiliating state in either case. Hannibal the Cannibal is the most free of all modern men because he has become his desires and he has gained the power to satisfy them. Hannibal the Cannibal is the role-model for our politicians and our lawyers, our investment bankers and our corporate executives, our athletes and our entertainers. He may even be a role-model for many clergymen.

Let me move in a different direction with a quote from *Time and Free Will* [11] by Henri Bergson:

[W]e are free when our acts spring from our whole personality, when they express it, when they have that indefinable resemblance to it which one sometimes finds between the artist and his work. [page 172]

Let me provide another quote, this one from Walter J. Freeman's *How Brains Make Up Their Minds* [35]:

An intent is the directing of an action toward some future goal that is defined and chosen by the actor. [page 8]

In Thomistic moral philosophy, 'intent' defines human morality and freedom. We don't freely will to be a good man or a good woman, we choose to struggle towards that state of goodness. We don't freely will to cut down

on our drinking or stop smoking, we choose to move towards a state where we don't continue our bad habits or bad thoughts because our brains and our bodies and our relationships to others and to our environments have all changed. We should realize that the very process of forming intents can be a bit vague if only because we don't see the goal clearly until we're well along the path. I've certainly deluded myself often about the goal of becoming a Christ-like man and I've also deluded myself about the nature of the path I have to travel. The forming of our moral intentions is an ongoing process and not an action taken once and for all time.

The modern concept of free-will is useful to entrepreneurs, political or commercial, as they go about their task of destroying local community life to draw us all into the gigantic marketplaces of a land where natural cultural and physical boundaries have been dismantled. That concept of free-will leaves most human beings stripped of their defenses against those entrepreneurs and other predators and parasites of a cosmopolitanism and imperialism rendered all the more damaging to human beings by the pretense that we remain dedicated to traditional human values.

[W]e are free when our acts spring from our whole personality. . .

So said Bergson but I'm not sure if he realized the full meaning of his own words. He was caught in the modern, liberal understanding of the human animal as being naturally a person, even a person from conception—a trivialization of the concept of 'person' and a useless concept alongside that of 'human being' or 'human animal'. We're not born persons and there is good reason for a sensitive observer to fear that that most of us remain human animals to the grave and never become persons. Mark Twain, an insightful critic of Americans and their culture, noted that many Americans claim they want to go to Heaven and live with God for time without end but few willingly engage in activities that would prepare them for life in any Heaven conceivable under Christian beliefs. My belief is that we can become human persons by preparing ourselves to live in Heaven. Even then, we're persons by sharing in Christ's own Being rather than being freestanding persons.

There are only Three Who are truly persons, Who are truly unified and coherent and complete in their single Being—to use criteria for personhood I've proposed elsewhere. There are virtuous pagans who show strong signs of personhood, Cato the Younger and Geronimo to name but two, but the

greatest of human animals is still constrained by his circumstances and his inborn characteristics. We're seemingly stuck if my instinct is true that freedom and personhood are tied together. Our very being and the choices offered us by our environments are tightly constrained. Any personhood we can develop will be tightly constrained. How can we be free? How can we become true persons, or at least truer persons?

How could even Jesus of Nazareth have been truly free? After all, He was a true man. Doesn't mean that He was also constrained in the ways in which even the best of us are constrained? Yes, but there's one major difference that makes all the difference:

The Son of God freely chose to become Jesus of Nazareth, to be born a helpless baby in the care of Mary and Joseph, to live as the adopted son of a carpenter, to become a carpenter Himself. He freely chose to be born a son of David and of Abraham. He freely chose to be Jewish, to follow the law of Moses and to worship His own Father each Sabbath. He freely chose to preach a mission of salvation, to save some and to cure some of their bodily ills. He freely chose to suffer, to be crucified, to die, to be resurrected.

Jesus of Nazareth was the only truly free man in history. His freedom was necessary for His perfect sinlessness. His freedom was necessary to allow union of man with God. His sinlessness would not have been perfect if Jesus Christ had been less than the Creator of His own world and His own human body, if He hadn't freely chosen to live that humble life. His divine personality would have been somehow cramped.

What about the rest of us?

We can choose the false freedom of a Hannibal the Cannibal by seeking to satisfy our desires rather than setting intentions to move towards moral goals. Or we can intend to reach the noble though constrained freedom of virtuous pagans. Or we can intend to reach the perfect freedom of a Christ-like person. This is the difference between the path to virtuous paganism and the path to a Christ-like virtue:

The pagan disciplines himself to become a truly good man while the Christian disciplines himself to learn how to stay out of God's way while the good Lord does His work.

When we stay out of God's way, He'll pick us up and put us on His shoulder. After we ride for a while, we'll learn the rhythms and direction of God's movement. He'll set us down and we'll find ourselves moving with God as if part of Him. But we'll be us. We'll be free because we'll be moving along with Him in His perfect freedom. We'll be thinking along with Him in His perfect freedom. We'll be speaking along with Him in His perfect freedom. We'll be acting along with Him in His perfect freedom.

## 220 Could Adam and Eve Have Made Christ Unnecessary?

Could Adam and Eve Have Made Christ Unnecessary?

No. Christ's self-sacrifice was necessary to save us, to make us true companions of God. No action by any human being could have changed that fact. No action by any human being could have reduced our dependence upon the work of Jesus Christ. In the sense of needing salvation in Heaven, no possible creature could be saved by some sort of natural grace because God has to act to make that creature suited for life in a radically different phase of Creation. The Almighty has to act to purify and raise that creature to be able to share His life. And the Almighty has to actually bring that creature to new and true life in the world of the resurrected.

There are many who would claim to believe that we need Christ to save us and then they go on to claim the Bible tells us that Adam and Eve were created in a state of grace the same as the state of the saved who belong to Jesus Christ. Then, as the story goes, the snake seduced grace-filled Eve into an act of disobedience to God and she, in turn, brought grace-filled Adam into that state of disobedience. A careful reading of the third chapter of the book of Genesis might lead to the suspicion that we're reading the story of Adam and Eve through interpretive lenses and not simply accessing a clear and obvious understanding of that strange story.

The story of Adam and Even is presented in a mythical form and apparently borrows much of its content from the heritage the Hebrews shared with the various pagan traditions of the Near East. To treat it as if it were presented as historical fact is, among other errors, to do great injustice to the treatment of the story of Jesus Christ in the four Gospels. Some might think that the entire Bible should be raised to the level of the Gospels in the sense of historical reliability and truth-bearing capacity, but the real effect

is likely to drag the Gospels down to the level of the books of the Bible which are intended as myths or allegories which teach a lesson of some sort rather than relating historical facts which carry their own direct truth.

That story of our mythical ancestors also has an edge to it. God Himself isn't presented in the best possible light. The all-knowing Creator is presented as being surprised by actions of His creatures. He seems to be defeated, at least in the short-term, by the snake and can do no more than promise a decisive counter-attack at some vague time in the future. Moreover, God seems unreasonable in punishing Adam and Eve for not meeting expectations that might well have been beyond human capabilities.

Something is wrong with that story of Adam and Eve or perhaps something is wrong with our interpretations of that story.

Let's consider a little bit of modern empirical knowledge.

There is serious reason to believe there was no human man and woman who were the common ancestors of the human race in the way of Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis. It seems almost certain that any common ancestors of the entire human race existed well before human beings came to full moral self-awareness. The genealogies of Cain and Seth indicate the authors of Genesis believed, as I do, that that awakening was tied to the development of technology, including true agriculture, and the growth of the early cities. So far as I know, the earliest evidence of craftsmen gathering in community—perhaps seasonal at first—shows in layers of soil about 10,000 years old in the vicinity of Jericho. Perhaps that indicates the reason for the inordinate importance attached to that city in the Bible. Specialists have done genetic sampling of human beings from across the globe and think that our last common ancestor lived about 70,000 years ago in the vicinity of Nigeria. And he was Adam. Even lived tens of thousands of years before that.

The immediate descendants of Adam and Eve were forming civilizations, indicating the very important conflicts and revelations which underly their story and those of their sons occurred more than 50,000 years after any possible common ancestor of all humans. A specific and concrete act of rebellion by a particular human couple doesn't seem to be a plausible explanation of the sinful nature of human beings or the disorder which often arises in the world. As St. Augustine told us: we do not sin, we are sin. Yet, the particular forms of sinfulness which bother the Biblical authors involve forms of human social life which appeared with cities. The disorder in the physical world, more accurately—the struggle between order and disorder,

have existed since the so-called Big Bang about 15 billion years ago, a bit before human beings appeared.

The positive element in all of this is that the hint that the true meaning of the story of Adam, Eve, and their sons has to do with human moral problems which somehow involved technology and the greater gatherings we call cities. I think it's even better to say that these important moral problems were magnified when technology and cities appeared. In a potentially dangerous way, I'll speculate that those authors of Genesis knew that human uniqueness, the reason we have the potential to be companions to God, is tied up with our ability to abstract ourselves—so to speak—out of the concrete environments in which our species evolved. As our ancestors developed technology and the ability to live in cities, they abstracted themselves out of the grasslands and a tribal foraging life. They had the problem of reshaping to some extent their own moral natures to match the new possibilities and dangers which arise faster than we can adapt.

It's still true that we develop technology and ways of life that reshape ourselves and our children in important ways. This reshaping is not just on the skin. As we learned at Hiroshima, as we learn when children are corrupted by modern entertainment, we can reshape ourselves to serve evil and sometimes, as Hannah Arendt told us after her studies of the Holocaust, evil is served most effectively by nice human beings who are well-adjusted to modern bureaucratic life.

What does this have to do with human sin and human salvation? In adapting ourselves so effectively to serve good or evil, we show we're capable of reshaping ourselves to the higher demands of God, demands which exceed natural morality, demands which culminate in the command: "Be perfect". Be Christ-like. Cooperate with God as He reshapes you to share His life.

The problem the authors of Genesis seemed to be dealing with was this:

The all-loving God was the same as the Creator who made a world which placed impossibly difficult burdens upon morally self-aware human beings. The human race seemed to be condemned by God the Creator for the crime of using the unique abilities He'd given to men and women. If a St. Francis is possible, then so is an Adolf Hitler. Does the possibility of St. Francis justify the sufferings of so many at the hands of Hitler?

Adam and Eve didn't rebel against God so much as they recognized

the burdens of God's demands upon human moral nature. As the great Southern writer Andrew Lytle realized, man had to leave paradise to fulfill his God-given role. (See the under-appreciated novel, *The Velvet Horn*, for a rich display of Lytle's views on this issue.) But paradise wasn't what most think it to have been. It wasn't Heaven. It was the same earth Adam and Eve later lived in. The difference was that Adam and Eve awoke and left behind their animal state of innocence. Go back and read the third chapter of Genesis and see if this makes sense. Adam and Eve took up their yokes, but those yokes were yet hard and those burdens were heavy. Our ancestors were called by God to be His companions but that task is well beyond human capacity.

The traditional interpretation of the story of Adam and Eve is inconsistent with the Christian belief that we can be saved only by Christ. That traditional interpretation makes the claim our ancestors were born in a state of grace, a state of salvation, and would have remained in that state if not for an act of rebellion. Even if God had created a world and a human race better suited to perfect creaturely virtue, we would still not be suited to be the companions of God.

Only Christ can save us. Only Christ can make us Christ-like, God-like, so that we can share God's life. Life with God for time without end would be hellish for a creature not suited to share God's life.

I think that the empirical knowledge of evolutionary biology, viewed properly, is a message from God, a wake-up call. God is driving His story along in a particular way at this particular time. I also think the human authors of Genesis were smarter than us and certainly had a stronger and more pure faith than we modern Christians have. Those authors were sensitive to God's call and they realized that God had placed contradictory burdens upon us, had given us demands which were impossible for human beings to meet. They didn't try to justify God by waving away His omnipotence with irrelevant and possibly blasphemous theodicies, claims that our moral freedom excuses an all-powerful and all-knowing Creator.

The problem isn't with the violence of Creation, the moral disorder which has arisen in social mammals. The problem is that we found fault with the work of God and had to look for those excuses for the Almighty's failure to live up to our standards.

Evolutionary biology leads me to the speculation that we human beings have natures that allow us to be reshaped to share God's life. We're not born in in a God-like shape and we don't have long-ago ancestors who were

in that shape before some fall from grace. Nor do we have the capacity to reason towards absolute truths which are binding upon God Himself. God shaped us to be reshapable as His companions and He must do the reshaping, He must tell us the greater moral truths which are the perfect and complete versions of the moral truths which have arisen in the course of evolution. He must help us to live up to those truths, though that's where we can start sharing His life—in reshaping our own selves to be images of God.

The moral truths of Christianity are consistent with natural moral truths, those which can be derived by the methods of evolutionary biology, but they go far beyond into regions which human beings couldn't have reached on their own. We can see this in the way that Jesus Christ astonished or shocked His followers with the *Sermon on the Mount* and with His claims that they were to eat His Flesh and drink His Blood. Many, including many who claim to be Christians, still discount the commandments to be perfect even as many refuse to accept Christ's words in instituting the Eucharistic Rite or in saying that only those who eat His body and drink His blood will be saved (Matthew26:26-28, Mark14:22-23, Luke22:19-20, and especially John6:53-58). There are many Christians who swallow camels and then strain at gnats, finding literal truth in an ancient Hebrew allegory and then denying or diluting the words of Him who they acknowledge as Lord and God.

My speculation about the meaning of the story of Adam and Eve moves in the opposite direction, taking Christ's words as absolute truths impossible for us to reach on our own and speculating about human stories and their meanings. Oddly enough, taking Christ seriously rather than trying to dilute His words or to impose heavy philosophical loads on Him has let me accept modern empirical knowledge on its own and has also let me speculate freely about Creation and about forms of metaphysics that can allow a deeper understanding of that Creation. I can let God be God and then go about my creaturely task of trying to understand Creation.

I think my particular speculations about the story of Adam and Eve render justice to the Gospels in recognizing our inability to save ourselves, to make ourselves Christ-like or God-like, even by the most virtuous behavior. It also does justice to modern empirical knowledge as well as to the book of Genesis. My speculation leads to a recognition of our dependence upon Christ, not because our mythical ancestors rebelled but because we're creatures and can't transcend our own natures. The traditional interpreta-

tion claims man was in charge, conjecturing that Adam and Eve could have saved themselves—and us—by simple obedience in a natural human state. In that traditional interpretation, God's plans were at the mercy of human decisions and the rebellion of Adam and Even forced the Son of God to accept crucifixion to save us from our own willfulness.

I see man as a product of evolution, the crown of Creation in the sense that man can be reshaped while remaining man. We human beings can abstract ourselves from our natural environments to live, imaginatively or concretely, in environments for which we seem unsuited at first glance. God can even reshape us to be suited to life in Heaven. It's largely our minds—so poorly developed in modern times—that make us so shapable, that allow us to abstract our own characters from a particular environment and to live in imaginative realms or in new environments such as those of the Industrial Age.

Adam and Eve weren't rebels who removed themselves from God's direct Presence. They were apish animals who heard God's invitation to be His companions and realized they weren't suited to such a life. There were contradictions in the human situation and those contradictions are prominently displayed in the story of Adam and Eve. The tree of knowledge was set in front of them and to eat from it was natural to human beings—it had to be done for them to realize their own natures. Having eaten that fruit, they gained self-awareness, awareness of their own nakedness, and knew sin. Sin had already been with them. They, in fact, had already been sin, but suddenly they knew that they were sin. But good or bad behavior, only a small part of the Biblical understanding of sin, is still not the point and the story is confused when it should be confused—the authors of Genesis admit their confusion and ignorance to anyone who reads with any sensitivity. The story of Adam and Eve seems to be almost a scream of frustration:

What do you want from us, Lord?

How were Adam and Eve to live forever? How were they to share the life of God? God Himself seemed unwilling to help them. God seemed to have booby-trapped His world, leading men and women to realize the potential of human nature, and then hinting at a transcendence of that nature. But He left men and women with no way to transcend their animal natures. God seemed to have played the nastiest possible joke on human beings, calling them to a life which could be seen only at a distance as well

as through a glass darkly. The authors of Genesis were inspired to look at a tiny image that God was holding miles away from them—behind a smoky hunk of glass.

Only Christ could save human beings and He was free to do so or not. He was free to come when He chose.



## 221 The Complacent Ape

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=101>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/10/03.]

Why Are We Complacent to the Point of Self-destruction?

More exactly, why did God create us to be such creatures? There is little doubt that we are such creatures and that this is one major cause of the problem pointed to by St. Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:3:

When people say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as travail comes upon a woman with child and there will be no escape. [141]

Our environments can switch rapidly from, say, a benign climate to conditions which cause famine, starving some and weakening the sick so that minor diseases become fatal. New disease organisms can sweep through large regions of the earth, killing many. Human predators can gain an upper hand on peaceful communities, enslaving many and impoverishing prosperous communities. Why do such changes occur?

One of the true lessons coming from modern empirical knowledge, mathematics and physics and biology and history, is that complex and unpredictable events occur whenever two independent systems interact. This occurs even if the two systems are themselves simple and fully determined. The standard example is two pendulums of different length (different periods of movement) which are tied together. The resulting motion will be fully determined (by assumptions based upon physics and mathematics as we know them) and yet unpredictable.

When we consider living creatures, the two independent systems which interact are the living creature (sometimes assumed falsely to be defined fully by its genes) and its environment. That living creature can be a

human being trying to feed his children in a world suddenly short of work or a virus seeking to survive and prosper in its way. To reduce living creatures and their contexts to a simple creature/environment interaction is clearly a great oversimplification of the sort which is necessary for making basic points. After all, I'm currently interacting with my own body and its damaged tendons as I type. In the past few minutes, I conversed with my sister and used her coffee-maker and microwave oven. I inspected her yard with its grass in some parts that is already dormant and the grass in other parts that needs at least one mowing before it enters winter sleep, and I made tentative plans to mow and clean up in a couple of days. I'll be interacting with various human social and economic systems over the course of the day and also with the system I could call New England weather—unpredictable largely because this region sits at the point of interaction of so many continental and oceanic systems.

I'm trying to figure out how to do some important reading and some equally important writing while meeting a commitment for several looming projects at my parish. My schedule for the next month is getting worse at least partly because there is a shortage of workers on these projects and those who are willing have uncertainties in their schedules. In addition, New England's weather can force me to mow the lawn and rake leaves at a time not convenient for me. There are also some logistical and supply problems on the parish projects and some odd jobs I'll be doing for friends. Each of these interacting 'systems' is pretty simple but we all know how complex a situation gets when such 'simple' systems interact. One change to a seemingly settled part of my schedule and I'll be rethinking my priorities and maybe scrambling to meet my most important commitments. Our everyday, boring schedule problems are often caused by interactions of independent systems. The concept is pretty easy but the details can be very complex at the level of organizing supply lines for an army or forecasting the path of a storm moving towards colliding fronts.

The interesting and important problems of evolutionary biology, including many that affect us directly, come mostly from the results of interacting systems. Our character traits and our body structures are sometimes the result of compromises or bad results forced by the interaction of our ancestors with their environments, including other human beings. For example, many of us have sinuses that don't drain properly or sciatic hips because of the 're-use' of the body parts of crouching apes to shape the erect human body.

When we deal with human personality traits, we're better off taking the Bible as a source of 'wisdom' and evolutionary biology, history, and other empirical disciplines as a source of 'explanations'. The Bible can provide purposes and guide our direction while empirical knowledge can help us to develop strategies for dealing with, say, that small percentage of impulsively violent young men who are little problem in a well-disciplined society but are a great problem when they grow up without strong male guidance. One example of such a young man is Genghis Khan whose father and grandfather were strong leaders seeking to form a peaceful confederation of the Mongol tribes. A paranoid Chinese government instigated tribal war that resulted in the deaths of nearly all the leaders of the Mongol tribes including the mature men in the family of Genghis Khan.

So, let's consider the complacency that can be called a form of laziness that kills our children and enslaves our grandchildren. Attaining security and comfort require a lot of energy—high-energy expenditures in bursts and the slow drain of energy which comes from constant vigilance. In many ways, we don't exist either inside our own bodies or outside of them in our environments but rather on the boundaries of these systems. It's tiring to be always pushed this way by our desire to soar over the trees and then pulled back by gravity – that Superman cape around our shoulders isn't so much a help as we would like.

Even when we mature, if we mature, our moral desires—to serve God and country and to care for our families—can be frustrated by economic factors or by stupidity or criminality of the leaders of our country. We discover we're on different paths from those of our loved ones and we fight through brush to meet only to bang heads. Our dreams often exceed our capacities or our financial resources. And we try to relax from this constant effort as much as possible. Our social and physical environments often seem no more than struggles between order and disorder. Sometimes disorder dominates and sometimes order. We're finding now that disorder may be upon us some day soon in public health issues—our technological tricks are being matched by fungi that eat our crops and by retroviruses that chew up our immune systems. We seem to be running full speed to stay ahead of the approaching famine or plague and we only need to slow down for a second or to stumble and disorder will catch us and overwhelm us.

Because of the bursts of high levels of energy expenditure and the constant drain due to the need for vigilance, we have strong tendencies to relax when possible. In recent decades, we Americans took our chances

for soft jobs with corporate or governmental benefits. Many of us left our neighborhoods and worship communities, entering the public marketplaces for most of our needs and pleasures and jobs. We allowed the banks and stock-brokers to turn our family assets and local businesses into fungible assets which were soon enough sold to corporations. We encouraged our government to enslave us by various sorts of benefits, leaving us vulnerable to impoverishment of various sorts when that government and those outside interests no longer share goals with us—our government is increasingly interested in overseas adventures and our corporations find cheaper labor in Asia and also find they can profit from morally corrupt goods and services. In my area, western Massachusetts, and probably in most of the United States, banks are now opening as fast as manufacturing operations were moving overseas in the 1980s and 1990s and as fast as family farms were disappearing before that. And we reacted by turning on the TV after getting home from our jobs at the local branch of a nationwide retailer or the marketing office of a computer manufacturer that has all its factories in Taiwan. We also take in stride this strange proliferation of banks in a troubled economy.

We took it easy, we still take it easy, because the world seems so peaceful and orderly to us living in the United States, so ready to offer us comfort and security. What we were really doing was emptying out the bank accounts created by the hard, smart work of our ancestors and now we're taking reverse mortgages on all that we own. The next generations will pay the bills, either by living in relative poverty as other countries stop selling us hard goods on credit or by giving up their moral integrity if the United States uses its military power to become a full-fledged empire, stealing what its citizens can no longer produce or grow.

Again, St. Paul told us:

When people say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as travail comes upon a woman with child and there will be no escape. [141]

The disorder of this world can overwhelm even a morally well-ordered society, and wisdom recognizes this. Wisdom also recognizes that prosperous human societies will often destroy themselves by complacency. Peace and security leads to a softening of moral and intellectual fibers, and woe to the generations that live when disorder dominates, when peace and se-

curity are mere memories. We are told in Psalms 49:12 which is repeated as Psalms 49:20:

Man cannot abide in his pomp,  
he is like the beasts that perish.

In his prosperity, man becomes as stupid as a beast, no longer making the effort to anticipate the future and to prepare for it, no longer even seeing the need to make that effort when his favorite NFL team is coming on the tube or when her favorite store is having a sale down at a nearby mall, no longer making any effort to serve God or the children of God—not even his own children and her own grandchildren.

St. Paul provides the wisdom to put this human tendency in perspective for Christians anticipating our salvation, our rescue from our own frailties and from the struggle between order and disorder which is so much a part of God's story in this mortal existence. Empirical knowledge, including the historical sections of the Bible, gives us some understanding of why we are like this, that is, why such creatures as human beings would have emerged in God's story. The story of Jacob is that of a devious man who survived and prospered and left children who multiplied rapidly over the succeeding generations. This is pretty much the same story told by the more rational and hardheaded of sociobiologists. I sometimes wonder about the blindness and rigidity of those Christians who are conversant with the Biblical view of human beings and then get upset when sociobiologists provide a very similar view in different language and a different intellectual context. We should be able to separate the serious scientific content of Richard Dawkins' work even as we filter out the philosophical and atheological babble.

Both the Bible and empirical knowledge can tell us what we need to do to play our role in this story, forming ourselves and our children into God-centered and morally well-ordered human beings who respond to our natural moral duties and to God's commands rather than responding to our environments in the way of stupid and lazy beasts. The number of hours we Americans work and the number of hours we spend in school are meaningless—we train ourselves and our children to 'learn' and to 'work' at the command of the gods of the marketplace, political and economic, and to the needs of those idols. Hardworking men and women can be the most complacent of all.

We need to find ways to remain constantly aware of possible futures. We need to find ways of recognizing those who make good watchmen and those who can lead us wisely according to the reports of those watchmen.

## 222 Through the Body Comes Sin, Through the Body Salvation

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=139>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/03/26.]

In the December, 2007 edition of *Brain in the News* published by *Dana Foundation* (see their website at <http://www.dana.org/>), there is a reprint of an article *I Feel Your Pain*, from <http://Salon.com/>. It seems that specific brain-cells have been found which respond to distress on the part of a nearby creature. True pain is felt.

What is empathy? It's the response of certain brain-cells to certain sorts of stimuli. But...

Is that really empathy? Is that what ties us together during times of distress and trouble? Is that what motivates some to take in orphans and others to go off to serve in regions just hit by natural disasters? Is that what leads me to feel sorry for a man who just lost his beloved wife even when he's the jerk who cheated me out of a promotion? We seem to have a need for some sort of higher explanation, something that would raise our emotions—loves and hates—into a realm more pure than our world of flesh and blood, dirt and rocks.

I had set out to write a nuanced and properly qualified discussion of this issue but changed my mind at Mass on Tuesday as I was bowing my head and praying while the priest consecrated the bread and wine that it might become the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. It came to me that any Christian believing that the Son of God is truly present in the earthly form of bread and wine should be able to believe that a human being is truly present in his own flesh and blood.

So, I return to the question:

When those specific cells in the human brain respond to distress on the part of a nearby creature, is that empathy?

Yes.

And I'll go beyond that to speculate that the basic brain mechanisms that produce our sense of 'self' and maybe can develop into a true sense of 'personhood' are very much like those which underly empathy. We become self-aware as certain parts of ourselves (a complex system of various groups of specific brain-cells) establish some sort of empathy with our entire self, not just our flesh and our blood but also our relationships with others, those we love and even the inanimate entities which are parts of God's Creation.

I've argued for the view that our only stuff is flesh and blood, that stuff is the basic substance of our full beings. I've also argued that stuff exists as an object of divine love. Beyond that, that stuff—our flesh and blood—exists to participate in relationships.

There are nuances as well as unexplored deep issues which are important. A full description of our relationships to the external world would be very complex. For now, I'll end by referring the interested reader to Chapter 8, *Staking Your Faith on Gaps in Empirical Knowledge*, and Chapter 569, *Abstract Mathematics and the Real Presence of Jesus Christ*.

## 223 Do We Survive the Major Transformations of Our Lives?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=148>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/05/03.]

Here is a summary of an article published by *American Scientist*, the full article being available only to subscribers:

Larvae, the immature forms of many animals, are distinct from adult forms by definition. In many life histories—caterpillars and the trochophore larvae of clams and sea snails are examples—larvae and adults bear no resemblance to each other. Biologist Donald I. Williamson has proposed that larvae are juvenile forms acquired through hybridization—the fusing of two genomes, one of which is now expressed early in an animal’s life, the other late. This hypothesis, which goes against traditional thinking that branches on the evolutionary tree cannot fuse to form chimeric species, is one of several possible solutions to open questions about the evolution of larvae. Although an experiment did not yield convincing DNA evidence, the hypothesis is consistent with certain patterns seen in the distribution of genes across species. Along with other evidence of cross-species hybridization, it implies a pattern of evolution that looks more like a network than like Darwin’s tree of life. Until he retired in 1997, Williamson was a Reader in Marine Biology at the University of Liverpool. He is the author of two books on the origins of larvae. His coauthor for this article is Sonya E. Vickers, a teacher and naturalist. [See *The*

*Origins of Larvae* found at <http://www.americanscientist.org/issues/feature/the-origins-of-larvae>.

The different species are not so well-separated as even evolutionary biologists would have thought a few decades ago. Even if this particular hypothesis of chimeric hybridization between species is wrong, there's still clearly something going on here that doesn't fit with our simple ideas of what a species is. Our cell-membranes and skins don't do as good a job as we might hope at keeping us in and them out. It's even plausible that different species can merge to share the same soma or body-mass. This is a conceptual problem at various levels, including our concern for understanding what sorts of entities we human beings are. We can say at least this much: whatever our fate on the other side of our graves, we are fully a part of this universe, this phase of Creation, so long as we remain alive as mortal human beings.

Biologists discovered long ago that our DNA includes such junk-code as genes for making proteins for our apish ancestors. It also includes junk-code inserted by viruses or retroviruses, even the reverse-transcribed DNA or RNA for some of those microorganisms. There's no empirical evidence that we are inherently transcendent to this world of blood and mud, no empirical evidence that we are anything but peculiar members of the animal kingdom. In some sense, we're still part ape or even part reptile or—still more radically – part bacteria.

Yet, it's surprising that someone could even speculate plausibly that two creatures can share a body, one living for part of the total lifetime and melting away inside a cocoon to provide the gunk from which the other creature is shaped. In a sense we already knew this about creatures, such as butterflies, which pass through a larval stage, but now we can speculate in a plausible though unsettled way beyond our verified empirical knowledge. We know that there may be two separate sets of genes involved, that is, sets of genes originally from separate complex species. But are they really two creatures or different phases of one?

After all, our cells and the cells of all known bacteria and plants and animals are powered by mitochondria which were once separate creatures before being absorbed by an ancient, single-celled ancestor of ours. Are mitochondria still separate creatures in some sense, perhaps slaves of our cells? I doubt if anyone would seriously support that idea. Why would we think the larva and the caterpillar to be separate creatures? One reason

might be the belief held by many that a human person is defined by his genes and that person comes into existence as soon as a complete set of viable genes exist in a fertilized egg. Suppose that the larva has one complete set of genes that are shut down as it enters its pupal stage. As that transitional stage progresses, another complete set of genes is activated and another creature comes to life, so to speak. Again, it's far from certain this is the best description of the situation, but it's currently plausible and that alone should raise some questions. If that larva and that butterfly can be coherently described as separate individuals, our own individuality may not be what we think it to be.

This speculation is another nugget of knowledge in conflict with many of the theories about human nature, especially when those theories have been drawn, however unconsciously, from modern liberalism's teaching that we're some sort of autonomous human person from birth to death. My Thomistic beliefs that the human mind forms by responding to its environment and also to its own body imply that we can change in very fundamental ways throughout our lives. A conversion, spiritual or moral or intellectual, may lead you down a path where you have a radically different mind than you would have otherwise had. Are you then a different person?

Suppose our bodies are changed in a significant way? How deep do those purely physical changes go? Are you truly a different human being if a virus invades and changes your genes in some way? How about changes induced by some sort of radical gene therapy or by psychiatric drugs? How many of your organs can be transplanted or mechanical before you becoming a different human being? Or do you always remain the same human being so long as changes are gradual enough?

In *Rewriting the Soul* [67], the philosopher Ian Hacking had speculated that the multiple personality phenomenon is a largely learned strategy of segregating painful memories. Is our sense of a particular individuality tied that strictly to specific memories? But our memories would not seem so separate from a specific physical body, with a specific set of organs and a specific set of genes that are activated or de-activated as needed by that body.

It's established to a high degree of certainty that we don't have conscious control over many of our actions that we experience as being consciously willed. (See Chapter 385, *Is This Evidence Against Free-will?*.) Our bodies move and act apart from our conscious parts to a greater extent than we realize. Our nerves and our muscles, our hearts and lungs, are parts of our

moral selves and not just stage-props. Questions about our bodily nature have moral implications as well as practical implications which probably are far more important than our moral worries with our conscious selves. Our conscious selves probably are most important in their ability to shape our future unconscious selves. That is, we can change our human beings, the 'wiring' of our nerves and the development of our muscles and our cardiovascular systems, and those changes become part of our moral selves.

When we talk about human beings, we're now in a position where we literally don't know what we're talking about. We're at a transitional point where we've learned a lot about human nature at the species level but we haven't absorbed that knowledge into our everyday languages, Christian and non-Christian languages alike. In fact, our words and concepts about our individuality, our ways of making decisions or forming relationships, is in very bad condition. Many of our philosophical and theological words and concepts are from once plausible but now outmoded ways of looking at the empirical reality of human nature, but our views of our individual selves, and our social selves, have been downright deformed by a lagged adoption of the radical individualism of modern liberalism. That is, today's Christian who thinks he's a moral traditionalist has ideas which come from Hobbes and Locke and Jefferson as well as from truly Christian lines of thought.

I'm not the only one who sees these problems though I might have a unique perspective. Others, scientists and poets, philosophers and theologians, musicians and historians, have been working on this problem of re-aligning our thoughts and speech with the reality of human nature and the greater realities of our universe, but thinkers who work specifically from inside the Christian faith don't seem willing to deal with this explosion of modern empirical knowledge. I'm trying to grapple with this new knowledge with an open-minded attitude similar to that of St. Augustine of Hippo or St. Thomas Aquinas. That open-minded attitude towards God's Creation isn't to be found in many recent Christian thinkers. This is a serious problem that implies that even the best of Christian thought has been corrupted for centuries by a Manichean lack of respect for God's Creation. Until Christian thinkers purge themselves of this lack of respect, until they nurture an open-minded attitude towards this universe, Christian thought will be marginalized and mainstream cultures will be lacking in a proper Christian element. In fact, with a distorted view of physical reality, Christians won't be able to see this world created by God because that world is the physical universe seen in light of God's purposes.

## 224 Rats feel peer pressure too

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=142>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/05/13.]

This news article, *Rats feel peer pressure too*, at <http://www.newscientist.com/channel/life/mg19826554.500-rats-feel-peer-pressure-too.html>, tells us:

It's not just humans who succumb to peer pressure - rats do too. Brown rats have a tendency to disregard personal experiences and copy the behaviour of their peers. What's more, the urge to conform appears to be so strong that they will choose to eat food they know to be unpalatable when interacting with other rats that have done the same.

The article ends with this interesting question:

The big question now, he says, is why they conform. "It's not immediately obvious why a rat or chimp or human would cast aside what it knows from its own experience and adopt an inferior course of action just because everybody else is doing it."

At the risk of straying into a sort of story labeled as 'just-so' by the very important mental sanitary engineers of evolutionary biology (such as George Williams), I'll speculate. Social bonds provide a huge advantage under the conditions which have prevailed during the recent evolutionary eons. Social mammals often have intricate habits to help the entire community to find and share food, to set up watches for that leopard slinking through the shadows, to help raise the young in the communities, and so forth.

Acting in concert would have generally provided advantages far outweighing the risk of the community following a member who was a little nutty or just mistaken so that he had picked up a dangerous habit.

A strong-willed madman or idiot would provide a great danger for the human race so long as he was attractive enough, in some sense (but Hitler?), that he is able to gain some initial attention while going about his lunatic ways. He might even provide a way of behavior in which seeming normality would cover up moral insanity, allowing the vast majority of members of his society to carry out evil projects while going about their ordinary affairs, taking care of their children and paying taxes and other bills and so on. This is exactly what happened in Nazi Germany, colonizing European powers, and even the Soviet Union according to the historical researches and analyzes of Hannah Arendt. (I say even the Soviet Union because the usual view is that the Communist Party wiped-out the developing middle-class rather than co-opting it into the Soviet state as bureaucrats and engineers and so forth.) Robert McNamara has made a similar claim about the Washington functionaries who managed the Vietnam War.

With great power comes great responsibility.

A modern technological society has great power to feed great masses of human beings or to blast them to kingdom come. A mass society, and modern technological societies are such, can provide for a constant onslaught of peer pressure. Raise children in front of the television. Raise them on brand names and tales of celebrities. Send them to schools organized in age-group cohorts just to make sure they don't get the mistaken idea that their job is to learn—no, it's to socialize and to learn how to like what everyone else likes. Thus it is that bureaucratic institutions and corporate products are always with us, allowing each worker to keep his nose to the grindstone and ignore the results of his efforts, allowing each consumer to simply transact as often as possible in his favorite marketplace. Hitlers have only a few years to do their work but the nice middle-class bureaucrats will always be with us.

Let me be personal for a minute. When I was young, I liked some television, but very little. A John Wayne movie on Saturday night was great. The *Flintstones* were okay on Friday and I tried to watch *Bullwinkle and Rocky* on Sunday mornings and *Bugs Bunny* cartoons whenever they were on. The last two cartoon shows demanded much higher levels of cultural knowledge and reasoning from their viewers than any current adult shows. At any rate, I was far from allergic to television but I didn't see the point of

watching *Leave it to Beaver* when there were so many good books to read and so many jigsaw puzzles to solve or even re-solve. Then I learned in fifth grade and sixth grade that I wasn't going to be part of the American conversation if I didn't watch *The Monkees* and then *Laugh-in* and then *ad nauseum*. Soon enough, I began to offer myself up, allowing myself to become more digestable to the gods of the marketplaces.

At the same time, I was being trained in school to sit in class as the teacher went over and over material I'd already known before the first time. I'd been taught to read at the age of 3 by my Aunt Minnie who'd grown up in Montrose, Scotland. I didn't slow down in my learning until informal peer pressure pushed me towards time-wasting trash like *The Monkees* and also trained me to be lazy. I've always had a problem with peer pressure—I failed to resist heavy drinking in college and in the corporate nomadic world. Apparently, I was born with a weak moral spine. But I sure didn't get any help in exercising my moral integrity from the schools or my church or even my family. To be sure, I had my hardworking parents and some other beloved adults as good examples but I learned some lessons from those examples and many from the public schools and many from the anti-intellectual trends in American entertainment. In fact, not seeing my parents actually working at the machine-shop and the hospital, I had little idea for years that they were working any harder than I was, snoozing in my classrooms.

Through lack of an inborn toughness and lack of proper formation, I had become just another head of cattle following the ass in front of me, so to speak. I wasn't happy about the situation and wasn't enjoying myself but I'd try a little harder every so often because those around me seemed to enjoy movies as they declined in quality and creativity, television as it remained television, sports as it became central to the American consciousness, constant movement through stores and malls. I tried. I honestly tried, wasting my opportunity to develop my mind and become a theoretical physicist as I'd wanted to become since I could recognize Einstein's face in pictures. I honestly tried, giving up my own pleasures and my own preferred ways of spending my time, even giving up my dead-time. That last was dangerous and had to be unlearned. Somewhere, Jacques Barzun points out that the achievers among creative thinkers are those who know how to loaf. In modern society, we're only to give the illusion of loafing as we sit in front of the television or stereo, or perhaps in Yankee Stadium, letting someone fill our eyes and our heads with profitable trash.

Because of human intelligence, human societies can be terribly dangerous organisms, to the point of evil. Because of higher possibilities of human intelligence, many of the worst dangers can be averted or at least moderated. Those higher possibilities allow us to do what rats or chimpanzees can't do: to evaluate the dangers to our own moral integrity or that of our children and to properly educate and train ourselves and our children to deal with the dangers.

The first step in overcoming inappropriate peer pressure which can deform our moral natures is actually something simple and something very Thomistic, if I may say so. We first need to pay attention rather than always acting reflexively or acting to move with the flow. If we pay attention, we can think about how to change our behaviors and our ways of seeing and thinking. If we pay attention, we can move towards true human personhood, achieving some sort of self-aware moral integrity. How do we do this?

The second step in overcoming inappropriate peer pressure is simply to decide to do what you think is right, one step at a time, and worry about the practical consequences afterward. This is the big issue from a more general level. If you wish to be a moral creature, then you act morally, by effort when training yourself and as a natural matter once you've done that. You do what is right. If you think first of the practical consequences and order your options accordingly, then you're not a moral creature but rather a utilitarian creature. This is not to say it's morally proper to ignore practical considerations, especially the damage our moral actions might have on others. It is to say that we have to first order our possible behaviors by moral criteria and then consider whether, for example, our children might suffer greatly if we accept martyrdom even if the price we pay ends up to be no more than the loss of public respectability or prosperity or both.

Pay attention and put moral concerns first, concentrate on your next step. Make your long-term goals but realize you have to move towards them one step at a time. By the time you reach a goal, you might find it to be different than you had imagined, different from what you'd planned upon. And you might find yourself frighteningly alone. You might find that some of those decent folk who are far better behaved than you have redefined morality in the terms used by those nice, middle-class German bureaucrats of Nazi Germany or their spiritual brothers in Washington, DC during the 60s and 70s. Moral behavior has become that which secures prosperity and protects our property rights. Thus it is that we're upset with street crime

but okay with dropping bombs on civilians in Hiroshima or Munich or in the villages on the borders of Cambodia and Vietnam. Why bother mentioning Baghdad or aspirin factories in Africa?

But this entire process of gaining the proper sort of moral independence is short-circuited too easily by peer pressure and we Christians should be insightful enough to realize that modern societies feed our worst sorts of social instincts. I was very lucky in some ways when I was young. Among those ways was my attraction to the idealized biographies of famous men and women which my local library had on the shelves on the children's floor. To be sure, a schmaltzy story of Thomas Jefferson bringing ham and bread to a slave who'd run away from the family plantation wasn't the last word on his complex and confused relationship to slaves and slavery but it's still the best introduction to an important man. A skeptic might point out that it's a narrow view compared to what we'd read in a more complete life of Jefferson, but what's wrong with that? Those stories glorifying some sort of moral integrity sat in the back of my mind all those years I was trying so hard to be a mainstream American.



## 225 Sin and Survival

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=143>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/05/17.]

In reading a short article on the web about bears rubbing against trees (it's marking by both males and females and not scratching a different itch), I saw a comment about females marking partly to protect their young: a male bear will sometimes kill a female's young to bring a mother back into heat and mate with her.

Behavior of that sort is truly 'sometimes' even for bears which are typically one of the less social of social mammals—especially the males and most especially the big males who need lots of food and wander over large territories. Still, I've read articles by wildlife biologists who have observed males socializing with cubs while the mother looks on without objecting.

Yet, brutal behavior remains a factor, behavior that I would call immoral even for non-human social mammals. This leads towards a very difficult problem, one not handled well by any view of evolution that I'm aware of:

Some of our less desirable instincts and tendencies were necessary for the survival of our ancestors.

This is a real problem for mainstream Christian interpretations of the story of Adam and Eve and, in general, for mainstream Christian understandings of human nature. Put a bit simplistically:

If our ancestors had been sinless, they wouldn't have survived.

Most modern Christians claim to accept some version of evolutionary theory and accept we share common ancestor with the chimpanzee, a creature capable of as much nastiness as a man. Presumably, that ancestor was

as nasty as his two major descendants. At what point in the evolution of humanity would we expect a 'sinless' Adam and Eve to have arisen? From nasty animal to sinless ancestors of all men to fallen man? Not plausible.

A real problem for those who think our ancestors were some sort of sinless Platonic archetypes who fell into a state of sin by their own (culpable) fault. In fact, the evidence is growing that we were born into a world, a phase of Creation, which is a battleground between order and disorder.

Is this evidence in conflict with the story of Adam and Eve, with the Bible as a whole? As most Christians understand that story and that book, yes. However, my reading of the story of Adam and Eve would lead me to believe it wasn't a fall into a state of sin but rather an awakening of man into an awareness of his state. Try reading those chapters in the book of Genesis and the following chapters giving the 'genealogy' of human technology—the founding of cities and crafts and so forth. Keep your mind open and see if you really find anything supporting those many sermons and homilies and books of theology about the fall of Adam and Eve.

# 226 If Only They were Athletes, Part 1

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=144>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/05/19.]

See *Images of maths 'geeks' stop people from studying mathematics or using it in later life...* at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/05/080512094435.htm> for more depressing evidence of modern priorities. As human societies grow ever more dependent upon advanced technology, we Americans continue to positively discourage the development of mathematical talent. This particular article deals with a general cultural prejudice against 'geeks', that is, smart boys (mostly) who can do the sorts of mathematics which is necessary for creative work in engineering, scientific research, as well as in mathematics as defined by college organizational charts.

We tease mathematically gifted students with the possibilities of learning when they're young and then place them in classrooms with teaching methods oriented towards those who don't want to learn or those who have to struggle to learn mathematics. Sometimes it's a simple matter of level of maturity in abstract thinking, a problem which would be solved by the logical solution of going to an achievement level system of education instead of an age-cohort system which allows brainwashing by peer-pressure processes and also is good for the sports programs.

This lack of concern about the nurturing of creative talent in general isn't a new problem in these United States of America. I was diverted from my goal of studying theoretical physics when I found I couldn't compete in my first two years of college because I had been trained to be lazy in high school. My high school course-work had been ridiculously easy. But I also

didn't pursue enriched studies on my own in high school as many successful mathematicians and scientists had done in similar situations. This was partly because I grew up in a sports-centered neighborhood in a sports-crazy town and partly because I'd taught myself how to watch TV and read undemanding books so I could participate in conversations with my friends and schoolmates and so I wouldn't seem too strange.

The simple fact is: Americans like good athletes and don't like smart young men and women. They don't strongly dislike those smarty-pants much so long as they stick to the rules of conversation—talk about sports and television shows. Let someone interested in a subject, be it local animals or American history start talking about species of bears or the courage of John Adams in (reluctantly) agreeing to defend the British soldiers who did the shooting in the so-called Boston Massacre and the yawns begin even as the eyes glaze over. As for any interest in mathematics? Something to wonder at but mostly just an eccentricity that's okay, but: "Lord, please, none of my children."

A town or city would be in uproar against a public school system that didn't take good care of talented athletes but few there are who think that maybe other sorts of gifts should also be nurtured. Little it matters if those gifts are directed towards the core subjects of education because the schools exist for social reasons and to indoctrinate children into the mainstream of American society.

## 227 If Only They were Athletes, Part 2

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=145>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/05/27.]

Recently, I read a volume which collected various works on the philosophy of mathematics—*New Directions in the Philosophy of Mathematics* [138]. This volume includes an article from the 1950 Proceedings of the International Congress of Mathematicians, pp. 258 -271, in which the mathematician Raymond Wilder talks about:

... drill type of teaching [Which he labels ‘symbolic reflex’ teaching] which may enable stupid John to get a required credit in mathematics but bores the creative minded William to the extent that he comes to loathe the subject! What is the difference between teaching a human animal to take the square root of 2 and teaching a pigeon to punch certain combinations of colored buttons? Undoubtedly the symbolic reflex type of teaching is justified when the pupil is very young—closer to the so-called ‘animal’ state of his development, as we say. But as he approaches maturity, more emphasis should be placed on his symbolic initiative.

Let me put this in a different but largely equivalent way. The modern mind is one which likes to settle in well-worn ruts. A human being with such a mind can see nothing outside of his ruts and he’ll consider education to be a matter of training other minds to travel those same ruts. This is a good way to deform and cripple the minds of those who can think more freely.

We need to nurture curiosity and a healthy imagination in those who show a willingness to move outside of set ruts. There might be a few who carve new ruts—the Einsteins or Beethovens. There will be many more who will climb out of their ruts and find a variety of pre-existing ruts to explore. They might end up as the serious thinkers who explore the details of the theories of an Einstein or the composers who explore the possibilities raised in the works of Beethoven.

Why don't schools nurture curiosity and a healthy imagination? Why do they suppress giftedness or even lesser talents? The proximate cause seems clear to me. Those who run the vast majority of public elementary and high schools aren't particularly interested in any academic subjects. Most of my teachers (I graduated from high school in 1973) would have greatly preferred a quiet evening of television to a quiet evening with a good book. Teachers kept up with the pennant-race but didn't pay much attention to developments in modern physics or mathematics, didn't even know what was revealed in the glossy pages of *National Geographic Magazine*.

The obvious exceptions were notable for being so obvious. And I should acknowledge that the older teachers were more likely to be interested in their subjects and seemingly competent.

In their favor, many of those teachers I observed were interested in the students as human beings. A good percentage of those many could work effectively with students in the middle, raising them to some modest level of literacy and perhaps general knowledge. Some could work wonders with at least the occasional troubled or disabled student. From what I could see, the teachers in the music department were truly interested in nurturing talented students and also helping the other students to develop some level of competence. Of course, many teachers and not just the coaches were concerned that athletes got the proper opportunities to develop their talents. I also have strong memories of the football coach, Chick Patullo, getting very upset that athletes no longer sang in the chorus or participated in the drama club. He was a good man and, though a little obsessed with football, interested in helping young men and women to become good men and good women, having some foundation of liberal learning and a bit of moral integrity.

Moreover, we have to consider the age of the student and the material he needs to learn as Professor Wilder noted in the quote at the beginning of this entry. At the elementary level, which should probably end at age 8 or so for talented students, it's probably appropriate for teachers to be

student-centered in order to nurture very general abilities.

What about teachers who were interested in their subjects? There were few at my high school. And it's such teachers that are needed to guide the students with some academic talent and an inborn curiosity. Such a student can be encouraged to develop a good work ethic—math is hard, but hard work can be fun in academic fields and not just on the playing field.

But the talented, those who can be our future physicists or the inventors of new computer technology, those who can make sense of our recent history and those who can plumb the depths of the modern soul in poetic forms, also need freedom of a sort not to be found in the modern American classroom. Such talented students, often bad students by many standard measures, need to be given some basic instruction and then encouraged to seek their own way, finding what interests them and learning to ask for guidance. This is a situation which would strike fear deeply into the heart of a bureaucratic school administrator trained to process young human beings as they were raw material and the schools were factories.

In math and physics classes, a talented student would be better off with only an occasional conventional classroom session to set the stage or provide general guidance. Then he should be given a list of problems culminating in some difficult ones. Let him find a comfortable place to sit with a small pile of books on the subject, a pad or two, several pencils, and a wastebasket. Provide him with a tutor and hold problem-solving sessions with several students where the leader could even be the most advanced student or one from a higher level. In history or literature, a talented student would be better off let loose in the library with some easy questions to answer, then with some harder questions, then with some for which there's no certain answer. All of this is preceded and interspersed with large amounts of reading of real books and not text-books.

Why do we have a school system in which talented and enthusiastic students are taught to hate even the fields in which they have talent? Because we have a school system populated by teachers and administrators who do not themselves like to work hard at the core subjects of a high school education, history and writing and mathematics and the sciences. They don't seem to even truly understand that there are some amongst the young under their care who actually can like math or history or disciplined creative writing (based on lots of reading) or lab sciences.

If only those students were athletes, we'd have noticed long ago and done our best to nurture their talents.



## 228 Cleanliness is Next to Cannibalism

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=147>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/06/01.]

Why in the world would *lab rats turn cannibal in cleaner cages*? The article at <http://www.newscientist.com/channel/life/mg19826576.200-lab-rats-turn-cannibal-in-cleaner-cages.html> tells us that rats are heavily dependent upon sense of smell to recognize other rats and even their own young as such. Keep their cages clean and they start to eat their own young.

As the evidence piles up relentlessly that we are wrong to think of ourselves as inherently separated from the animal kingdom, we should wonder if some of our problems with sexual and other social/psychological disorders might be due to our modern crusades to wipe out natural smells or to cover them up with perfumes.

This is not to say that the sense of smell is as important to human beings as it is to rats. Visual systems are dominant in most ways in human perception. But, apparently Proust (*Remembrance of Things Past*) was right that the sense of smell is very important in bringing back memories and painting them with emotional colors. Likely it is that the sense of smell plays other important roles, almost certainly helping to bond baby to mother and maybe helping to form stronger bonds between man and woman. It might be that we're disrupting a variety of human interactions by suppressing natural smells and covering them up with the smells of detergents or perfumes. Has any historian or anthropologist or sociologist ever done a study on the correlation and possible causal relationship of moral disorder and the use of perfumes?



## 229 Reality is Still Knocking: Human Uniqueness

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=158>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/06/03.]

This article, *Six 'uniquely' human traits now found in animals* found at <http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn13860-six-uniquely-human-traits-now-found-in-animals.html>, will be worrisome to those who think to secure the moral worth of the human being by appealing to some claim to uniqueness of the human race amongst biological species. Some of us aren't bothered much at all by such articles because we see human beings as raised above the animal kingdom only by adoption by Jesus Christ as His brothers and sisters.

In fact, there's been substantial evidence for a while that human natural morality is not so much different from that of other social mammals. That famous anthropologist from Mars wouldn't be able to so easily distinguish between the moral nature of a human being and that of a wolf, though wolves are more reluctant than human beings to kill other members of their own species.

Yet, as the old saying goes:

Only man brews beer.

More importantly:

Only man explores differential geometries or writes metaphysical poetry.

Human beings share the ability to think abstractly with at least chimpanzees. Unlike chimpanzees, human beings are aggressive in using their

abstract thinking talents. Those human talents for abstract thought are also much greater than the talents found in chimpanzees. Human beings are capable of being companions of God just because of the capabilities of the human mind. Firstly, we can become aware of at least the possibility of a personal God. It's hard to have a relationship if you're not aware of at least the possible existence of the other entity. Secondly, we can become aware that we inhabit some 'place' that might be called a cosmos or a universe. Once we see the possibility of a cosmos or universe, we can realize that such an entity would have to be rational and well-ordered by some standard that we may or may not wish to discover. We are creatures who, with minds properly developed, can hear God's offer of friendship and can respond to such an offer.

If the Son of God were to become a creature in an act of submission and obedience to the Father, the Son would've had to become a creature capable of that higher level understanding so that He could understand, you might even say remember, that most important of all creaturely knowledge: our humble relationship to the Father and our duty to render Him all that we have and all that we are—see <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/justice.pdf> to download my article *Justice: The First Step Toward God*. The human nature of Jesus Christ was in deep communion with the Father and with all that He had created with Father and Holy Spirit. This means that such a state is—in principle—possible for an ordinary human being just because Jesus Christ was a man like us and also the Son of God. He was true man and true God. This means that with the proper relationship to Creation and to the Creator, we can be just like Him. Human uniqueness lies in that possibility of imitating our Brother, the Lord Jesus Christ, in our adoption as His brethren.

## 230 We are Also Outside of Us

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=151>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/06/10.]

Changing the colors of a bird in the most superficial and artificial way can change its hormone levels and make it a more aggressive breeder. (See *Feather Colors Affect Bird Physiology, Barn Swallows Show* at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/06/080602121302.htm>.)

When John Henry Newman entered the Catholic Church, he gave up his comfortable living as an Anglican priest and accepted poverty. He moved to Birmingham to, among other accomplishments, found a school for poor children. One of his first acts was to spend most of his small stock of funds to buy new dresses for the girls who would be attending the school. Undoubtedly, he anticipated good results in self-esteem when those girls received, in most cases, the first pretty, new dress of their lives. How deep do such changes go? We don't yet know but we should be very careful to work for the best and to fear the worst when we raise children or even when we set our own ways of living and thinking.

When I was young, most Americans still had the traditional middle-class habit of ensuring that each child had decent clothes for school (maybe a couple pairs of khakis and a couple sports-shirts for boys) and also a set of Sunday 'church-going' clothes (if only a modest blue blazer and pair of gray slacks from Sears for a boy).

Let me zag a little now that I've zigged. When I was reading about grizzly bears years ago, in preparation for an important scene in a novel, I learned that wildlife biologists had verified that Rocky Mountain grizzlies, especially the males, had been so big in the 19th century as to seem a different species from their 20th century descendants. Their speculation was: mother grizzlies could manipulate the genes of the young in their

womb (not consciously of course), sending the message, “Grow big, son, we’re the dominant species” or maybe, “Be more modest in your growth, son, because there’s a dangerous species taking our territory and food.”

I’m simplifying in a somewhat grotesque manner to make a point, which is: we, that is—our bodies, can’t be something which isn’t a possibility in our genes, but our genes give ranges of possibilities rather than locking us into one set pattern of development. Our genes aren’t just a set response to our ancestors’ environment but rather a set of responses to some finite but perhaps wide-ranging set of possible environments.

## 231 A Moral Animal Rather than a Selfish Animal?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=152>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/06/23.]

I find this article, *Virginity Pledges May Help Postpone Intercourse Among Youth* at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/06/080610105945.htm> to be somewhat interesting given the evidence that human beings don't always change their current or their future behavior in response to horror stories of lung cancer told to smokers or lingering death by AIDS told to nearly all American children, even when relatively few were at high risk of 'risky' behavior. Apparently, some youth will be more likely to avoid premarital sex if they simply give their word to do so.

A creature that values its word more than the avoidance of future suffering may be different from the creature assumed in much of our teaching institutions, inside churches as well as inside the secular schools. Such a creature might even carry the possibilities of nobility, of willingness to sacrifice for future generations rather than maximizing their consumption of present pleasures. If only we were wise enough to nurture these better possibilities in our own selves and in our children.



## 232 A Truer and More Honest Natural Law

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=166>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/06/25.]

There's a short but interesting summary of a survey about the effects of knowledge on the opinions that men and women hold about the moral legitimacy of some controversial medical/scientific procedures such as the use of various sorts of stem-cells. See *Scientific Information Largely Ignored When Forming Opinions About Stem Cell Research* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/06/080606112831.htm>.

In a nutshell, those who hold prior moral beliefs about such matters, usually because of more basic religious beliefs, don't change their opinions about, say, embryonic stem-cell usage if new research results indicate embryonic stem-cells can be used to cure some terrible disease. It's hardly surprising, at least to me, that those who think the *Ten Commandments* and the *Sermon on the Mount* are binding will not change their opinions on allowable human actions because of individual fragments of empirical knowledge, even when those fragments speak of cures for cancers or neuro-muscular diseases. After all, we don't look at the evidence of success for the relatively homogeneous population of Japan and decide that maybe ethnic cleansing of alien populations can be a good thing. If something is morally wrong, alleged practical benefits have no effect on its moral status. But some don't put such activities as harvesting of cells from aborted fetuses or from eggs fertilized in the laboratory in the same category of moral wrongdoing as genocide. And I don't really wish to start out assuming that those modern medical techniques are in that same category. I just wished to make the point that a belief that something is absolutely wrong isn't going to be

subject to any change from most sorts of empirical evidence. And I say that as a radical empiricist of a Thomistic existentialist sort.

I'd also like to make the point that even natural moral reasoning not allied to some sort of absolute beliefs should still have a core of beliefs which don't change readily. This is true even when we speak of reasoning in the empirical sciences. In physics, for example, as evidence piled up against some of the problems of so-called Newtonian physics, physicists kept patching up an increasingly baroque structure of thought rather than throwing aside increasingly implausible basic beliefs in response to the mounting piles of inconvenient empirical facts. A discussion as to whether they should have changed before Einstein forced the issue is beyond the scope of this posting, and probably beyond my knowledge of the situation, but the point is that you don't dynamite the foundation when you realize the plumbing to the bathroom is bad. When you realize all the plumbing is bad and the electrical system is in bad shape and then you discover cracks in the foundation, you start buying the dynamite and also begin to think through a better design for a new structure.

In many of my writings, I've criticized my fellow Christians for not seeing that many of their moral beliefs and all of their ways of expressing moral beliefs should reflect the nature of a human animal and also the nature of our universe which is the only phase of Creation which we can experience and the only phase we can explore in our mortal lives. Most human beings throughout history have reasoned according to their understanding of their own nature and also their understanding of their own environments and any other environments of which they're aware. Human beings in all ages start out with a great deal of knowledge about appropriate behavior as understood in our families and neighborhoods and places of worship. In the modern world, even casual viewers of television documentaries often have acquired lots of more or less organized facts about bones dug out of the sands of Africa and the customs of tribes in Australia and oil-rich princes in the Near East. It doesn't matter if a modern human being tries to consciously form his moral beliefs or if they come to him during his dreams after watching a television documentary about the evolution of the human race or about the development of human civilization. Unless that man is a new Socrates, he won't be capable of the sustained attention to reality and the sustained lines of thought that can lead to the development of a set of rational moral beliefs. But someone needs to do this and to provide a way for others to understand this world, as a world—that is, in terms of unity,

completeness, and coherence. Such a rational system of beliefs would be stable enough that it would take a lot of new empirical knowledge and a large speculative effort to bring about significant changes.

The idea of forming a moral system which accounts for the actual nature of evolved human beings and their world is hardly new nor is it alien to Christian thought. In the 13th century, St. Thomas Aquinas taught us that we're 'mostly' physical creatures. He felt forced to conjecture a strange and non-human 'soul' that would survive the death of the human body but it was no more than an entity which does abstract thinking. Teaching we have souls separable from our bodies was his biggest mistake in matters of human moral nature, but his views on human moral nature were otherwise so solid by the high standards of modern empirical knowledge that one of the most highly regarded brain scientists of our era has endorsed those Thomistic teachings. See Chapter 73, *What is Mind: Part 1. The Imagination that Can be All* and succeeding parts in that series for my review of Walter J. Freedman's *How Brains Make Up Their Minds* [35]. Professor Freeman gives a remarkably clear and concise description of Thomistic teaching on the 'intentionality' of human moral nature. (A warning, 'intentionality' in the Thomistic sense has nothing to do with motivation or setting goals and all to do with your movement along a certain path. If you drink excessively and get behind the wheel of a car, you're acting as if to kill another human being. In terms of Thomistic moral teachings, you intend to kill though your head might be filled with the best of wishes for all your fellowmen.)

Human reason and knowledge of human nature, along also with knowledge of other creatures, tells us that human beings are a rather unique species of ape, but such true natural-law reasoning doesn't justify the belief in the absolute value of even obviously human creatures let alone masses of cells in a petri dish or young embryonic growths in the womb. Reasoning from the facts of nature also tells us that it's appropriate, pretty much by definition, for the members of a social species to place high value on the lives of others in their species, but not absolute value. In fact, wolves seem to be far more reluctant than human beings to kill members of their own species but few would see any possibilities of absolute truths coming from a deeper understanding of the moral nature of wolves.

It was the adoption of human beings as the brethren of Christ which gave human life some sort of absolute value. See Chapter 217, *Why are Human Beings of Greater Worth than Chimpanzees or Rattlesnakes* for a discussion of this view of matters. I'll speculate that this is the insight underlying the

denial of the concept of natural moral law by John Howard Yoder and some other theologians. They're right to this extent: it's impossible to derive the fullness of Christian moral beliefs from the natural world because that fullness is based upon a freely made decision of God to incarnate His Son and the freely made decision of the Son to adopt all men as His brothers. Yet, the impossibility of deriving a free-will decision of God from nature doesn't invalidate natural law which comes from human thinking and human common-sense reasoning.

In terms of any natural-law reasoning having much to do with nature as we know it, there's no rational reason to believe human life to have absolute value in any meaningful sense. Christians have to realize they have no right to expect others to recognize truths which depend upon the revelation Who is Jesus Christ. Christians should also work a little harder to clarify their own beliefs and to recognize that they do have two sources for their system of moral beliefs: nature and Holy Scripture. We should respect those who haven't accepted the Good News and the light yokes of Christ. If we wish others to accept the fullness of Christian morality, we should evangelize, should spread the Good News of Christ.

It's also well within our duties as Christians to respectfully critique the moral positions which others might hold in good faith. We can and should also point out to our contemporaries that many of the 'rights' of ordinary human beings in recent centuries, much of the dignity we of the non-elite can claim, can't really be justified without the belief that the Son of God became our brother, adopting us into His divinity. Even this development of a respect for human beings has to be seen and understood in light of specific historical developments in particular societies which were at least Christ-soaked if not quite Christ-centered.

## 233 Excluding the Hyperactive Amongst Us

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=153>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/06/26.]

See *Did hyperactivity evolve as a survival aid for nomads?* at <http://www.newscientist.com/channel/being-human/dn14100-did-hyperactivity-evolve-as-a-survival-aid-for-nomads.html> for another example of a human attribute that can be good or bad depending upon the context. I'll provide a few quotes from the article:

The nomads' active and unpredictable life centred on herding might benefit from spontaneity, says Ben Campbell, an evolutionary anthropologist at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee, US, who was involved in the new study.

"If you are a nomad then you ought to be little more impulsive than if you are settled," he says. "You should be a little quicker on the trigger."

...

Why the mutation isn't more common is a mystery, says Eisenberg. Another study found the impulsive variation in about 60% of native South Americans, but only 16% of Caucasian Americans. "It might be that there is a niche for a few people with more impulsive behaviour, but when there are too many of them those niches are filled," he says.

...

The mutation “predisposes you to be more active, more demanding, and not such a pleasant person,” says Henry Harpending, an anthropologist at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, also in the US. “You probably do better in a context of aggressive competition.” In other words, in lean times, violent men may feast while passive men starve.

A number of years ago, I remember pondering the situation of some hyperactive boys and young men that I knew. I came to a conclusion similar to that of these scientists, but different. These young men were prone to misbehave in schools which expected of them an alien behavior, passive and quiet. Those young men also exhibited impulsive courage that made me realize that, if taught a proper discipline, they would be the ones who would, without hesitation, place themselves in danger to protect women or children or puppies. Not that men without hyperactive traits are incapable of courageous acts, but there’s at least a hesitation in the responses of most men, a period of evaluation and calculation—often, but not always, that period of delay is appropriate. In addition, some of those boys and young men with hyperactive characteristics proved themselves more than willing to accept a certain sort of harsh discipline, that of the Marine Corps or martial arts. Though we manage to turn hyperactive boys and young men into sociopaths of a sort, they might actually serve the needs of communities by being willing to move without thinking.

Modern society, at least in Europe and North America, has been dominated by a middle-class with rather gentle manners, well-behaved in face of any authority and not just an authority which shows itself deserving of respect (such as Marine drill sergeants). We seem to assume that the ideal human being is one of these creatures who so obligingly fills slots in the workplaces of the modern world and then goes to buy what is offered in the well-organized, sanitary marketplaces. We don’t know how to deal with those human beings who can’t or won’t fit into their allowed slots and behave as expected. We don’t know how to use the full range of human attributes and seem to be blind to the advantages of having impulsively courageous men who might have, for example, stepped between his Jewish neighbors and a Gestapo agent. Of course, the Gestapo foot-soldiers were likely drawn from the population of men with impulsive tendencies developed in a sadistic direction, but that just points to the need for ways to

accept those with characteristics outside the mainstream and to teach them the proper discipline to serve society in their own way.

Perhaps we simply need more manly fathers and clergymen and teachers. Perhaps we need tough religious orders and demanding vocation schools.



## 234 The Tie that Binds

# Evolutionary Theory and Biblical Christianity

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=167>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/06/30.]

John Hawks is an evolutionary thinker who seems to think clearly and to speak honestly. I'd recommend his weblog, <http://johnhawks.net/weblog/>, for anyone wanting an intelligent take on evolutionary biology from the viewpoint of an anthropologist who has done highly regarded work on the genetics aspects of his field.

In a recent entry about a conference of scholars gathered to discuss the question, "What makes us human?"—see the article, *Don't ask the experts if they can't agree on the question*, at <http://johnhawks.net/weblog/2008/06/18#what-it-means-to-be-human-2008>, he had this to say about what ties us together into the human race:

One thing is shared by all humans, and cannot be taken away: our evolutionary history. Each of us bears some—but none has all – of the marks of this history.

It is our history that connects us to our distant relatives, not our genes. Even with a close relative like a twentieth cousin, there is a decent likelihood that you will share no genes at all because of your shared kinship from your most recent common ancestor. By the fiftieth generation, it is a virtual certainty. You are a genetic stranger to your ancestors.

Modern science in general has been forced to speak in terms of stories. Astrophysics discusses the development of galaxies as a reality and not just as part of the unpacking of a pre-fab universe. Darwin himself seems to have realized the importance of movement through time in a geological context (the Patagonian highlands) before ever he arrived at the Galapagos Islands. Within human history, those who produce better-quality thought in my opinion recognize that the various aspects of human civilizations—such as political freedom in the West or absolute respect for human life in Christian cultures – are the result of specific sub-plots in the human story.

The Bible also is a story and many stories. Like the universe, the Bible is more than it contains. (See Chapter 193, *A Universe is More than it Contains.*) Like the Bible, the universe is a story being told by God. When we see the universe as a story being told by God, that is – morally ordered as a narrative, I call it a world. The story that is the world has a chapter yet unfinished which is the evolution of man.

After years of contemplating the mystery, I still can't quite understand why so many Christians refuse to see that evolutionary thinking, a narrative based understanding of human nature is easily reconcilable with our understanding of the Bible.

## 235 What is Stem Cell Research Really About?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=84>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/07/30.]

In the April, 2007 issue of *Brain in the News* published by Dana Press, there's an article titled *Stem Cell Research Opens New Doors*, written by Carl T. Hall and originally published in *The San Francisco Chronicle*. I would recommend regular visits to Dana's website, <http://www.dana.org>, to anyone interested in modern medical sciences, especially the study of the brain or immune system, and also those interested in the ethics of medicine and medical research.

In his article, Mr. Hall tells us:

One argument for stem cell research is that it might generate fresh replacement cells for those destroyed by such horrific diseases as ALS, the paralyzing nervous system disorder popularly known as Lou Gehrig's disease.

The latest research suggest those predictions might be unrealistic: Replacing cells that die off in a disease still leaves open the question of why the cells died in the first place, which is the critical issue in any autoimmune disease, or degenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's or Parkinson's.

The findings may be the most dramatic example yet of the idea that stem cells are valuable as a "disease model—used to study disease—rather than a simple source of replacement parts."

Stem cell colonies were used in experiments which discovered that nervous system damage in ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease) was not due to problems with the nerve cells; it was a result of poisons coming from diseased cells surrounding those nerve cells.

As a next step, some scientists plan to, roughly speaking, transfer DNA from diseased cells in ALS patients into stem cells and watch as the disease progresses, presumably in the neighborhood of stem cells grown into the type of nerve cells which die to give the terrible symptoms of ALS.

As someone who is opposed to the use of any human being, or possible human being, as the means to the ends of another, I wonder what sorts of stem cells were used in these experiments. I've also read enough of the accessible scientific literature in this field to know that the pro-life leaders live in la-la land. The four or so types of stem cells have different properties and morally obtained stem cells don't have the right properties for all types of medical uses, research or therapeutic. Even when adult stem cells can be altered to be somewhat like embryonic stem cells, a careful observer will note the alterations depend upon technology that will possibly allow the elites of the moder world to create customized human beings, perhaps dumb and physically tough or perhaps capable of sexual feats beyond the desires of most of us.

My first general comment is:

We are a in a state of moral decay where all powerful technologies are potentially evil. Some of the technologies which are potentially of good moral use are at least as dangerous as the technologies which are evil from the get-go.

Our problem isn't one to be solved by the sorts of policy wonks we've all become, even those with honest and noble intentions to protect traditional moral values. We need to recognize that our society has removed many of our moral constraints. As the novelist Flannery O'Connor pointed out a half-century ago: we Americans are not a moral or compassionate people, we are merely squeamish. Our moral limits melt away a little more when we realize we might be able to increase our prosperity or safety or comfort by going just a little further. The nations of the West support medical research, technological exploitation, entertainment, and social experiments of a sort which would have horrified our grandparents. Our general decay, our tendency to create problems and to destroy moral and political traditions

rapidly, would indicate that we shouldn't assume that we're the ones who know better than our grandparents. At 52, I'm old enough to remember the attitudes of those days which were, to be sure, the true parents of our days. If someone had described a society like ours to my grandmother in, say, 1965, she would have gasped and labeled that society as being evil.

As numerous commentators have conjectured, Hitler and Stalin won the battle for the hearts of modern human beings. In fact, the neo-Marxist Horkheimer once claimed that radicals owed a lot to American businessmen who proved they could destroy families better than the toughest and most competent of modern dictators. I would add that the moral giants of our corporate world dissolve traditional moral institutions of all sorts but otherwise Horkheimer was mostly right on target, though he missed the important role played by the American government in all of this. Modern human beings have been bribed to walk away from the institutions which once embodied the moral traditions of the Christian West. The result is a gentler and kinder Reich, a more efficient version of the Bolshevik Empire. Every entity on earth, every bit of flesh, has become a means to the end of increasing the prosperity of society which defines prosperity not in terms of human and humane goals but rather in terms of material wealth, of safety, of comfort. We value long lives and have forgotten about good lives.

We haven't seen the worst of it yet. If it now seems necessary to study ALS by observing multiple types of human cells grown in the laboratory, what will we do when we discover that ALS or some other horrible disease is really a complex disease of multiple parts of the human body? So far as I can predict the future, we'll begin to grow human babies in the laboratory and not just any human babies but babies customized to have particular forms of those horrible diseases so that the progression of those diseases can be studied under controlled conditions. Our public morality is such that we'll have no good arguments against doing this.



## 236 Are All Scientists Evil?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=85>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/07/31.]

After publishing Chapter 235, *What is Stem Cell Research Really About?*, as an article on one of my weblogs, I got some feedback that indicated that I didn't make my point clearly. One reader claimed I implied that all scientists are evil. While I think my writing was not nearly that bad, I do think it worthwhile to address this issue from that angle, that is, to ask, "Are all scientists evil?" There is some scientific research that is inherently evil but most is morally neutral depending on how it's used. I did eliminate one good example from that prior entry at the last minute: Alfred Nobel invented dynamite to save the lives of miners and was horrified that it was so readily used in warfare. He funded the Nobel prizes to try to encourage moral and peaceful uses of science. Plenty of other scientists have done as much evil as Nobel did by accident, but some—maybe many—have intended to do that evil if that was necessary to gather money or power.

It wasn't businessmen and politicians who invented all the evil technology that rips apart human bodies or destroys our social and physical environments, though some of the scientists and engineers who did invent that technology moved on to become businessmen or politicians. And some of those were in the same position as Alfred Nobel—the evil results of their work weren't intended and might have deeply bothered them to the point where they did some sort of penance.

The problem we have in our age, and I've tried to make this clear in many entries and also in my only published book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], is that scientists are no different from the rest of us and the rest of us are morally disordered (or perhaps unordered) creatures living in a society which has liberated its citizens from traditional moral

relationships that they might produce and consume more freely in the public marketplaces.

There is another source of confusion about moral issues which I've tried to clear up in other writings but it takes some honest contemplation and maybe some reading of substantial history books to fully eliminate this confusion:

There is good reason to believe that most of the evil in the modern world was actually carried out by nice, middle-class people because the nuts like Hitler weren't capable of carrying out their own schemes.

The most frightening books I ever read were *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and *The Origins of Totalitarianism* by Hannah Arendt, the Jewish historian and philosopher who took the long way out of Europe when she had to flee her native Austria after the Nazi takeover—she stopped in Paris and helped others to escape, leaving only when the Gestapo was almost upon her. Eichmann, the bureaucrat who supervised the roundup and transpiration of the Jews in Nazi-controlled lands, was captured in South America by Israeli agents in the early 1960s and transported secretly to Israel. Hannah Arendt was sent by one of the major American magazines to cover the trial and was allowed to interview Eichmann after the shocked prosecutors had completed their interrogations. She was soon as badly shocked as they had been: Eichmann was a very, very nice man. It turned out that he had sympathized with the Jews and had helped many to escape, refusing bribes, when it had been possible for them to make it out of Nazi-controlled territory. He had simply been doing his job when he carried out orders and managed the logistics of the Holocaust. Adolf Eichmann was a nice man without any moral integrity.

It was Hannah Arendt who concluded that most of the evil in the modern world was actually, and necessarily, carried out by nice, middle-class human beings who were simply trying to make a good living. She didn't say anything about scientists being a special group who had refused to go along with the commission of evil. In fact, much of the evil in modern times was carried out with the help of advanced technology. The collaboration of scientists and engineers was necessary to the Holocaust though Stalin in Ukraine and Mao throughout China murdered a lot of human beings with more primitive methods.

In *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith stopped deceiving himself and his readers just long enough to wonder if the type of commercial society he was advocating might produce citizens who were genial without having any real moral integrity. His fears were valid. He was foreseeing us, the citizens of the modern West, and perhaps the citizens of China and India and Southeast Asia before long. The scientists are drawn from us. And we are like Adolf Eichmann, not wishing at all to do evil but doing it in pursuit of the goods we've been taught to value:

1. economic prosperity,
2. a good credit record,
3. a clean record with the tax authorities, and
4. children we've successfully raised to be just like us.

Our desire to meet those goals will lead us to all sorts of moral shortcuts. Mostly, we lull ourselves into a state of moral unconsciousness. And, no, I see no reason to believe that scientists are immune from these processes by which we put on blinders and delude ourselves.

Are we free and morally well-formed human beings who take responsibility for our own acts and for the acts of our elected leaders? No, not most of us.

Are scientists such human beings, free and morally well-formed? No, not most of them.

We, including the scientists amongst us, would prefer not to do evil. We'd prefer a world in which we can all become prosperous and there are no victims, but we do place our prosperity, our safety and comfort and long lives high on our list of priorities and rarely are we taught the practical skills of moral living and moral reasoning. There are some of us who do evil, in a fully conscious way, perhaps even enjoying the evil as much as the profits. Most of us just do our jobs and go about our peaceful way, working in a plant while caring—but not excessively so—what it produces. Napalm? Antibiotics? In the end, we just do our jobs, pay our taxes, and protest if anyone claims we aren't morally responsible human beings.



## 237 Corporate Laws: Not in Our Genes and Not in the Bible

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=183>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/08/06.]

There is no verse in the Bible that says:

Thou shalt extend human political and economic rights to corporate entities with abstract ownership that freedom and prosperity might spread through the land.

Nor do we have any reasons from genetics or evolutionary biology to believe that human beings function well as cogs in large corporate entities, either private or public. The nice middle-class Germans who actually did the work for the Nazis (building railroads and running military manufacturing and logistics and so forth) were not forthrightly evil as were Hitler and Himmler, but they ignored the larger effects of their work and kept busy in pursuing their modest career goals that they might be respectable citizens paying their taxes and adding to their children's college funds. See *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* by Hannah Arendt for an accessible analysis of the situation in light of Eichmann's trial and her efforts to deal with the 'niceness' of the man who was horrified by the Nazi programs but did his job of managing the logistics of the death-camps.

For every exploiter who made his billions by selling American productive assets and jobs overseas, for every exploitive employer pushing the 'liberal' cause of open immigration programs which has been justly labeled as 'quasi-slavery' by some commentators, there were not only armies of naive and well-intentioned activists for the global economy but also armies of well-behaved widgets who handled the details of those programs even to the

point, in many cases, of selling their own jobs overseas or training their own cheaply-paid immigrant replacements.

The marketplaces of the modern world are morally unstructured because those vast places can only be inhabited by mobs of human beings, not human beings organized into local communities that reflect, poorly or badly, the needs of concrete family- and community-centered creatures. A mob of human beings moves as such. Not generally rebellious, these marketplace mobs are docile, moving to build the railway lines to carry their Jewish neighbors towards the east, staffing the planning and operations departments of corporations which provide huge bonuses for executives and illicit dividends for retirement funds by selling American productive assets and jobs overseas. But what are those people to do?

Capitalism can take many forms, including forms which allow families and local communities a large role, but as for corporate capitalism. . .

Can no one see that huge, centralized structures don't meet the moral needs nor the moral capabilities of those very specific creatures – human beings? The economic man assumed by the theoreticians and practitioners of corporate capitalism doesn't exist and never did exist. He bears no resemblance to the concrete man described by evolutionary science, genetics, psychology, and the better-quality novels. Try to justify our current economic system on the basis of any of the writings of Jane Austen or Feodor Dostoevsky or Hermann Melville or Henry James or V. S. Naipaul. It would be the same problem as trying to justify our current economic system on the results of sociobiology or neurobiology, both of which paint an image of man not so different than those of our better novelists as well as the Bible. And this is an image of man not suited for life in the modern marketplaces, not capable of living a morally well-structured life in these marketplaces.

# 238 Stem-cell Research: Some Good News But I'm Still a Skeptic

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=189>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/08/12.]

First, the good news. From this article, *Stem cells created from ALS patient and used to make neurons* at [http://scienceblogs.com/notrocketscience/2008/08/stem\\_cells\\_created\\_from\\_als\\_patient\\_and\\_used\\_to\\_make\\_neurons.php](http://scienceblogs.com/notrocketscience/2008/08/stem_cells_created_from_als_patient_and_used_to_make_neurons.php), we learn:

It's a good time to be a stem cell researcher. Legal and political wrangling aside, the discoveries are starting to come thick and fast now and new breakthroughs seem constantly around the corner. Last November, I was writing about two groups of scientists who had managed to turn adult human cells into embryonic stem cells for the first time. Now, after less than a year, John Dimos and Kit Rodolfa from the Harvard Stem Cell Institute have given us two more surpassed milestones for the price of one.

As before, they have transformed adult skin cells have been into embryonic stem cells but this time, there are two important differences. Firstly, the cells that came not from a young, healthy individual, but from an 82-year old woman with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), the same condition that has paralysed Stephen Hawking. Even after a lifetime of chronic disease, the adult cells could still be reverted to a stem-like state.

I remain skeptical about the uses modern societies will make of this technology. For various reasons which have taken books to explore on even a tentative basis, the modern West no longer has the moral and social structures which forced even scoundrels to discipline at least their public behavior to some reasonably demanding standards. This was part of the reason for the ‘spontaneous’ formation of morally well-ordered marketplaces which so impressed Adam Smith: he was observing societies where scoundrels were forced to behave in their public activities, including commerce, or they would have been ostracized. You could label this as the ‘good’ hypocrisy that pays tribute to morality. But mostly, those Scottish and English marketplaces self-organized into morally well-structured forms because the vast majority of citizens of those countries were Christians at least in their moral beliefs and behavior. In this context, I’ll make no arguments that Christianity is morally superior to other human sets of beliefs, only that such a homogeneous society allowed free human beings to organize their activities from the bottom-up because they shared their basic beliefs and behaviors.

In any case, our modern societies have unleashed their morally challenged members to the greater task of enriching themselves even at the expense of others. For the sake of argument, I’ll assume that the current researchers and administrators and investors in the stem-cell industry are all morally well-formed men and women. If true, it won’t be true for long just because of the vast potential of this industry, potential for profitable good or evil. Those seeking wealth and power will soon be flowing towards this industry, as trained scientists or administrators, as fund-raisers and bankers. The potential for abuse and exploitation of vulnerable human beings is perhaps beyond any horrors yet seen in the brutal history of our race. Even in the United States, the most middle-class of any major country in history, there is a growing separation between rich and poor and the middle-class is pushed downwards. This is but a hint of what we might see if we build an industry capable of turning some human beings into walking spare-parts bins, in general—capable of turning some human beings into the means for reaching the ends of others. More so than in any period of that brutal history of our race.

I remain skeptical that we can control the potential evil of various forms of biotechnology. Our societies have not the moral structures adequate to control such dangerous technologies. After all, we managed to destroy our farming communities and many other human communities by the way in which we deployed our modern knowledge of growing food.

## 239 What's the Point of It All?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=211>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/08/21.]

Some more good news on stem-cell research, but all is not well. An honest researcher points out a fact which is inconvenient for those of us who have trouble thinking one human being should never be used as the means to the end of another human being.

In *Twenty Disease-specific Stem Cell Lines Created* at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/08/080807130834.htm>, we read:

Harvard Stem Cell Institute researcher George Q. Daley, MD, PhD, also associate director of the Stem Cell Program at Children's Hospital Boston, and HSCI colleagues Konrad Hochedlinger and Chad Cowan have produced a robust new collection of disease-specific stem cell lines, all of which were developed using the new induced pluripotent stem cell (iPS) technique.

The new iPS lines, developed from the cells of patients ranging in age from one month to 57-years-old and suffering from a range of conditions from Down Syndrome to Parkinson's disease, will be deposited in a new HSCI "core" facility being established at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH), HSCI co-director Doug Melton announced yesterday. The operations of the iPS Core will be overseen by a faculty committee, which Daley will chair.

Later in the article, we read:

While Daley, President of the International Society for Stem Cell Research, is enthusiastic about the promise of reprogram-

ming studies, he is far from ready to abandon experiments with embryonic stem cells. Daley believes that reprogramming and ESC research must advance in tandem to bring cell therapy to the clinic as quickly as possible.

Christians have fallen over each other in the recent past to justify good and moral uses of stem-cell technology so long as we might have our medical problems solved and might be relieved of the responsibility for moral witness. In this article, I'll not discuss the moral error in using any human being (including babies murdered years ago) as the means to the ends of other human beings. (See Chapter 235, *What is Stem Cell Research Really About?*, and Chapter 236, *Are All Scientists Evil?* for such arguments.)

We can't live forever. We can't solve all medical problems anymore than we can stop earthquakes or volcanoes. We do what we can to help ourselves and others, especially the children, but we do no good by sacrificing our moral integrity, by growing or making things which might well be evil and putting them in our bodies or the bodies of children.

We Christians proclaim a belief in a resurrection into life without end as the companions to our Lord Jesus Christ and yet we make no serious protests against a society that sets its goals to maximize life-span and comfort and material prosperity, considering moral preferences—truths would be too strong a word for our views—only as secondary matters. True Christians would decide to live in recognition of moral truths, to live in such a way that we would nurture our love of God and our human moral integrity first and try to lengthen our lives or ease our sufferings as a secondary matter.

## 240 Causality and Moral Freedom: Heading in a New Direction?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=178>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/08/28.]

A while ago I'd read that some wildlife biologists had speculated that there's a regulatory gene for size in grizzly bears and that the mother could change the setting on that gene, setting it to BIG when there was plenty of food and grizzlies were dominant and to a lesser setting when the conditions were less ideal for those humpbacked bears. There have been other speculations as well as factual hints that an organism doesn't develop under the strict control of its genes, that genes are part of an organism and not sort of all-powerful dictator beyond the reach of its slaves. The strongest evidence that the gene-as-dictator model is defective was the discovery by the Human Genome Project that human beings have about the same number of active genes as the average worm. I'll leave it to the reader to think about that or to research the thoughts of geneticists and others who've tried to make sense of that result.

Now we have evidence for the complication of inheritance in the form of data from reproducible studies of the inheritance of diabetes: *Diabetes Transmitted From Parents To Children, New Research Suggests* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/08/080820163239.htm>.

DNA is the primary mechanism of inheritance; kids get half their genes from mom and half from dad. However, scientists are just starting to understand additional kinds of inheritance like

metabolic programming, which occurs when an insult during a critical period of development, either in the womb or soon after birth, triggers permanent changes in metabolism.

In this study, the researchers looked at the effects of a diet high in saturated fat on mice and their offspring. As expected, they found that a high-fat diet induced type 2 diabetes in the adult mice and that this effect was reversed by stopping the diet.

However, if female mice continued a high-fat diet during pregnancy and/or suckling, their offspring also had a greater frequency of diabetes development, even though the offspring were given a moderate-fat diet. These mice were then mated with healthy mice, and the next generation offspring (grandchildren of the original high-fat fed generation) could develop diabetes as well.

In effect, exposing a fetal mouse to high levels of saturated fats can cause it and its offspring to acquire diabetes, even if the mouse goes off the high-fat diet and its young are never directly exposed.

The study used mice so it's not time to warn women to eat differently during pregnancy and breastfeeding but earlier research has shown that this kind of inheritance is at work in humans. For example, there is an increased risk of hypertension and cardiovascular disease in children born of malnourished mothers.

Changes from metabolic programming can pass on through multiple generations even though there's no changes to DNA. Though we don't yet know how important this is in human beings, there is reason to suspect it could be very important. In any case, it greatly complicates our understanding of our particular human natures and how we fit into a family line. In theory, though not yet proven for our species, we could inherit the effects of bad habits of our grandmothers by way of our mothers or fathers.

While this can seem unfair, most of us can accept this for physical problems such as hypertension and diabetes. What about inheritable traits or dispositions that have a more direct bearing on moral matters? Many accept that a man might have too strong a taste for whiskey and yet draw back from considering the possibility that our moral freedom is constrained

by factors inherited from prior generations. This sort of constraint on our moral freedom seems all the more unfair if it's a matter of our mother's or grandmother's habits rather than the DNA they carried through no fault of their own, though I'm not sure about the use of the word 'fault' when talking about who we are. To say that it is or isn't my fault that I'm me, that I possess certain strengths and certain weaknesses, might be a little strange. That we talk this way might be a sign of the confusion that leads us to think constraints remove our moral freedom though constraints are necessary for a well-formed human nature. To be sure, constraints can strangle us or choke off some vulnerable part of us, but we shouldn't speak as if freedom were some sort of formlessness. And usually we don't.

We get close to our fears about being morally misshaped when we consider the results of another study as summarized in this article, *Nature or nurture—Are you who your brain chemistry says you are?* found at [http://www.eurekalert.org/pub\\_releases/2008-08/sonm-non081208.php](http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2008-08/sonm-non081208.php), we read:

“Our main finding was that reward dependence is the only personality dimension correlated with opiate receptor binding, and that positive correlation was restricted to the ventral striatum, which is considered the key area of the human reward system and of the development of addictive behavior,” said Peter Bartenstein, M.D., professor of nuclear medicine, Ludwig Maximilians-University, Munich, Germany. “This correlation means that people with high reward dependence have a high concentration of opiate receptors available in that area, while people with low dependence have fewer opiate receptors.”

In other words, be born with too many of those opiate receptors and you're in relatively greater risk of becoming a junkie. This returns us to the harsher mysteries of that phrase domesticated by gentle Christians of a prosperous age: There, but for the grace of God, go I. But I have no interest in developing that line of thought.

To me, this is more evidence of the truth of Thomistic intentional morality. We're creatures, organisms, and our moral natures grow as part of our overall growth. We're not rational agents, nor are we autonomous agents. I don't say we aren't rational and autonomous because such words do describe certain aspects of our human beings. I do say we're primarily organisms and

our stomachs do have substantial impact upon our moral decision-making, especially when we're truly hungry. Our sex organs and brains interact in complicated ways. We inhabit environments where the meaning and impact of a habitual behavior or a single action vary according to context. We're organisms in specific contexts, most especially social contexts.

I'm not trying to introduce any sort of 'holistic' mysticism. Organisms act as such but they can be usefully studied by proper use of reductionistic methods of research. Human beings are the 'rational animal' only as a way of qualifying certain differences between us and even the most intelligent of other animals. Our human natures aren't rational in a complete sense but they can be understood in scientific terms, in terms of rationality. The mind can study that which isn't mind or isn't only mind. That's tautologically true because even the human mind takes its form in response to its environments, the universe if all goes well, the world—or universe seen in light of God's purposes—if all goes still better. Moreover, our minds really respond even to our own bodies. As a consequence, even in its 'immaterial' aspects, the mind is a process of response to Creation, in part or whole. The human mind is a fairly well-defined subset of those organic development processes which are human nature, but there is substantial overlap between our intellectual natures and our moral natures.

We become moral beings—and mindful, self-aware beings—by processes which are spread over time and over our own bodies and our environments. It's those development processes, part of more general development processes of human organisms, which are our moral natures or our intellectual natures. Each and every act we make is part of the movement of the whole of the organisms which are us. As a consequence, each and every act we make with any moral import, even the decision whether to pick up a hobby and cut back on watching television, is a part of our moral development.

What interests me for now is that the organic foundation of human nature, including its moral aspects, argues for ways of speaking of cause and effect as being, shall we say, more diffuse than the well-defined ways of speaking of agents and decisions in spacetime terms reminiscent of billiard-ball physics. I have read that the logician and philosopher Quine has spoken of the possibility of causation which is non-local.

The interested reader can follow up on the basics of Thomistic moral nature as I understand it by turning to Chapter 385, *Is This Evidence Against Free-will?* for a discussion of one set of experiments showing we make at least some simple decisions without our any prior activity in the regions

of our brain which are associated with higher levels of consciousness. The problem is that this sort of a result does argue against models of free-will as developed by modern philosophers in the various schools of liberalism, but not against models of moral freedom which recognize the organic nature of the human being.

Thomistic moral philosophy is far better than competing schools of thought if we wish to develop a plausible model of human freedom. For a discussion of intentional morality as advocated by the neuroscientist Walter J. Freeman, see Chapter 83, *Is Christian Morality a Natural Morality?*, Chapter 84, *Pragmatism and Thomistic Existentialism*, and Chapter 84, *More on Pragmatism and Thomistic Existentialism*.

As a first step, I think we should study causation in the realm of physics proper because that can provide us with an understanding of the possibilities in terms of the fundamental being of this universe. I'm particularly interested in non-locality, which occurs in general relativity and quantum mechanics but also in other physical realms such as those of self-organizing systems. Hurricanes are one example of a self-organizing system where there are lots of local processes but no one local process dominates the overall activity as a tropical storm develops from hot ocean water and disturbed air masses. Getting a handle on this issue of locality vs. non-locality which is fairly well-defined might well lead to a breakdown of much of the language and the conceptual apparatus we use to try and understand causation in the moral and non-moral realms.



## 241 Didn't Their Lack of Muscle Tone Give a Clue?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=223>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/09/12.]

Here is an article about parents overestimating the time their children spend on vigorous exercise: *UK Children's Physical Activity Levels Hugely Overestimated* at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/09/080908215935.htm>. We learn:

Parents said their children were moderately to vigorously physically active for an average of 146 minutes a day.

But the accelerometer readings showed that this figure was actually 24 minutes a day, with boys managing 26 minutes and girls 22.

According to the survey data, 83% of boys and 56% of girls complied with the recommended daily amounts of moderate to vigorous physical activity.

But the accelerometer showed that only 3% of boys and 2% of girls actually did so.

I'm bothered by the parents' lack of awareness of their children's physical activity but I'm not really advocating a crusade for parents to be leading exercise sessions for five year-olds nor am I advocating still more T-ball for pre-schoolers or little league for pre-teens. I think most children are naturally active and that leads to the fear that we've deformed our human societies so that they somehow lure children away from their inborn inclinations to run around and climb everything accessible, to organize themselves

into groups playing games and get themselves into healthy sorts of trouble. We've turned too many children into sluggish creatures who only move in herds, generally under the direction of an adult coach or at the beckoning of some corporate marketing scheme.

# 242 Heading Towards a More Exact Understanding of Human Nature

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=226>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/09/13.]

Sometimes I've written entries which point to various scientific evidence that our soul-like characteristics are actually founded on matter and arise first of all, but not only, from such physical processes as hormonal flows or brain-cell activity. Soul-like characteristics seem to be matters of relationships rather than strictly of physical activity or physical states, so the hormonal flows that restructure a new mother's behavior and very perceptions work towards the benefit of her child. The hormonal flows and brain changes work to generate and strengthen maternal love.

It doesn't bother me at all to think my stuff is 'just' the stuff of my body. It's stuff that God made for His purposes. And, in its perfected form (think of the risen Christ), it's sufficient for life without end as a companion to the Lord Jesus Christ. St. Thomas Aquinas had this to say about the relationship between a human being, his body, and his soul [5]:

My soul [in Thomas the organ for thought] is not I; and if only souls are saved, I am not saved, nor is any man. [page 43]

Aquinas' major mistake in regards to understanding human nature was thinking an immaterial entity was necessary for human (mostly abstract) thought, but he never made the mistake of placing core human attributes, which we share to some extent with other animals, in the soul. It is the

physical man who loves, has faith, and has hope even if Aquinas thought those to be refined by association with the higher thoughts of the 'soul'.

We're creatures, objects of God's love and our being has to have some sort of substance to allow us some appropriately independent existence from God who is His own Act-of-being, the supreme Act-of-being, in terms of Thomistic existentialism. We exist because of lesser acts-of-being possible only to God but these lesser acts-of-being result in bodily life.

It bothers me not at all, surprises me not at all, to see growing empirical evidence indicating that our substance is that of our body and that, unlike even Aquinas' moderate views, we probably are not some sort of pasting together of two substances. It seems to me better to be this stuff that sits and types rather than some mysterious stuff with radically different properties than anything the biological me can even detect. Who would I be if I were not this flesh-and-blood me? My soul is not me. In substantial terms, my soul is even less than St. Thomas thought, in fact, nothing at all. The soul is a set of aspects of this biological me, aspects coming from my relationships to God and my fellow-men and to this world created by God. And so, I retract my claim—my soul is part of me but it comes into being when the flesh-and-blood me responds actively to God and God's Creation.

We shouldn't be overly disturbed by the various scientific findings that tie us ever more tightly to this flesh-and-blood which is us. So, I'll continue to make note of some of those findings, noting also that we do possess those aspects and characteristics which are considered by man to belong to the soul. In fact, we are heirs to a profound understanding of important aspects of human nature that was developed in the Bible, in the writings of Virgil and Shakespeare, in the music of Bach and Beethoven. What we did was to fool ourselves into thinking that we have an invisible and undetectable substance that somehow controlled our flesh-and-blood substance. This was a dangerous understanding. Errors of such magnitude will always cause loss of faith in our human selves and even in our Creator when they're seen as errors. Errors of this sort have likely played a role in the loss of faith in this age where we have good reason to know that science gives us certain kinds of truths and those truths which must be accepted on faith are presented by most Christians as being tied to ideas in conflict to those lesser but verifiable truths of science.

Let me discuss a couple of recent empirical findings about human nature, starting with the article *The right side of fair play* at [http://scienceblogs.com/notrocketscience/2008/09/the\\_right\\_](http://scienceblogs.com/notrocketscience/2008/09/the_right_)

side\_of\_fair\_play.php:

Now, Daria Knoch and colleagues at the University of Zurich have discovered that this desire for justice is influenced by a small part of the brain - the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex or DLPFC - which constantly suppresses our more selfish urges.

Note that word ‘influenced’. Think also back to those poor sons or daughters of alcoholics who also had an overly strong taste for the elixir of life. In a social context, one of concern for another human being, we freely admit there is something to this inheritance of traits which have a bearing upon our behavior and characters. At the same time, we must remember We do have a substantial amount of moral freedom. It takes effort and patience and often a humble willingness to seek help for us to exercise proper moral control over our tendencies, but we can do much even when we lose the battle. With conscious awareness, we can sometimes overcome our selfishness, probably even when our DLPFC isn’t doing its job. Some believe that they are in a war of sorts against a fallen soul when we’re actually in a struggle to discipline the different parts and aspects of our organic selves to higher moral standards. The explanations of evolutionary biology and the books of Moses are different but they both point to the same—sometimes harsh—reality, even when it concerns male promiscuity as in this article: *Of voles and men: exploring the genetics of commitment* at [http://scienceblogs.com/notrocketscience/2008/09/of\\_voles\\_and\\_men\\_exploring\\_the\\_genetics\\_of\\_commitment.php](http://scienceblogs.com/notrocketscience/2008/09/of_voles_and_men_exploring_the_genetics_of_commitment.php), we read:

Love is all around us and love is in the air, and if I know my mainstream science reporters, today they will have you believe that love is in our genes too. A new report suggests that variation in a gene called AVPR1A has a small but evident influence on the strength of a relationship, the likelihood of tying the knot and the risk of divorce. It’s news for humans, but it’s well-known that the gene’s rodent counterpart affects the bonds between pairs of voles.

and

Humans have our own version of the vasopresin receptor, with its very own unmemorable acronym - AVPR1A. Like its vole

counterpart, it's preceded by an important stretch of DNA that is rife with repetitive sequences. These are known as "repeat polymorphisms"; they are short genetic leitmotifs that vary in number from person to person. According to earlier research, these variations in this sequence can affect human behaviour and are linked to altruistic tendencies, the risk of autism and the age at which people first have sex.

We can now add the strength of relationships to that list.

But, we are warned:

Vasopresin is far [from] the only molecule involved in forming relationships, even in voles and there is still much we don't know about the other players involved.

On the morning of June 7, 2008, Pope Benedict XVI "received participants in the sixth European Symposium of University Professors, which is being held in Rome from June 4-7 on the theme: *Broadening the Horizons of Reason. Prospects for Philosophy.*" I discussed this address in Chapter 25, *Broadening the Horizons of Reason*. In that address, Pope Benedict said:

Modernity is not simply a historically-datable cultural phenomenon; in reality it requires a new focus, a more exact understanding of the nature of man.

What we are seeing in all these scientific research results is the empirical foundations of that more exact understanding of man. What we modern men need to do is to take these mountains of empirical knowledge, some of it so raw as to be facts or data and not yet knowledge, and make sense of it in light of our higher-level understandings of human nature. In an age where too many men are able to use modern empirical knowledge to more brutally exploit others or to simply kill them in large numbers, we have a chance to use this "more exact understanding of the nature of man" to do some good, to help us shape our own moral characters and those of our children. We have a chance to help us shape ourselves and our children to better serve God and to even prepare ourselves to be His companions in the world of the resurrected.

# 243 Dualism is Dying a Slow Death

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=194>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/10/02.]

There was once a strange tint to the philosophizing of some modern biologists and philosophers working in that field. They set up unidirectional structures of control from DNA to soma and from brain to physical limbs while also setting up one way flows of perception, including that of pain, from physical limbs to brain. The result was a dualism in which some forms of matter became embodiments of what might be called 'software' or 'soul' or 'spirit' as you will. That is, matter organized in the way of mere mortal life could send out detailed commands while remaining surprisingly unaffected by that which is controlled. All matter is equal but some matter is more equal than other matter. This universe is one entity, homogeneous and isotropic, but some entities within it are radically isolated in their homogeneity and isotropy.

When the Human Genome Project was completed, the researchers found that the number of active genes in the human body is about the same as the number in the body of a worm. Clearly, there was something activating and deactivating the huge number of genes in the human genome. Suddenly, DNA was a part of an organism which interacted with that genetic stuff, calling upon it to provide, say, directions for producing the hormones to prepare the placenta of a woman for possible pregnancy. In fact, many clearheaded scientists had realized DNA and the brain are parts of very complex organisms. For example, see Simon LeVay's *The Sexual Brain* [86] for a discussion of the role the brain plays in sexuality, focusing upon that all important part of human sexuality: the menstrual cycle. The brain is

the dominant organ as Professor LeVay tells the story but even the brain is most certainly not a Master dictating to powerless slaves.

So far as I can tell, popular writers and followers of science are more aware of the importance of the organism as a whole. This study, *Pain Is Not A Symptom Of Arthritis, Pain Causes Arthritis, Study Shows* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/09/080929123935.htm>, tells us:

Pain is more than a symptom of osteoarthritis, it is an inherent and damaging part of the disease itself, according to a study just published in journal *Arthritis and Rheumatism*. More specifically, the study revealed that pain signals originating in arthritic joints, and the biochemical processing of those signals as they reach the spinal cord, worsen and expand arthritis.

The imaginary barriers which divide the human organism are falling. The most important lesson we can learn is that the human being is an organism which has properties not to be found by simply assembling each of its parts seen as separate entities. A second lesson we can learn is that those parts are separate in only a very qualified way or, still better, the entire human organism is more than it contains. See Chapter 193, *A Universe is More than it Contains* for a short discussion of the universe itself in the same spirit.

## 244 What's Wrong with Books and Writing Pads?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=271>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/10/10.]

In this short article, *Smart Desks Make Sci-fi A Reality In The Classroom* at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/09/080916215203.htm>, we are told that:

Researchers at the Technology-Enhanced Learning Research Group (TEL) are designing new learning environments using interactive multi-touch desks that look and act like a large version of an Apple iPhone.

Children with any academic talent need to develop good reading and writing skills as a prior condition to learning science and math and well as literature or history. Children with lesser or little academic talent need to acquire at least the reading skills to deal with newspapers and basic contracts. In any case, the development of a child's literary skills, high or middling or low, requires great effort by both teacher and student. This means lots of hours reading books, along with the teacher or alone. This means lots of hours writing out at least simple sentences. And there is also the basic arithmetic skills, important to future chefs and machinists as well as future engineers.

The situation gets more complicated at higher grade levels when the various opportunities and problems of students at the higher and lower levels of academic talent are ignored as our bureaucratic educationalists try to force all students onto standard paths of development which, at best, might be appropriate for many of the students of middling academic talents.

And why are all students put in so many hours of academic classes in any case? Is it somehow better to be a failed algebra student than to be a good student of sewing or carpentry?

If smart desks are an answer to a problem, it's not any of the real problems of educating human beings. Then again, few school systems are going to be able to afford these desks or much other new equipment with our economic problems still increasing.

## 245 The Invasion of the Body-changers

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=246>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/10/11.]

Nearly ten years ago, I wrote the first version of a dark comedy in which the protagonist, a formerly respectable professor of philosophy, seems to be in a rather confused state of mind. (The novel *A Man for Every Purpose* can be downloaded from <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/aman.pdf>.) I'll ruin part of the surprise by saying that much of the confusion of the protagonist's thought comes from alien genes introduced into his body by a virus that nearly killed him. Since I wrote that book, partly a matter of pure speculation on my part, scientists have gathered information that indicates the possibility that an invading organism can alter us, our genes or at least the expression of those genes. For example, our personalities or manifested intelligence levels can be changed. Read on for some details...

There is no magic that will exclude from our bodies chemicals from our environment or genes from another species. Our environments leak into us and we leak out into our environments. We often alter our own chemical balances on purposes, using alcohol or far more dangerous drugs. Sometimes, we can cause permanent changes by excessive use of various substances or by exposure to workplace chemicals or whatever.

I'm hardly surprised to read this entry, *Toxoplasma - the brain parasite that influences human culture* found at [http://scienceblogs.com/notrocketscience/2008/10/toxoplasma\\_the\\_brain\\_parasite\\_that\\_influences\\_human\\_culture.php](http://scienceblogs.com/notrocketscience/2008/10/toxoplasma_the_brain_parasite_that_influences_human_culture.php), on Ed Yong's fine science education blog. (His blog, now named *Not Exactly Rocket Science*, has moved to <http://blogs.discovermagazine.com/notrocketscience/>. We learn

from this science writer that:

In rare cases, *T.gondii* infection causes a disease called toxoplasmosis that produces mild flu-like symptoms and only really threatens fetuses and those with weak immune systems. But in most instances, the parasite acts more subtly.

Carriers tend to show long-term personality changes that are small but statistically significant. Women tend to be more intelligent, affectionate, social and more likely to stick to rules. Men on the other hand tend to be less intelligent, but are more loyal, frugal and mild-tempered. The one trait that carriers of both genders share is a higher level of neuroticism - they are more prone to guilt, self-doubt and insecurity.

The entire article is worth reading if only for its intelligent discussion of the problems with too simple or literal an interpretation of these results or results of similar sorts of studies.

Yet, it's likely that we are altered, for good or bad by various living entities or non-living substances that enter our body uninvited. Parasites, in particular, can spew out various products, some of which change the metabolism or behavior of its host. This particular parasite reduces fear in its host for one cycle of its life, rodents, so that they're more likely to be captured and eaten by the host for the next cycle of its life, cats. As Yong explains, human beings are a dead-end in the reproductive cycle of *T.gondii*, but the various chemicals it spews out to change the brains or hormonal flows of rodents are likely to have some effect upon us, just as viruses can influence us or our descendants by planting copies of their genes inside our DNA, which genes might contain random fragments of genes from the most unlikely of species. Notice that men infected by this parasite tend to be mild-tempered. This may be a sign of a lowering of fear levels which is the effect upon rodents—tests of different breeds of dogs have shown the gentler breeds, such as Golden Retrievers, have far lower levels of fear in many circumstances than the aggressive breeds, such as Rottweilers.

I don't know how matters have turned out but, back when I was learning a little about these areas in the 1990s, some scientists were claiming the gene for feline leukemia was a fragment of a gene for a growth hormone in an ancestor of the baboon. It's most likely it was transported from one species to another by a virus or retrovirus. And that's how I made matters

work in that novel I referred to above. Poor Milt emerged from a blood-fever disease with some mental peculiarities including an occasional desire to enter stagnant bodies of water and feast on pond-scum. Somehow, he had acquired genes from some species of aquatic worm. Maybe. Or maybe he had a vivid imagination affected by his learning in the fields of genetics and evolutionary biology.

I'm not surprised that *Toxoplasma* might change the personalities of those human beings it infects. If so, it would have an effect upon cultures. Since *Toxoplasma* infections are far more common in tropical regions, then we might have cultural differences which come not from human DNA or from human interaction with physical environments but rather from a difference in infections by region and maybe by level of economic development. The chemicals in the products we handle in the developed West, the heavy metals found in the dust on our roads (such as platinum from catalytic converters), the various hormones in our meats and dairy products, and certainly the constant flow of certain hormones in response to hectic lives, are likely to have some effects upon us.

This is a bothersome matter to those who define the human self in terms that imply it is, or ever could be, sealed off from what's around it. To me, it's just another complicating aspect of our world and one which is amusing in a somewhat darkish way. And I don't necessarily think there to be any deeper meaning, other than the impossibility of truly walling ourselves off from Creation or even much walling ourselves off from this universe during our mortal existence.

Once upon a time, a transcendentalist princess announced with the most generous of motives, "I accept the world," only to be asked by Sir Thomas, a champion of a certain hard-headedness, "Ye gads, what choice have you?" [My memories of a reported exchange involving Margaret Fuller, as a young woman, and Thomas Carlyle as a middle-aged and somewhat wise skeptic.]



## 246 Aiming to be Half-sane

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=275>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/10/14.]

In a recent essay, *Liquidate the Empire* at <http://www.amconmag.com/blog/2008/10/13/liquidate-the-empire/>, Patrick Buchanan continues his recent tendency to move in the general direction of reality while not wanting to stray too far from the path of political orthodoxy. To be sure, reality can be harsh and we see why by noting Buchanan's half-heartedness in these words from that essay:

Uncle Sam's VISA card is about to be stamped "Canceled."

The budget is going to have to go under the knife. But what gets cut?

Social Security and Medicare are surely exempt. Seniors have already taken a huge hit in their 401(k)s. And as the Democrats are crafting another \$150 billion stimulus package for the working poor and middle class, Medicaid and food stamps are untouchable. Interest on the debt cannot be cut. It is going up. Will a Democratic Congress slash unemployment benefits, welfare, education, student loans, veterans benefits—in a recession?

No way. Yet that is almost the entire U.S. budget—except for defense, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and foreign aid. And this is where the axe will eventually fall.

It is the American Empire that is going to be liquidated.

Why does it matter that "seniors have already taken a huge hit in their 401(k)s." I've taken a hit in recent years in not being able to afford a car or a lot of new clothes because I've chosen to continue writing while not

making any money at it. Do I have some sort of right to what I can't afford? Maybe it'd be a better world if serious writers could make a living right now. Maybe it'd be a better world if American seniors and Chinese seniors and African seniors could have hip-replacements when needed, if they could have generous pensions that allow them to live without being dependent upon their children or local communities. The real question is: can we Americans or those Chinese or African afford such ways of life? There's also the very important question as to what binds together human communities, including multiple generations. Some sociologists and historians say it is exactly dependencies which bind human beings together.

The fact is that we can't afford Social Security and Medicare as currently structured, though the pension plan—Social Security – can likely be saved by increases in taxes combined with cutbacks in benefits. Various economists and accountants and actuaries have calculated the deficit in those plans if the books were kept in the way that the government and investors and societies of Certified Public Accountants require of private businesses and most nonprofits. The range of deficit estimates that I've seen is \$50 trillion (from the GAO, the Federal government's own auditing unit) to \$100 trillion (from an economist at the Dallas Federal Reserve Bank). Both of those numbers are for 2007 or so and likely have gotten worse because of our current financial problems. I've seen estimates of the value of everything that American citizens own throughout the earth—around \$40 trillion.

The bulk of the deficit is in Medicare. If we really want to continue trusting those in Washington and New York City, we could rescue Social Security. In fact, that gives us some time and room to move to a better system without putting undue burdens upon those who are currently retired or will be retired soon. But sacrifices are necessary. Our choice is between an impending collapse or a planned transition to a more modest medical-care systems and more modest private plans—perhaps fully privatized. Until recently, economists and actuaries have thought that the system needed repair by at least 2020, but I'd guess that collapse is truly imminent because of the current economic collapse.

Medicare seems to be a good example of a system which is the worst of all worlds in the way it combines market mechanisms with regulation and government deficit-financing. The government pays much of the charges to individual consumers (though more direct grants to researchers and others involve very large sums as well) but the institutions compete. This

has resulted in hospitals with an excess of expensive diagnostic equipment and hi-tech operating theaters and probably a severe lack of hospital bed-capacity which provides affordable nursing care including simple hospice care for those in their last months of life and without possible home-care. Medicare has been used to corrupt our once wonderful medical systems in the same way that the general system of deficit funding through the Federal Reserve system has been used to corrupt our financial systems. In fact, we shouldn't pretend that Medicare and Social Security are viable systems without deficit funding.

Just as we're seeing with our imploding financial system, the Federal widgets will do their best to save the bloated and dysfunctional parts of the system. They may well drag down the regional and local banks with their Wall Street bailout programs and they will likely try to save our far too numerous research hospitals and the bloated radiology departments in every hospital and make it more difficult for us to return to a better system of primary medical care and basic nursing care supplemented by far fewer specialists than we have now.

Because of the bloating of our medical system, private health-care plans are no healthier than Medicare. We've got one hell of a lot of MRI machines to pay for and doctors are forced by standards of care to use them when needed or not. Furthermore, as many are finding out on their statements for their 401K plans, private pension plans are also being dragged down by our general economic problems and there is no return to prosperity in sight.

We're not in a land of milk-and-honey. We're in a land where the major political battles of the coming decades will be over the allocation of resources under conditions of scarcity—the task that once earned economics the title of 'the dismal science'. That science is being returned to its roots by our inability to kick the can down the road too much further and this situation will likely bring our political system down with it. In terms of sheer size, the biggest problems in this battle will be Social Security and Medicare though Buchanan is justified in emphasizing our military expenses at this time. Those military expenses have grown at an extraordinary rate and at the cost of our personal liberties and perhaps at the cost of the moral integrity of our country as a whole and the moral sanity of those soldiers we put into situations where we function as enemies of civilian populations—we never learned the real lessons of Viet Nam. Furthermore, many of our military expenses could be cut soon, though there are many troops and much doomed-to-rust equipment to bring back as well as a lot of veteran's

benefits to fund.

Whether or not we get our would be imperial rulers under control, the deficits of Social Security and Medicare are so huge that we couldn't maintain these systems past 2020—at best—even if we started to steal the economic productivity of the entire globe, leaving all others on earth to live as impoverished slaves. In fact, it's likely the system has lasted this long only because the role of the American dollar as reserve currency, including its role in the international oil trade, has allowed us to fund our deficits through the Federal Reserve bankers and their fellow-crooks on Wall Street in such a way that other countries have absorbed part of our deficits through inflation. Our advanced hospital systems and our generous pension plans are subsidized by Chinese and Russians who have far lower standards of living and far less access to medical care. I doubt if they will continue subsidizing us in this way.

The Social Security and Medicare systems are unsustainable and immoral – along with our general governmental spending, they've been a regressive tax upon the American middle-class and upon the peoples of nearly all countries no matter how poor. The deficit funding schemes which are dragging down the world's financial systems are needed to prop up our Social Security and Medicare systems even more than to prop up our rulers' imperial ambitions. We must have the courage to face up to the problems of those systems in a deliberate and direct way or they will drag us down even if we find a better way to manage our banks and even if we manage to bring our military and foreign aid costs under control.

# 247 No Wonder We Have to Choose Between McCain and Obama

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=286>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/10/15.]

In this article, *Narcissistic People Most Likely To Emerge As Leaders* at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/10/081007155100.htm>, we learn that tests of small groups presented with a problem to solve have indicated that:

When a group is without a leader, you can often count on a narcissist to take charge, a new study suggests. Researchers found that people who score high in narcissism tend to take control of leaderless groups. Narcissism is a trait in which people are self-centered, exaggerate their talents and abilities, and lack empathy for others.

The researchers emphasize that those narcissists are not necessarily lacking in talents and abilities, only that they exaggerate whatever talents and abilities they do possess. This may explain a lot. In the 1830s, the famous French commentator Tocqueville noted that the moral caliber and general level of talent of American leaders he found during his visit was far lower than he'd expected based upon the stories of a family friend, the Marquis de Lafayette. My memory tells me Tocqueville used a term translated as "self-serving scoundrel" or something similar to describe this country's chosen leaders at the time of his visit.

The question, not attempting to be at all subtle, is:

Why did we have Washington and Franklin and Jefferson in the first generation of American leaders and recently we had Bush and Clinton with Obama and McCain on deck?

I think the answer is fairly obvious. The quest for leadership positions in the United States is a free-for-all of sorts. We have the political machines to screen out men and women who have too much moral integrity to be willing to deliver the goods to the clients of those machines, but there is certainly no selection process for actual competence. The Founding Fathers were a group of intellectually prepared men, knowing history and at least some legal and political theory, and were self-selected by their acts of moral and political courage. The supporters of political independence for the eastern-coast colonies risked lives and fortunes while “self-serving scoundrels” hid under rocks waiting for the dangers to go away.

Once the generation of Founding Fathers had died, the American people, free to choose their leaders tended with frightening consistency to choose those scoundrels, who are generally very good at flattering us and denying the need for sacrifices during difficult times; after all, they don't intend to sacrifice their lives or fortunes for much of anything. We tend to choose leaders who claim to be able to cut taxes and balance the budget while increasing funding of colleges and aiming at 1,000 American military bases throughout the world. Observers of the Soviet Union noted that the system was most effective when the bureaucrats and policemen believed the lies they lived, even when they knew them to be lies on some level. I think the same phenomenon, along with narcissistic effect, explains the apparent sincerity of our current leaders and the two aspirants to the Presidency of the United States when they put forward truly absurd claims to be able to garrison the world and keep the money flowing for our health-care systems and send every human being within our borders through college and balance the budget and cut taxes for at least some major part of the citizenry. Only a man or woman part scoundrel and part narcissist and part self-deluded liar could speak or promise in the way of our current politicians.

## 248 Dealing with Natural Law: A Summary To-date

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=253>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/10/17.]

This is a summary of my thoughts on dealing with natural law from my viewpoint of updated Thomistic existentialism. There may be some new thoughts in this entry but mostly I'm aiming at two goals:

1. Improving my presentation of my views of a truer natural law, that is, one that corresponds to modern improvements in our understanding of human nature.
2. Providing a foundation for viewing human nature in terms of our evolutionary past but also in terms of the new opportunities which arise from the nature of the human mind which can shape itself by active responses to its environments or multiple environments or the entire universe or even the world—the universe seen in light of God's purposes which define a moral ordering upon His self-aware creatures.

The second goal is the more important though we must understand the ways in which human nature is part of this universe before we can understand how we can transcend our natural-born condition by the seemingly odd strategy of shaping our minds in response to this universe, our physical environments but also our knowledge of deep-space objects and quantum events and very abstract mathematics. To put it in a lightly different way: a human mind can be shaped to correspond to the nature of created being in a very wide sense. To be sure, this is a matter of principle. No particular human mind could actually shape itself to fully correspond to the universe,

including all that we can't see—in which category, I'd place such bodies of truths as transfinite set theory though they might not be manifested directly in this universe.

Non-Christians and perhaps even non-theists can develop a version of this worldview in which the human mind can, in principle, come into a somewhat direct communion with created being. Or so I would assume on their part, though I have a specific viewpoint as a Catholic Christian and convert from liberal Protestantism who is updating Thomistic existentialism to account for modern empirical knowledge. This sort of creative thinking must be done from a specific stance. Motivation is crucial and so is faith in the rationality of Creation, or the cosmos if you prefer. Faith is always of a particular shape or it's not likely to hold up when the going gets rough, which is true for many stretches of creative efforts. Only a few of those few who can do this sort of thinking will persevere. In my case, faith in rationality comes with my belief in a rational Creator. And so I turn to a recapitulation of my understanding of human nature, of man's nature as a particular species of great ape, on my way to an understanding of man as a potential creaturely person, an entity resembling a world in having an objective substance and also a narrative structure which is well-ordered.

We modern human beings, Christian and non-Christian alike, have failed to integrate our empirical knowledge into our culture. Our cultures, even the entirety of Western Civilization, have become ghettos, isolated from God's Creation. Some Christian thinkers of this age reject the need to even study modern empirical knowledge because, to consider just one pile of empirical knowledge, evolutionary theory doesn't seem to fit with their view of human morality. Many other Christians accept evolution while seeming to somehow put it to the side—their metaphysical view of man and his moral nature seems to be related, but not always closely, to the empirical reality indicated very strongly by modern science. Their view of human morality is largely structured according to the best of ancient philosophical thought founded upon ancient science and mathematics. (See Chapter 69, *Hellenistic Metaphysics is too Small* which is an effort to rebut the idea that we can rebuild a civilization on traditional foundations.)

Thomistic thought, which is the only ground-up Christian philosophy I know of, looks at empirical entities, creatures, from an empirical stance, rather than the idealistic Greek philosophy which started from abstract concepts of virtue and understands human moral nature by weaving such pieces together into a whole. See Chapter 83, *Christian Morality a Natural*

*Morality?* for one of many discussions I've provided on this topic. Walter J. Freeman, the neuroscientist whose views I discuss in that entry and some others with the same major title, *What is Mind?*, has proposed that, of all major philosophers, Aquinas provides the best foundations for an understanding of human nature that is built from modern scientific knowledge. (See the various chapters in Part III for discussions of various aspects of this topic.) I'd only add that we should generalize from 'scientific' knowledge (as narrowly understood) to empirical knowledge that includes history and literature and the practical arts by which we make our livings, and other specialized fields of empirical knowledge as well.

Once the world is seen as the physical universe ordered to God's purposes and once we've gained the confidence to speak of even the flow of natural events as part of a story being told by God, we can even speak of morality as arising in this story. In fact, if we look directly at the evidence gathered and organized by evolutionary biologists, we can see that moral natures seem to have arisen and evolved to more complex states in the flow of the same story in which eyes and nervous systems evolved. There are a lot of details to be settled and, without the proper critique on both biological and philosophical bases, ideologists find it easy to distort this evidence, but a fresh look should allow a thinker to realize that the story of the evolution of life is not so much nastier than the story of the formation of Israel. That alone hints of a reconciliation between a Biblical God who shaped Israel and a God who created a nature which can be downright and disgustingly nasty at times.

Morality has evolved during the course of that biological evolution with all of its nasty events. The so-called altruism which leads social rodents to sacrifice themselves for others, preferentially their close relatives, isn't an indication that the higher altruism – even *caritas*—of a St. Francis is 'only' a biological impulse. It's an indication that morality is a very basic part of the story by which life evolved. Evolution leads to moral order, at least in social mammals, by developing ties between closely related animals and then similar animals. It's not only human beings who respond tenderly to a creature with oversized eyes and chubby cheeks – females of one species are often used by farmers or zookeepers to nurse the young of another species.

Even the order found in non-living things, such as stars or galaxies, is a sign of the moral purposefulness of the Creator. Yet, we have to remember that the higher altruism of a St. Francis is different and I've proposed a way of understanding that difference—we can shape our minds in active efforts

to understand Creation and those efforts are as good as child-like imitations of God's work in bringing Creation into being and then shaping it into this world and the world of the resurrected and maybe others.

Does God impose order as if He were a human engineer forcing silicon and other minerals into the state we call 'semiconductor'? Is mind imposed upon a brain and maternal nature upon a pregnant woman? Or does mind emerge from the purely physical actions of brain-cells as if an engineer could cause nature herself to produce semiconductors by her 'own' processes and for his own pleasure? Is maternal nature no more than genetically controlled rules or is it a set of behaviors and attitudes which develop as a pregnant woman responds to hormonal flows during pregnancy, then to childbirth, and then to the child put at her breast? Those who see God as outside of us and outside of His own Creation have to think in terms of imposed order, perhaps calling it 'intelligent design'. Those who see God as His own Act-of-being, Creator of all other acts-of-being, can see matters a bit differently. We and rattlesnakes and interstellar gas-clouds exist as objects of God's love, yet He doesn't love only from the outside. He loves us even as He first creates the stuff of Creation and then shapes it into the concrete stuff of our universe and then brings us into being from that stuff by telling our story. He loves us from deeper inside of us than we ourselves can reach.

# 249 Still More Evidence that We're Organisms in Einstein's Universe

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=262>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/10/24.]

This article, *Genomic Changes Found In Brains Of People Who Commit Suicide* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/10/081023100543.htm>, asks questions which I've been handling in my first book and my blogs for the past two years:

Are genes destiny? Alternatively, are we simply the products of our environment? There is a growing sense that neither of these two possibilities fully captures the essence of the risk for psychiatric disorders. New light is being shed on the complex interaction of genetic and environmental factors as the result of growth in the field of epigenetics.

We need to recognize importance of the soma which is shaped not only by genes and the later environment but also the environment in the womb and all that goes into the development of that human being, including sheer chance. I think we even need to start thinking of ourselves as being boundary phenomena of a sort. Crudely speaking: our innards, soma and genes, exist to create the movements which are our interaction with our environments.

This is one reason for my efforts to explore those powerful ways of looking at being which are found in modern physics and not yet in metaphysics

or theology. I'm thinking in this context of the geometric techniques developed first by Einstein to describe the very nature of that complex entity space-time as well as the various forms of energy embedded in that entity. Techniques that work well in describing physical being at a fundamental level, even work well in predicting behavior of that being, won't necessarily work so well with complex entities composed of that fundamental being. It's likely that even stars and galaxies have individual histories that can be fully expressed only by narrative techniques—if we could know enough about those histories. For all our differences, we human beings share our fundamental being with stars, our collective natures probably share some of the nature of galaxies. This isn't so different from our current assumptions except that modern biologists and social-scientists, even when not reductionists, think in terms of an earlier mechanical phase of man's efforts to understand physical and metaphysical physical being and space-time.

The more sophisticated models, such as various differential geometries, used by Einstein and his successors can—it seems to me – be used to describe our basic being. After all, we were born into and developed within that same universe which Einstein described so well. It seems unlikely to me that God created Aristotelian creatures within an Einsteinian universe. It also seems likely to me that a qualitative understanding of our basic being which uses the more sophisticated models of modern physics might well allow us to come up with good ways of speaking of our limited but real freedom to move about and to respond to our environments.

[More recently, I've come to believe that the advanced tools of mathematical physics, including differential geometry and tensor calculus, will be very useful in our efforts to understand complex narratives. Our understanding of the sorts of narratives we perceive directly uses language and concepts for movements, say, through our lives which isn't really Euclidean so much as a common-sense interpretation of our concrete experiences with movement and with our physical relationships with other entities and even those relationships between our various parts. We need to go beyond this and, as of April, 2011, no one—including me—has done much in this regard.]

## 250 Preliminary Thoughts on the Evolution of the Human Mind

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=399>. It was finished and uploaded on 2009/01/15.]

There's little or no reason to believe there is any 'mind-stuff', material or supernatural, unless you simply wish to dogmatically assert that matter isn't adequate as the foundation of our thoughts and feelings. Brain-scientists, geneticists, and evolutionary theorists are researching the workings of the human mind (and human nature more generally) and are producing remarkable descriptions of brain events underlying human thoughts. So far, all efforts to determine the nature of the most spiritual of experiences, such as after-death or out-of-body experiences, have tied those to specific brain events—those two cases seem to be caused by a disruption of the brain system which constructs our self-awareness. Self-awareness and the effects of a disruption of such are real, as are other soul-like or mind-like events. That they are real tells us that at least the potential for those aspects exists in a human being at conception but it doesn't say the aspects are actually present at conception. To use a simple analogy from the animal kingdom, a black Labrador retriever is born with certain playful traits that make him potentially a good water retriever but it takes a sustained and patient effort to actualize that potentiality.

The evidence is growing that mind is tied to the physical brain and not to any immaterial stuff, but the mind isn't strictly the brain, not even strictly the brain and any electromagnetic fields it might generate. The mind is formed when the physical human being responds to his environments or any greater world he acknowledges, even if he only dimly suspects the existence of some parts of that greater world. The mind involves re-

relationships and relationships are perhaps what we understand least about the physical universe which is our birthplace and our place of growth.

This is the point of Thomistic theories of the mind, which do a good job of providing the language and basic concepts for a narrative explanation of the mind and its development in the individual. Despite the confusion in some popularizations of so-called ‘theories of everything’ and perhaps even in some serious scientific discussions of such theories, human knowledge can’t penetrate to the very ground of what-is because that ground is a contingency brought into existence in a way that lies well beyond any sort of thinking we’re aware of. We can speak of the very basic idea of something coming into existence from nothing but there is no known way of imagining or even speaking ‘scientifically’ about such an event. We can speak of what-is, such as the mind-like aspects of a human being, but there is some elementary level, or perhaps an ever descending series of seemingly elementary levels, which we have to accept and use in our speech about and our understanding of what-is. The task before us is to gain the ability to speak intelligently about the mind, using the a language which preserves the phenomena while also allowing more fundamental explanations. In practical terms, this might involve multiple but reconcilable languages, but that’s a complication of no immediate importance.

And so, I return to the Thomistic proposal that the mind forms in response to the environments of the human being. For the record, St. Thomas Aquinas actually split up what we would now call the mind into mostly embodied components with abstract reasoning located in an immaterial soul which wasn’t quite human. By abstract reasoning, I mean such mental acts as the construction of classes, species, etc. from particular examples. Aquinas considered our more concrete mental acts, such as those of moral reasoning, to be embodied and to mature and be shaped in an organic way. I take his understanding of the mental operations of moral reasoning as the understanding he would have had of the entire human mind if he’d known about the nature of matter. Aquinas thought of matter as being inert as did all ancient and Medieval thinkers that I know of. That understandable mistake threw St. Thomas off and led him to the false conclusion that the brain couldn’t be flexible enough to engage in truly abstract reasoning, such as drawing the concept of the species ‘dog’ from particular examples such as dachshunds and great Danes. In passing, I’ll state an idea I’ve often used, implicitly and explicitly—our current opportunities for better understandings of even human nature are due to our better understandings

of the nature of matter-energy, of space-time, and of mathematics. Biological evolution is a very important secondary line of thought but we have to remember that life is a phenomenon within a particular universe with a specific nature and more than slight hints of a relationship to a greater realm of truth. That greater realm is not supernatural as such. Roughly speaking, it's the stuff from which this universe was shaped.

In my way of thought, there is no clear separation between a valid thought and reality. This is not to say that we have minds which magically correspond to reality. We don't carry a magical chain of keys which can open all locked doors. We make a key for a new locked door in a way that's often as ad-hoc as a burglar with a plastic card and some crude lock-picks and sometimes as elegant as the finest work done by a locksmith with a traveling van filled with the latest of modern tools.

Our brains aren't analogous to computer hardware nor are our minds analogous to software. If we use that sort of an analogy, our mind-brain complex is analogous to a computer network manned by various sorts of experts. The physical equipment for a given network is largely determined within the short-term, but the software can be adjusted even in the short-term and human expertise can be added or moved out, at least in the form of books or other materials for the staff to use. On the other hand, the system evolves over time, not only in its hardware and software but in a variety of ways in which it interacts with the outside world.

Organisms are born with the genetic capacity to become different particular entities. Some amphibians have double sets of genes, one of which is activated in the embryonic stage of development when temperatures are relatively low and another when temperatures are relatively high. The genetic code isn't dominant as some still believe, but rather a partner to the soma which is represented in embryos by the egg-cell contributed by the mother.

I'm claiming that there is no pre-existing and pre-formed mind, just as there is no pre-existing and pre-formed human person. In old-fashioned language, we're born as particular instantiations of human nature but that's far from a well-formed human being and not a person in any but a nominalistic sense. A particular human being is formed, well or otherwise, as he responds to what lies around him and a particular mind is an aspect of that particular human being formed as that being begins to form abstractions from the reality around him or from books or other compendiums of knowledge. Now, I'll remind myself and the reader that an organism is the

result of the evolution of the lines of his ancestral organisms since life began and his own development during his lifetime.

The evidence seems to be fairly solid that the human mind has evolved, as least the evidence is solid enough for a serious hypothesis. The ordinary assumption, implicit or explicit, in the writings of many scientists as well as nearly all historians and philosophers and theologians is that Euclid had a mind not so much different from that of Gauss while I'd been implicitly claiming that Gauss had shaped his mind to a world described by human knowledge which is far, far, far richer than the knowledge of Euclid's time. Gauss' mind was not just stuffed with better and more information than that of Euclid. Gauss' mind was shaped to a radically different body of knowledge from that available to Euclid and also radically different ways of gaining new knowledge. If Euclid's mind was analogous to the figures of plane geometry, Gauss' mind was analogous to the wider and more general 'figures' or algebraic formulations of differential geometry. Gauss' mind was shaped to deal with more abstract levels or deeper layers of Creation.

Long after biological evolution of species had been accepted, long after Waddington and Wolpert and other embryologists had taught us about the constraints and freedom of embryological development, many have spoken and written as if the human mind at the species level had been some sort of magical special creation, as if the human mind of Luke will be the same whether he sinks into alcoholism and life on the street or goes through Harvard Medical School. The mind of a human creature of 100,000 years ago is assumed to be just 16 years of modern education away from possibly taking on the shape of Einstein's mind as he graduated from ETH. The minds of Luke I and Luke II are typically assumed to differ only in the memories each contains including the second Luke's brain-surgery skills which are merely humanly remembered versions of textbook instructions.

No.

Our inherent mental capabilities are more in the nature of mind-building traits and not in the nature of a pre-formed mind. Our minds reflect the state of the underlying organism, not even just the brain, but also the relationships with Creation defined narrowly or widely.

If the human mind has evolved at the species level in a manner somewhat independently of the evolution of the brain, then we should see some signs of such patterns of development in history, but we should recognize the physical constraint: the mind would have to evolve after the formation of brain-structures which make possible abstract thought including the

ability to think of objects not present and the ability to make explicit plans for using those objects in gathering food or making shelters. Such brain-structures and the related abilities, in a rudimentary form, do occur in at least chimpanzees. Unless there was independent development of very complex structures, then the underlying brain-structures for abstract reasoning might well have first evolved more than five million years ago, though there is no evidence that chimpanzees have ever much used abstract reasoning unless cued to do so in specific ways. I believe there is now some evidence that creatures who were either ancestral to *homo sapiens* or offshoots of that ancestral line did use tools and maybe manufactured primitive tools perhaps more than a million years ago. Evidently, progress towards anti-personnel bombs and iPods was even slower than scientists once thought.

There are a variety of interesting problems to solve. If Western Civilization survives, there won't be any lack of employment opportunities for anthropologists and other scientists. I'll mention just one. We were taught by popular science writers that body structures which are expensive to maintain will tend to disappear if not used. If true, what in the world were those prefrontal regions of humanoid brains used for during those hundreds of thousands of years in which the mind was gestating, if I may speak with purpose-filled terseness?

I'm more interested in what seems to have been rapid development of abstract reasoning ability over the past 3,000 years or so. Perhaps this should be expanded back another few thousand years to the development of large-scale agricultural enterprises which logically would have required profound changes in the minds of those first settled farmers. It's not clear how the transition would have been made from the lives of their ancestors, lives spent in small family groups living nomadic lives over various natural landscapes. The development of the human mind as we know it seems more plausible once men began gathering in larger communities which would reward specialized skills and knowledge and would even demand planning for sanitation systems and for larger-scale food storage. Moreover, complex but somewhat regular patterns of activity would make for an easier pattern to start developing skills of abstraction.

Some scholars of philosophy and literature, such as Bruno Snell (*The Discovery of the Mind in Greek Philosophy and Literature* [128]) and R.B. Onians (*The Origins of European Thought About the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time, and Fate* [106]), have done some preliminary but serious work in understanding still later stages of the development of the

human mind at the group or species level. I'll be trying to understand these more recent developments (from the time of the pre-Socratics or so) in terms of my updated version of St. Thomas Aquinas' understanding of the development of the human mind. For now, I'd just like to propose a general set of stages in this development. The following isn't intended to be a piece of scholarship but rather a sketch at the preliminary stages of a study I might not have a chance to ever complete:

1. The practical mind developed early, well before cities or even permanent agricultural villages had formed. Weapons and tools were manufactured, pigments were invented for cave-paintings, and all that. At some point during the age of the gestation of the human mind, a sense of narrative and some unknown sort of spirituality also developed.
2. The speculative mind developed in a theological form among the Israelites and the founders of Hinduism circa 600BC.
3. The speculative mind developed in a philosophical form amongst the pre-Socratic Greeks, perhaps a little after 600BC. The early philosophers seemed to be engaging in natural philosophy of the sort which is also the early stages of a theoretical physicist's work if he's taking on fundamental problems. I can then propose the scientific empirical mind made its early appearance in the work of philosophers who seemed to be empirically oriented without having the tools or habits of empirical investigation. Perhaps for that reason, that scientific empirical mind made a fairly quick vanishing act—though several centuries later, Archimedes would make his appearance out of time. Then the scientific mind continued to arise only in isolated cases for a thousand years or so.
4. A more disciplined form of practical empirical knowledge appears with Roman political and military organization.
5. The speculative mind develops further in the Christian West and shows a willingness to let empirical knowledge constrain and shape speculations. We see the emergence even in the letters of St. Paul of an end to a Platonic split between really real reality and concrete reality. This is a very complex process of development which shows funny results in such intellectual events as St. Augustine's claim that animal

species can transmute into other species except for man who was a special creation. Unfortunately, human thinkers including those who profess Christianity have shown they're ever tempted to move back to a thoroughly inappropriate idealism and dualism.

St. Thomas Aquinas was very much an empirically oriented philosopher, though his Medieval writing style and his formal acceptance of the angel-infested chain-of-being teachings of Pseudo-Dionysius would lead naive readers to think otherwise. I was one of those. Under the guidance of Etienne Gilson and others, I came to realize (perhaps going further than they did) that angels and demons were formal entities in the writings of Aquinas, filling slots in some chain-of-being without having much to do with the world of men or with salvation history. On the other hand, Aquinas seems to have been quite serious when he said that metaphysics uses the specific sciences. Having claimed that things are true, he seems to have also realized that the truths in things are more particular versions of abstract truths. It's not generally so easy to go from particular truths to more general or abstract truths.

Aquinas lived near the end of the High Middle Ages which was a period in which mathematics was being rediscovered by Europeans, optics was being developed, and many other sciences, theoretical and practical, were being explored. It was a good sign that it didn't take a Newton or an Archimedes to develop the foundations of optics, but it should be considered odd that a founder of optics made an elementary mistake in measuring the angle of refraction for rainbows and no one caught the error. The first to publish became an authority and the need to check results from even the greatest of thinkers or experimenters wasn't yet acknowledged. Along similar lines, Albert the Great was one of the first of those who practiced empirical investigation as a science and yet even he was seemingly unaware of the need for disciplined experiments or even second-opinions on speculations when he theorized wildly on possible causes for the creation of new species. I don't remember all his exuberant proposals, but I do remember he thought a new species was created when a rose stalk was grafted onto the root-stock of another variety. The training-wheels were off and the apprentices were pedaling as fast as possible to compensate for lack of balance. I may well be in a similar situation. In any case, St. Albert seems not to have made the proper effort to understand such words as 'species' in empirical terms. Maybe that was the problem—he tried to

subject his thought to empirical constraints but the ‘chunks’ of his thought were themselves *a priori*.

With Galileo, we see the emergence of a more disciplined sort of scientific mind though one that doesn’t seem to appreciate the power of speculation in empirical investigations. Yet, he taught at least some European investigators a variety of lessons about designing experiments and building equipment and analyzing the results.

With Newton, we see the emergence of a mind which is truly multifaceted though a bit fragmented. Newton did theology at apparently a high level, and bible studies which at least tried to make allowance for quality of manuscripts and history of the texts and histories of the peoples involved. I might disagree with his Unitarianism but not with his understanding that human beings know even God through His effects on Creation. Newton showed his brilliance in practical empirical matters with his alchemical experiments (which overlapped true science) and his ability to manufacture and use instruments for his optical and other experiments. He showed his mental powers as a philosopher in the speculations that preceded his more formal work in gravity and dynamics. And he showed his powers in scientific empirical work by his mathematical explorations beginning in his teen years as well as that later physics work in gravity and dynamics. Newton’s importance in the history of human thought probably is underestimated, as strange as that statement may seem, just because of the strangeness of his theology from mainstream Christian viewpoints and also because few seem to appreciate that much of his scientific work (but not his development in his youth of the calculus and the theory of infinite series) began with philosophical speculation into the nature of space and time. In the end, his thought ran in several largely disconnected streams and, thus, he didn’t accomplish as much as Augustine and Aquinas in unifying seemingly disparate fields of thought.

In the Renaissance, we also see the beginning of a more disciplined approach to history and to texts, both historical and literary. This is a little amusing since the textual analyses of the Renaissance humanists began in hero-worship of the ancients and ended in confessions of their all-too human natures.

In the 1800s, we see some unique men, Keble and Newman and a handful of others, who were able to engage in still more honest history and textual analyses than the Renaissance humanists and yet kept their orthodox Christian faith.

With the great mathematicians and physicists of the 19th century and early 20th century, we see the emergence of more versatile minds in bulk, in a manner of speaking, though not even Einstein had a mind quite as versatile as that of Newton. We've perhaps seen the emergence of that general sort of mind in modern neuroscience.

The modern empirically based understanding of the universe points towards a Thomistic existentialism rather than a Platonic essentialism. I've explored this claim in a variety of entries on this blog and also, in a more preliminary form, in my first published book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41]. The sheer power of mathematics in understanding concrete being and the way that highly abstract mathematics emerges from modern scientific investigations point to the likelihood that being is unified rather than some sort of form, or abstraction, impressed upon inert substance. Abstraction is to be found and investigated by moving more deeply into concrete being, in a manner of speaking. Now we also know that space-time is itself contingent and part of the concrete being of this universe, opening up all sorts of investigations the meanings of which are probably beyond our current understanding.

Modern brain-science is moving towards the confirmation of the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas that the mind is shaped by the responses of the organism to its environments. Strictly speaking, Aquinas treated the abstract reasoning abilities of a human being as located in a soul-like object which wasn't really human but was more of an immaterial prosthetic device. I take his teaching that concrete reasoning (such as moral reasoning) is embodied in the organism and, like the organism as a whole, develops in response to its environments as what he would have taught about all forms of human reasoning if he'd been able to believe the brain is as highly plastic as we now know it to be. Perhaps the most important aspect of Aquinas' thought about human beings is his default assumption that we're organisms and develop in the way of organisms. An organism is a unity, however defectively so.

The general thrust of modern science indicates that there is a deep relationship between Creation and a well-formed human mind, though theoretical physicists have seen this more clearly than other thinkers, even brain-scientists. This relationship, almost a synchronization, occurs not because we are conceived with minds that operate according to some body of higher truths but rather because a well-formed mind—as I define it—is shaped to the surrounding reality, a reality which is the manifestation of the

truths God chose for our world, manifestations which point back towards the more 'raw' or abstract foundations of those truths.

While I'm emphasizing human progress as seen in the minds of philosophers and theologians and scientists, we should remember that there is a somewhat amazing general movement towards something that could be called a higher state in most general realms of human activity in most civilizations. Progress is for real though it's certainly not a given nor has it been consistent in all domains of human activity nor in all regions of the world.

# 251 Darwin, Einstein, and the Totemic Mind

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=421>. It was finished and uploaded on 2009/01/29.]

In the January, 2009 issue of the newsletter *Brain in the news* published by the *Dana Foundation*, (see <http://www.dana.org>), there's an interesting article, *In Search of the God Neuron*, by Steven Rose which reviews some recent books on the alleged problem of mind and brain.

It's true that the brain has evolved as part of an organism which is descended from organisms which survived, but what's most important about the mind-like aspects of a human being is that creature's totemic tendencies, its ability to put itself in the place of its prey or any external object it was seeking to understand. Undoubtedly, survival is necessary for this process to have gone on and to continue, but that hardly provides any sort of causal explanation or narrative description of what really happened when our ancestors implausibly, by the needs of survival, developed a mind capable of not only writing symphonies and painting masterpieces in oil, but also capable of inventing plumbing and exploring the properties of time and space and matter and energy. As neuroscientists try to deal with those aspects of the human being we call 'mind', they've failed to encounter the importance of the totemic nature of the human brain when it interacts in a creative and aggressive way with its environments, including the jungles of the hunting peoples of Central Africa and also the rather abstract environments to which Newton and Einstein responded.

In the totemic mind of ancient hunters of elk, we see the possibility of modern hunters of the secrets of God's Creation, hunters who carry out their quest in the acts of shaping their minds to embody the very actions

and traits of what they study. There is nothing mystical going on here, simply normal events in a universe which rewards with reproductive success those who are able and willing to reshape their minds to encapsulate their environments, to put themselves in the place of their prey for greater success in hunting, more recently to put themselves in the place of Nature in pagan terms or of the Creator in Christian terms. It's interesting that Einstein was an atheist more than not but one of his speculative strategies was to put himself in the place of the Old One. At other times, he'd ride a wave of light, putting himself in the place of a photon.

The ultimate in totemic thinking is to try to put yourself in the place of God as Creator, often seen as the father of the pagan gods or the Old One, a perhaps fictitious entity who has that good, old God's-eye view of matters. To try to transcend God's own actions as Creator is clearly beyond the capacity of a creature. Anything we might know about God in His absolute being, His transcendence, has to come by way of revelation and that's a tricky matter itself—even revelations have to be perceived by the physical organs of the human being.

God as Creator creates and what He creates seems quite subject to study, even the most abstract of His manifested truths. A Christian should even regard it to be his duty, or the duty of some in the body of Christians, to investigate God's Creation and to make sense of that Creation as the setting for the story of salvation.

The human brain with its totemic 'circuitry' has survival benefits and that totemism gives us a mind first understood by St. Thomas Aquinas as an entity which shapes itself by responses to its environment. I'm going further here than Aquinas or his interpreters over the centuries and apparently further than modern neuroscientists, but I'm confident that our best path forward is to speak of truths and knowledge as coming to us from the things, things which are true as Aquinas told us to the giggles of most metaphysicians. This is my response to my rather eclectic environment consisting of a variety of books as well as my practical experience and my contemplations about the formation of knowledge in my brain. I'm certainly not saying that our brains see truths or obtain valid knowledge perfectly. The messiness of biological evolution and the imperfection of organisms and their particular organs provides a pretty good explanation of the history of mankind, in its intellectual and other aspects.

It's important to realize that abstractions are part of being human, just as much a part of the trade of a plumber as that of a mathematical

physicist though the idea of pipes to move fresh water and sewage have become part of our cultural apparatus in a way that hasn't yet occurred with the idea that space and time are actually one spacetime which is well described by something called 'differential geometry'. We think that such an conceptual apparatus as that of general relativity is inherently difficult but the principles of hydraulic engineering which are now part of the thinking of any competent plumber took far longer to be developed and accepted. Galileo had one heck of a time convincing some engineers that water couldn't rise to an arbitrary height.

Higher levels of human intelligence involve the ability to creatively respond to one's environment. The Pascals and Einsteins, the Homers and Goethes, the Bossuets and Barzuns, move ahead of the rest of us, and so do those who tinker with better internal combustion engines in their garages. Whether it comes to understanding the physical world or the characteristics of human beings of a particular age or understanding the flow of events we call human history or understanding the movements of pistons, the answers—of any sort – come as a human being actively responds to the world and don't come from some sort of abstract realm **separate** from the world. Abstractions lie deep within concrete being and not alongside concrete being.

The human mind isn't to be adequately described or understood in terms of any worldview that separates the concrete and the abstract, whether idealistic or reductionistic. So far as I can see, the only worldviews capable of giving us a rich and plausible narrative of developing being and the developing human mind have to be based upon the Christian (Creator-centered) philosophy of methodical or moderate realism, which sees truths as coming to us as we respond to the parts of Creation we can perceive or plausibly imagine.

Things are true.

Truth is to be found in the things and relationships and processes of that world in which men strive to survive, that is, they strive to survive by responding properly to that world filled with truths, however obscured they are by textbook standards. Some can even respond to certain clues invisible to most of us, responses that are the lifework of a Newton or a Mozart, a Goethe or a Blake.

As I've said before, abstract truths represent a deeper level to being, the directly perceptible level being concrete being. Think of being as a plant with a rich network of unseen roots which not only reach deep into the earth but also are intertwined with the roots of other nearby plants which are intertwined with the roots of still other plants. Moreover, there is much earthly substance down below the reach of the most extensive root-system. The human mind has the unexpected ability to penetrate to the roots by first shaping itself to the entities and relationships and processes of the above-ground, or perceptible, world. Then we can even go to depths only implied by those plants and their roots.

To continue with the above metaphor, the usual explanations of aspects of reality not fully or even partially explained by what can be seen fall into two groups:

1. Reductionistic: Wave your hands and say the difficult-to-explain aspects are epiphenomenon or otherwise 'non-existent'. All that really exists is the plant-parts we can perceive or perhaps the top layers of soil which can be chemically analyzed.
2. Dualistic or idealistic: The difficult-to-explain aspects of the plants are explained by imperceptible components of the plants or invisible plants growing between the ones which can be perceived.

As I've written often before: the human mind isn't separate from created being in all its concrete and abstract levels. Understanding the human mind and proper nurturing of the mind isn't separate from the understanding of being, and the skills of working with that being, in all its concrete and abstract levels. The mind can't be understood as a container or processor which holds facts or truths which come from it. The mind has to be understood as being formed by active processes of response. To the extent we can speak of the mind as a container, its shape is determined by its contents. To the extent we can speak of the mind as a processor, its activities are an internalization of the interactions between the human organism and its environments.

# 252 Mathematical Physics and Moral Philosophy

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=436>. It was finished and uploaded on 2009/02/07.]

I'm still trying to sketch out better ways to view causation and the human moral situation, ways that recognize both Christian truths and modern empirical knowledge. The first step is to start a refounding of our understanding of our own human nature and of concrete being in general, a refounding based upon the richer understandings of being which have been developed in modern empirical science, especially theoretical physics and mathematics. Most language and concepts currently used to discuss causation and morality and human nature in general draw upon Aristotelian biology, Euclidean geometry, and a naive physics. Historical analysis, literary exegesis, moral philosophy, politics, and other important narrative-based sciences draw upon some understanding of being and currently that means that old and somewhat soured wine of ancient and Medieval science and metaphysics and mathematics.

There's at least one example of a pre-modern thinker, the poet Dante, having some intuition that something different might be needed to describe, for example, the path to salvation. At the very beginning of Dante's *Inferno*, the pilgrim keeps going straight while the path wanders away. The true path to salvation can move away from us while we move ahead paying attention to less important matters. I'll invite the reader to think of the path to moral integrity if he doesn't think in terms of salvation and then I'll point to a historical analogy oft-discussed by Hannah Arendt. The nice middle-class Germans of the 1930s and 1940s continued to act morally by the rules of earlier decades. That is, they worked hard, advanced in their careers,

paid their taxes and other bills, took care of their children, and so forth. To do this, they were processing papers for Jews and others being moved to Warsaw, making chemicals designed to kill human beings efficiently and quickly, manufacturing tanks and fighter-planes, and so forth. What's still worse is that many Christian leaders encouraged their followers to act in this way.

With our simplified view of being and our simplistic tools for analyzing narratives, we tend to draw straight lines and to assume straight paths. When those don't work for even qualitative descriptions, we wave our hands helplessly or perhaps we speak of the complications of reality and maybe of moral freedom. Those complications are real. Moral freedom is real. The problem is that we have no ways of speaking of the full complexity of modern human life in intelligent and literate ways. Philosophers and poets worthy of those titles should be able to give the citizens of the modern world ways to speak of reality and moral freedom.

In other words, we have a frightening lack of richness in most of our current political and social discourse relative to our situations. The philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre has been raising the claim for more than two decades that the lack of meaningful encounter in our public discussions about controversial issues (such as abortion or embryonic stem-cell research or male-female relationships) is due to our lack of a shared moral vocabulary. As I see matters, no major group in the modern world has a rich enough vocabulary to express our situation, not those who share my beliefs (I'm a morally conservative Catholic) nor any others. We default to behaviors and to narratives which assume environments far simpler than the ones we inhabit and relationships far simpler than those of our modern societies. For now, I'll claim without discussion that this has occurred just because new possibilities have arisen due to the enrichment of the human mind which has developed in response to God's Creation but this enrichment has occurred primarily in physics, mathematics, and related sciences. We have enriched our moral, social, and political environments but we don't understand those environments and have done no better than to try to deform traditional ideas developed when the human mind was developed to a lesser understanding of created being. Various thinkers have noted we've passed through an age when human technological accomplishments and scientific knowledge advanced even as our moral and political situation decayed. Those two human treasures, technological accomplishments and scientific knowledge, are linked and don't occur together as a matter of ac-

cident. Our technology advanced because our physics advanced and that was tied to richer understandings of being. The technological advancements allowed huge growths in population as well as huge increases in the specialization of human work and of the complexity of our societies and political entities.

Much of this analysis can be made simpler and more abstract. To understand man's place in the world and his relationships to his fellow-men requires a preliminary stage in which questions have to be formulated regarding the very nature of time, space, matter, empirical truth, abstractions, and other creatures involved in man's understanding of being. This is the sort of preliminary metaphysical analyses that Newton and Einstein performed before moving on to their detailed mathematical analyses. Those analyses produced understandings of time, space, etc. that haven't yet been dealt with adequately by philosophers and hardly dealt with at all by theologians, historians, poets, and men of practical affairs though so much of the preliminary work has been done by modern physicists and mathematicians, and it's those preliminary stages which are most difficult in such creative expansions of human understanding of being.

Let me take one example from the human condition where a more enriched view of being might help us understand our own age and perhaps the immediate future. Such understanding is necessary for intelligent and lasting solutions to our various problems. I'll be careful not to tie things together too tightly because cause, effect, accident, etc. are tricky issues in biological evolution.

The human species is unusual in its dimorphism by sex. Solid sociobiological analyses indicate rather strongly that this is due to the long gestation period and long period of helplessness on the part of the infant—still embryonic at birth. Chimpanzees are far more mature at birth and for months afterward. If rapid maturity were good in itself, we should give up civilized standards of education and apprenticeship and return to a life where boys and girls become working, reproducing members of society as soon as they pass puberty.

This slow maturing of the human child places a great cost upon the human female relative to the low cost of a single offspring to a female chimpanzee who pushes her young into adult lives after a few years. What does this mean in terms of social organization and in terms of moral relationships between male and female? I don't know. Look at the changes brought about just by changes in levels of poverty and prosperity. What sorts of invariant

aspects are there to human social possibilities or the possible relationships between individual men and women? What sorts of transformations occur when a poor society becomes wealthy and how can those transformations go wrong? The beginning point to applying a richer and truer understanding of created being in our efforts to understand ourselves has to be an understanding of the invariant aspects of fundamental human nature.

I think we were quite mindless and quite heedless of various dangers when we adopted our current ways of making a living. I suspect we don't have problems within basically good social systems but rather twisted social structures and deformed relationships between men and women. Some had tried early in the industrial industrial to experiment with different ways of organizing our lives and of making a living. When the industrial revolution was building up steam, a battle of sorts ensued between the advocates of the banking/investment system—which is currently collapsing—and others who were supporting a system of craftsman cooperatives financed by men less greedy than the Morgans or Rockefellers or Paulsons. See *From Cottage to Work Station: The Family's Search for Social Harmony in the Industrial Age* [17] by Allan C. Carlson for a short discussion of this struggle. Some Quaker investors were prominent in the effort to support that system of craftsmen coops.

The advocates of centralized finance, stock-markets, etc. won and one result was the devaluation of skills as depicted in the novel *Sybil or The Two Nations* by the British politician Benjamin Disraeli. Unskilled workers prospered and were drawn out of their rural homes and skilled workers sank into poverty. At first, the budding capitalists drew young men and young women into their factories but a backlash in Western countries led to increased wages for heads of households that allowed women to remain out of factories and offices with their children or the children of others if they had infertile marriages or chose to be 'spinster' teachers or nurses. Throughout most of history, Women had economic roles as important as those of men, though generally speaking female foraging was less prestigious than male hunting and farm-wifery less prestigious than farm-husbandry. Suddenly, middle-class women of the 1800s and forward had a strange role separated from the mainstream of the economy and the number of such women was increasing. The obvious—if not necessarily best—solution was for women to be freed from the home to join the men in the workplaces of modern industrial/financial capitalism. This was a solution to the liking of those industrialists who wanted a larger and cheaper workforce. Eventually,

the requirements of this strange form of liberation, that is—joining men in a certain sort of morally unstructured industrial army-life, led to the realization that the home could be invaded by corporations or government agencies offering services to replace those of mothers and grandmothers. The situation grew more desperate, or at least more boring, for most women remaining home.

Even in this summarized view, the situation is extremely complex and quite beyond description in terms of our acceptable language for moral, social, and political discourse. There are plenty of smart men and women of various viewpoints who have struggled to make sense of all of this, to try to determine the invariant or absolute aspects of human moral duties, to try to understand the processes by which modern industrial societies were deformed to their current shape. Some thinkers tried to understand the general nature of social transformations which could have led to better and more stable results.

The point I'm driving at is:

Human beings and their environments are shaped from concrete and abstract being well-described in important ways by modern physics and mathematics, yet, we try to describe ourselves and our societies in terms of words and concepts drawn from pre-modern and less satisfactory descriptions of being.

One rationale for defending the humanities and the social sciences against the intrusion of knowledge from the realms of modern physics and mathematics is that the aspects of being which lie in the realms of the humanities and the social sciences are complex in ways that make qualitative descriptions necessary and quantitative descriptions useful in specific cases (such as analyses that can help determine if a recently discovered manuscript is really Aristotle's lost work on comedy or whatever) but useless or even misleading in general. This is a complex idea summarized in a sentence hard to digest and it's a complex idea with which I largely agree, except for the underlying belief that mathematics and theoretical physics only deal with the quantitative.

Modern physics and mathematics have produced remarkably powerful tools for both the quantitative and qualitative analysis of being, of time and space and matter and of abstract truths. Refusing to even consider the use of these tools and these understandings of being puts many human thinkers

in the position of choosing the ancient and simpler understandings of being in its fundamental aspects and not adopting richer and more complex understandings with the absurd explanation that they're working in areas of complex levels of being. And the situation is still worse because those simpler understandings of created being are now known to be wrong. Aristotelian biology, Scholastic physics, and Euclidean geometry can't be used to provide correct descriptions of Created being as we now know it. Why would we think they provide good foundations for understanding of human nature or for literary explorations of that nature? Are we to understand ourselves in terms of a world different from the one we're born into and the one we inhabit? I would suggest that the great complexity and richness of human nature is built upon the complex being so powerfully described by modern physics and mathematics and those descriptions should be the starting point for constructing our various analogies and metaphors which we use for poetic or scientific or historical understandings of human nature.

## 253 Belly Over Brain

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=532>. It was finished and uploaded on 2009/06/23.]

Mind over matter. Willpower. Free-will. Those sound good when you wish to think of yourself as being in charge. The problem is that ‘yourself’ then becomes some entity which is an agent separate from the human organism and somehow in control over that organism. As I’ve argued repeatedly in my various writings, we shape ourselves by responding to created being as we encounter it. Once our encounters with created being were mostly at levels in which our apish ancestors had evolved. A man of the 21st century has a richer environment. He is in contact with far more human beings and is exposed to knowledge about outer space and also alien human cultures. A small businessman who keeps his own accounts is exercising skills which were at the level of a specialist scholar in the early Renaissance. A teenager who plays around with the statistics of his favorite athletes is showing skills unimaginable to the men who built the pyramids of Egypt. We have built somewhat powerful minds by proper responses to created being and by finding ways to build our knowledge and skill base up so that we can teach to children what would have been too difficult for any but the greatest thinkers of the Medieval world.

The higher regions of our brains inhabit, so to speak, more abstract regions, including the past and the future. The mind-like aspects of a human being contribute by understanding created being at abstract levels, allowing us to build powerful computers and to engineer the attributes of material almost down to the individual atom – nano-technology. We can form social relationships with those we never see and with whom we share only a dedication to Gaelic music or a set of professional credentials. Western Civilization is breaking down in some ways that are frightening

to me but it's also still growing more complex and is entering ever more complex relationships with other cultures and with the non-human parts of God's Creation.

In recent postings, I've been arguing that we need proper sorts of abstract thinking to meet our practical problems, but we need to understand what abstract thinking can do and what it can't do. The mind can be seen as a pilot of sorts, but the human body isn't just a plane. It flies by ingrained habit and responds to what's happening around it, before that mind is even made aware that there's a storm or a mountaintop ahead. Part of the task of a mind is to create a narrative explaining what has happened and those who think their minds or wills to be in control are often fooled into taking those narratives as memories of their planning or decision-making. Decisions are made too fast for the regions of our brain which control abstract reasoning and rational planning.

See the article *The Scientist and the Stairmaster* found at <http://nymag.com/news/sports/38001/> for a discussion of the mind's lack of direct control over our body's level of fatness. Will as you will, the belly is likely to win. The lesson isn't that it's useless to go on diets or to exercise, but rather that each human being has to work with his own bodily traits and his own environment. We don't have the sort of will which would allow us to pick up an instructional manual for a recorder and just tell our fingers to do what our mind wishes them to do as it reads the notes and the fingering, nor do we have any inborn knowledge or instincts to help us act properly in this civilization a bit different from the small-scale, foraging societies in which human beings first evolved. Obviously, many do learn how to play the recorder, by making plans, practicing in a disciplined manner, and persevering. How many learn how to act properly in this civilization? Not many. Perhaps even fewer than those who acquire good skills on the recorder.

It takes a bit of thought to analyze a complex situation and then lots of practice to execute any plans you've developed. As responsible citizens, we may decide to learn about Western Civilization so that we can figure out if we really are in a state of decay and then try to think of ways to improve the situation. Few of us have the will to just say, "I'm going to start reading Jacques Barzun's masterpiece *From Dawn to Decadence*"—published in 2000 when its author was 93. That history book, still more complex than *War and Peace* and perhaps longer as well, was the story of the decay of the West told largely in terms of the decay in literacy and—

by implication—abstract reasoning. Only those who have a high level of literary skills can read the narrative of the decay of literary skills in the West. Not many have such skills in the early part of the 21st century—that’s the point of the book. My own literary skills had decayed badly during the latter years of high school, college, and the ten or so years following. I worked hard to regain what skills I had and to raise them to a more appropriate level.

When we read a book such as *From Dawn to Decadence*—and use the references to find other worthwhile books, we discover there was a time when a well-educated man was supposed to be skilled in proof techniques of Euclidean geometry, but some of those men kept up with advancements in mathematics and physics and other difficult subjects on their own time. A man such as Jonathon Edwards, the Puritan theologian of the mid-18th century, was said by one historian of ideas to have had a profound understanding of Newtonian physics. On his own time, driven by interest or a sense of duty to keep up with important advancements in human thought, that Puritan divine studied Newton’s writings and other serious, difficult writings. This is comparable to a man of our times learning—on his own—the mathematical and physical aspects of Einstein’s general theory of relativity or quantum theory.

Developing your mind is no different from dieting or running a marathon. It takes sustained effort. Why would we wish to study demanding works of science or history or literature after escaping from the grind of school? Perhaps because a well-developed mind is itself a good, perhaps more of a good than the memories of 20 Sunday afternoons of watching football? I’m not saying that all should be spending their weekends and evenings reading intellectual works, but I am saying we need intellectual and moral and spiritual leaders who are willing to work hard reshaping their minds in active and openhearted response to Creation. Those not inclined to intellectual effort should actively respond to Creation in their proper ways, by playing music rather than always listening to recorded music, by joining the community theater rather than watching movies on television, by joining a religious community rather than watching services on television.

Once upon a time, even some public leaders read serious books or engaged in scientific work. Calvin Coolidge was very well educated and multilingual and was said to read classics in Latin or ancient Greek, as well as works in various modern languages, while he was in the White House. Benjamin Franklin was not only a wealthy, hardheaded businessman, but also

a highly regarded amateur scientist, not only conducting experiments in electromagnetism but also working on the conceptual or theoretical level in that field.

Why did modern man lose interest in developing his mind unless he was being paid to do so? Isn't Western Civilization still getting more complex in many ways? Doesn't empirical knowledge continue to pile up?

Without those active, self-driven responses which may take the form of studies or experimentation or perhaps the organization of a musical group, the mind is no more than a poorly organized brain. The belly, so to speak, will rule. This is to say that a man without a mind well-developed to his context will be something like an apeman with a noticeably well-developed prefrontal lobe allowing much more sophisticated planning than his cousin the chimpanzee, but he isn't going to be able to understand, for example, the relationship between the United States and China, let alone be able to evaluate possible ways of improving that relationship. He won't be able to understand the assaults on his liberty and the liberty of his children in the form of seemingly beneficial programs. One who did understand was the Austrian Franz Jaggerstatter, recently beatified by the Catholic Church and perhaps on his way to canonization as a saint. Jaggerstatter was beheaded for refusing to serve in the army of Nazi Germany, even in the medical corps. Earlier, he had withdrawn from the fraternal and charitable groups and activities in which he'd participated because he saw that the Nazis were using those groups and activities to forge the Austrians into a dependent and subservient herd of sorts.

Let's return to the belly. Did that belly somehow change during this age of diabetes and obesity? Did it suddenly develop a taste for more sugar? Or was that belly like the pilgrim of Dante's *Inferno*, a traveler who kept on going straight while the path changed? The path curved away. The belly continued to crave the rare opportunity to indulge in a hive of honey, only that opportunity isn't rare nowadays. A large jar of honey, as many cookies as you can carry, gallons and gallons of ice-cream, await you at your nearby supermarket.

Did that brain somehow change during this period when some human thinkers suddenly could speculate that time and space are particular manifestations of abstractions and that matter is frozen energy? Did it change during this period when understanding human moral nature became not a matter of understanding a static listing of virtues and vices but rather a matter of trying to grasp a mountain of facts about DNA and brain-cells and

billions of years of evolution, not to mention new reasoning skills dealing with frightening subjects such as chaos? Did our brains become suddenly dysfunctional so that they could not make good decisions as did the brains of the prior century or two of remarkable prosperity?

No. We human beings of, say, the 20th and 21st centuries are like that pilgrim in Dante's poem, continuing to interpret reality in terms of immediate impressions and models of created being which see concrete being as absolute and objective and abstractions as mere formalisms, though we and our modern cultures have been shaped so much by the abstractions of modern physics and mathematics, history of human thought and languages, literary exegesis, and engineering projects which are beyond the understanding of any one man. General relativity wasn't just a set of formal models which were resident in Einstein's mind; general relativity was manifest in Einstein's mind.

Let's return to the belly again. If you wish to gain some control over your weight in the modern world, you should come to an understanding of the strength of your will and the tendency of your body to make fat. You should also understand modern food technology, your body's handling of additives or different forms of sugar or fat, and the seductive layouts in certain aisles at the grocery store. You should step back and understand your own habits and schedule and the habits of those you live with or socialize with. This is possible only by way of abstract thought and a bit of work. The effort will be similar to that of writing a novel or an historical narrative.

But maybe there are still better reasons to come to an understanding of modern empirical knowledge, of your environments, and of your own mind. Maybe there are still better reasons to further develop your mind.



## 254 Are Some Men Born to be Free and Others. . .

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=704>. It was finished and uploaded on 2010/09/25.]

I wouldn't wish to complete the sentence in the title because I think the obvious completions are too pessimistic, yet, there is little room left to claim that human beings place a generally high value on freedom. Or that they can even recognize it.

It might be the case that a desire for freedom, the courage to accept freedom, and so forth are no different from other human traits—they lie on a spectrum. Just as some human beings seem nearly fearless in physical matters while others are very timid and most of us lie in between, so there are some nearly fearless when they face the great risks of freedom and some who shake in fear at the possible consequences of freedom or perhaps just at the uncertainty. Some may even be oblivious to the very possibility of freedom.

I'm starting to address moral and social and political issues within the context of my worldview. For now, I wish to make one specific point about difficult issues such as the possibility that many human beings aren't made for freedom:

The world is what God made it to be and not what it is in someone's speculative understanding of the world based, far too often on empirical knowledge now known to be wrong or—more likely—not rich enough to describe our universe.

When we overlook harsh realities of God's world, or turn away from them, we're not being 'idealistic', we're being dishonest and even disre-

spectful towards our Maker. We're making a claim that we know better than God. We're in a state of rebellion against God in His role as Creator of this world.

Historical evidence, and probably the weight of empirical evidence about human personality characteristics, tells us that few there are who can tolerate any substantial amount of freedom and many who seem to be in that camp lived in an era where they never had to make great sacrifices for freedom. This may be no more than support for the apparent claim of the New Testament that most men are sheep and few who pretend to be shepherds love freedom any more than those they pretend to guard and guide. Yet, if this is how we are to interpret Biblical claims, it merely emphasizes the great errors in our understanding of man and of the political, social, and moral aspects of his nature.

The more I try to make sense of human political and social and moral teachings, the more defects I can see. At the most fundamental level. That would indicate it's wrong to even speak of defects and closer to the truth to say that our beliefs in these areas aren't even wrong – they have nothing to do with reality.

And so I return to the need to reconsider our understanding of human desire for freedom and maybe even to reconsider our understanding of freedom itself. Given my belief that our minds are shaped by our responses to our environments, I'd have to conjecture that freedom is something you can't much enjoy, or at least fully enjoy, unless you have a coherent intellectual understanding of freedom set in the context of a coherent intellectual understanding of human nature. The pursuit of a poorly understood freedom will lead you to a state of deluded slavery. This doesn't mean that understanding of freedom has to be sophisticated or even defensible against the attack of philosophers. The simple farmers and tradesmen of Switzerland had a clear idea, if a bit simplistic, of the freedom they were defending against the Austrian occupiers of their country.

There's a need here for careful thought. Before we can produce better theories of man and the political and social and moral activities proper to him, we need to properly abstract from what has already been observed in history and what we can see around us. Just as Adam Smith taught us how primitive and apish man rose to the state of Scotsman, so the better thinkers of modern libertarianism have taught us that primitive and apish man was already a central European intellectual in embryo if only he can live in economic freedom and avoid fiat currencies. And, yet, there is much that's

true and useful in the teachings of Adam Smith as well as in the teachings of Ludwig von Mises, if also much in the way of human possibilities which is missing.

My claim remains: neither history nor my personal observations support any claim that more than a few human beings desire true freedom, though perhaps many wish to set their own schedule or to watch dirty movies. When the efforts of a small group of freedom lovers, such as those culminating in the American Revolution, have granted freedom to many around them, that freedom is sold within a frighteningly short time for promises of security. The Founding Fathers were barely turning to dust when Hawthorne wrote of his experiences as a customs agent and how it made him feel unmanned and he noted that most Americans seemed willing to be unmanned in return for mere promises of financial security. (See the introduction to the first edition of *The Scarlett Letter*.) The situation only got worse from that time, especially when power-hungry men could get the American herd stampeding in unison with tales of an enemy who had to be destroyed, of evil that threatened the purity which was the American way of life.

God is merciful and, in any case, He seems to have told us through His prophets and His Son that most men are sheep in need of good shepherds at least during their mortal existence. Yet, in all honesty, I have to wonder how someone who has little desire for freedom, perhaps little aptitude for it, can enjoy a life shared with God, a life in which, I would conjecture, we'll share the true freedom of the Almighty. Perhaps sheep can grow to be like their Shepherd? Perhaps they can even learn to understand and desire freedom in this mortal realm? To be sure, we are yet in the early stages of the growth of the mortal entity, the Body of Christ, which will reach its true and mature form only in the world of the resurrected.

I'm thinking it might be best when describing our current situation to adopt the pessimism that John Adams brought to bear in his political thought. When we look to the future, we should perhaps consider the optimism that Thomas Jefferson exercised towards human potential.

Interesting questions are like good books, so many and so little time.



## 255 When Do We Become Persons?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=707>. It was finished and uploaded on 2010/09/28.]

In a newsletter, (Letter #50, 2010/09/24, see the website for *Inside the Vatican* magazine at <http://insidethevatican.com>), Dr. Robert Moynihan, a journalist covering the ‘Vatican beat’, discusses a recent meeting in Vienna of high-level church officials from the Catholic and Orthodox churches. At least some of those officials are also theologians. It would seem good that there are serious movements towards unity of the the oldest churches in Christianity, but I’m most interested for now in Dr. Moynihan’s summary of the thoughts of a Greek Orthodox theologian regarding the nature of the human ‘person’. In the thought of Metropolitan John Zizioulas, human beings are not born as “creatures capable of sharing the life of God”—the only meaningful definition of ‘person’ for Christians. Like me, he thinks a human being (human biological hypostasis in his more traditional metaphysical language) becomes truly a ‘person’ when he has entered a certain relationship with God that will lead to a sharing of the life of the Holy Trinity. Actually, I would reserve the term ‘person’ for those who have matured in their relationship with God and that can only happen in the world of the resurrected. This is the relevant section from the newsletter:

The Ultimate Victory

The Christian message offers an entirely new type of existence to men and women.

Preserving and defending the Church is to preserve and defend the vehicle, the means, of this message.

The theology of one of the participants at the Vienna meeting, Metropolitan John Zizioulas, has expressed this in a striking and powerful way.

Zizioulas, who studied under the Russian Orthodox theologian Georges Florovsky, received his doctorate in 1965 from the University of Athens and has taught theology at the University of Edinburgh and then the University of Glasgow, Scotland.

Zizioulas has argued that full humanity is achieved only as “person” so that one may participate (*koinonia*) in the personal Trinitarian life of God — participate in the life of the divinity.

He argues that man initially exists as a biological hypostasis (person), constrained as to the types of relationships such a being can have (biological) and doomed to the eventual end of this type of being — death.

He argues that Baptism constitutes an ontological change in the human, creating an ecclesial hypostasis, or person.

This rebirth “from above” gives new ontological freedom as it is not constrained by the limits of biological existence.

Such an ecclesial being is eschatological, meaning it lives in a paradoxical “now,” but “not yet.”

The completion of this rebirth from above is the day of resurrection when the body will no longer be subject to death.

Metropolitan Zizioulas speaks in more traditional theological terms than I do—a mistake since this way of speaking tends to freeze current views into a schema while Thomistic ideas applied to modern views of a dynamic and developing world will leave, for example, our views of how a human being becomes suited to share God’s life, as itself a developing set of ideas. This dynamism isn’t something and human thought which follows it is something else. As I’ve noted elsewhere, the mind of a human being is shaped in response to his environments, ultimately to the thoughts God has manifested in His Creation. It’s not a process of a human mind trying to shape itself to a static world but rather a process of a human mind shaping itself to a world which is itself dynamic, a story and not a defective reflection of some sort of static realm of truths. The human mind is dynamic because Creation is dynamic. I’ll pursue this line of criticism in my next article, but, for now, I just wish to express agreement with the general thrust of the ideas stated by Dr. Moynihan and attributed to Metropolitan Zizioulas.

I have to believe that such a theory of human nature, even when stated in terms of a traditional Hellenistic metaphysics, had to have been motivated at least partly by both observations and modern scientific knowledge. We can watch a parent, or even a child, deteriorate in many of their human characteristics as some sort of brain disease or injury takes its toll. We can watch video shows about our apish ancestors. We can watch other shows, or read serious or pop books, about all the supposedly unique human characteristics which show up, if only in a primitive form, in chimps or gibbons or wolves or even humble and monstrous octopuses.

Reality rules. After all, reality is what God made it to be and He's powerful enough to force us to see things His way, the way He chose when He first brought this particular Creation into existence. He moves slowly but I suspect He's not happy with all the human beings who prefer to impose their own desired ideas upon the world around them—He may be downright angry with Christians who do this. But there's been some progress. Often reluctantly, Christians have bowed – slightly—to God's reality and have admitted that man is a natural creature descended from apish creatures who were also the ancestors of chimpanzees, but our intellectual and spiritual leaders have pulled off the trick of endorsing evolutionary theory while continuing to preach and teach as if the first man was a special creation from the mud of Eden. Monday through Saturday afternoon, man rose from an apish state to a creature with a higher but quite defective moral nature. And some of those *National Geographic* documentaries are quite interesting, especially the ones which present the well-supported theory that the last common male ancestor of all human beings lived about 75,000 years ago while the last common female ancestor lived about 150,000 years ago. Not to worry. . . Saturday evening (in the Catholic Church) through Sunday, man fell from a god-like state when the first human couple rebelled against God. If we could identify such first human beings, if they had lived within even a thousand years of each other, we would find ourselves putting a lot of moral responsibility upon creatures whose parents were apes.

We need to work honestly and courageously with empirical knowledge of the human species and to explore the implications of the insight that man is born an animal and remains such until the grave. I would support Metropolitan Zizioulas in his movement towards a sane view of man and his relationship to Creation and Creator, but he has only moved partway. We need to realize man is an empirical creature and not one whose nature is to be built up from metaphysical principles. We need the courage to

accept the near certainty that mortal man is truly mortal, not possessing a soul of immaterial substance and only God-like in potential. We need to ask: “What sorts of events, or single event, can realize that potential?” I think Zizioulas is right to emphasize baptism’s central role in forming man’s proper relationship to his maker but wrong to speak of ontological changes, as if man the ape becomes man the angelic creature at some identifiable point in space-time, but I have to admit I’ve only begun to think about the proper ways of discussing the Sacraments in my worldview. And I’ve not yet published a word on the topic.

## 256 Evolutionary Thomists Don't Do Ontology

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=713>. It was finished and uploaded on 2010/10/09.]

In the previous chapter, Chapter 255, *When Do We Become Persons?*, I quoted a summary of a view of man developed by the theologian Metropolitan John Zizioulas of the Greek Orthodox Church. I see much good in that view as stated in the summary and didn't go into a detailed critique, only mentioning that the chosen framework of "mainstream Platonism will always try to freeze current views into a 'system' while Thomistic ideas applied to modern views of a dynamic and developing world will leave, for example, our views of how a human being becomes suited to share God's life, as itself a developing set of ideas." I'll make a somewhat more specific comment on the issue of ontology.

First an often quoted but mostly ignored principle of Catholic thought:

Grace doesn't replace or destroy nature; it completes and perfects nature.

This principle argues against an ontological transformation which can be pinpointed in space-time. I'll also note this rule is a result of contemplation on the nature of this world shaped by God from the raw stuff of all Creation. It's not a necessary truth and could—in principle—be overridden by God.

As I understand that principle, it argues there's only two true ontological categories: necessary being (God) and contingent being (Creation and its creatures). Contingent being of the most mundane and ordinary sort can be completed by grace into images of the Creator. God can make for Himself children of Abraham from the stones in a field just because a

child of Abraham isn't a substantial creature in the sense of mainstream philosophy but rather an object of God's attention, a product of a certain relationship God has decided to form. Put this way, my claim becomes quite consistent with a fairly radical understanding of matter as described by quantum mechanics—see Chapter 74, *Rules or Context?*. The principle describing the relationship between grace and nature is ancient, but modern empirical knowledge would tighten that principle to agree with our best understanding of this world, this story being told by God. God has chosen to work in this Creation by way of evolution and development and not by way of changes which occur at a point of spacetime. Grace completes and perfects nature by processes which proceed in this world by paths described by modern physicists and evolutionary biologists.

Let me give the first definition of 'ontology' from the 1913 edition of *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*:

**ontology** 1. That department of the science of metaphysics which investigates and explains the nature and essential properties and relations of all beings, as such, or the principles and causes of being. [140]

Thomists don't do epistemology because they know the mind is formed by response to the world and epistemology as a philosophical enterprise pretends to judge the world's presentation of itself to our senses. If our senses are less than perfect, that leaves work for neurobiologists and physiologists and psychologists and novelists and painters and others. It's irrational, and impious to this Christian, to judge the source of our knowledge, that which shapes our mind, from a standpoint outside of that comedy of presentation and response. It's an impossible and absurd enterprise.

Why would I also claim we shouldn't engage in ontological analyses? Actually, my better claim would be that we engage in a form of evolutionary ontology instead of hierarchical or categorical ontology. The only being we can directly observe and study, the starting point for our understanding of even the most abstract being, evolves and develops. It's shaped and worked into the form of landscapes and characters for narratives. It doesn't come to us as Man or Tree or even Matter. Nor as earth and sky and fire and water.

Being exists but not in the form of predefined substances—though obviously God knew what substances He would shape when He first created from nothing, that is, when He first manifested the basic truths which are

the foundations of this world and the rest of Creation. The being of this Creation exists in that primordial form and also as objects and landscapes along evolutionary and developmental paths leading out from that primordial being.

So let me return to the thoughts of Metropolitan John Zizioulas which do recognize the obvious constraints upon the nature of mortal man – neither mortal man nor any part of him can be immortal in himself but God may have a trick or two up His sleeve. Let's see how we can maybe reconcile Christian faith in the resurrection with modern understandings of empirical being as evolutionary and developmental.

In Chapter 255, *When Do We Become Persons?*, I quoted a summary of the views of Metropolitan John Zizioulas, including the following statement:

He argues that Baptism constitutes an ontological change in the human, creating an ecclesial hypostasis, or person.

I have to admit to a major gap in my work to date as a Christian thinker—I've not yet written of the Sacraments, but, intuitively, there is a clear path to follow towards a theology of the Eucharist, the Real Presence, because the concrete world is shaped from the primary abstractions, the manifestations of the thoughts God chose for this Creation. We might think of those manifested thoughts as being God's acts through His Word in the sense of the opening verses of the *Gospel of St. John*. Those manifested thoughts, God acting through the Christ, remain yet in the most concrete of things because they are the basic stuff of those things. Wheat provides the building blocks of human flesh, wine of human blood, because they are particular forms of concrete being shaped from some thoughts of God which correspond to the flesh of the Christ and the blood of Christ. Christ is present in that bread and that wine even before the consecration which occurs during the Eucharistic Rite. So the problem is to find a way of speaking as Christ being still more fully present after the consecration.

The solution, which may be complex, will involve a deeper understanding of God's acts of shaping thing-like being from more abstract stuff and of God's acts of shaping living creatures from more basic thing-like being. That shaping of living creatures has produced a human creature with a brain which can encapsulate other forms of being. And the story becomes more complex. I'll not give that story here, though I've written of different pieces and aspects of the story in which the Son of God enters the world

created through Him and calls men to join Him in His divine life. See Chapter 251, *Darwin, Einstein, and the Totemic Mind* for a discussion from an empirical view of an important aspect of this sacramental process of man becoming God.

It's not quite so clear to me how I should deal with baptism but an ontological change as such doesn't make sense in my worldview because there are no well-defined ontological categories to come from or go into. But "ontological change" would work if it were defined in terms of a change of direction in the path of development. Yet, more is involved because the entire Body of Christ is involved when a new member enters. I'll speak of another related problem after summarizing my evolutionary and developmental view of ontology:

Forms of being are the results of God shaping the truths He manifested as the basic stuff of this particular Creation. There is much value in thinking of those shaping processes as being two – evolutionary processes, such the evolution of the human race over an immense period, and developmental processes, such as the development of a specific man over his lifetime.

There is another sentence which bothers me in the summary of Metropolitan John Zizioulas' thoughts which I quoted in Chapter 255, *When Do We Become Persons?*.

The completion of this rebirth from above is the day of resurrection when the body will no longer be subject to death.

If God works by way of acts-of-being, bringing into existence, shaping, and sustaining, we should not be talking about "rebirth from above" as if God were a Zeus sitting on a throne on Mount Olympus and watching His world from a distance. The Thomistic view of God as the source of acts-of-being, including His own Act-of-being, the supreme Act-of-being, makes better sense of this world as a part of the work of a personal Creator than does the older, Hellenistic views of God. In saying this, I speak of the world as being a moral understanding of what might be called Einstein's universe, our physical world in light of the best of modern scientific knowledge and theories. But what I call Einstein's universe is a specific set of thoughts and acts of the Creator. He is here working now and doesn't work from above, saving us by waves of a magician's wand.

Man can become the image of God not because of a change at an instant which converts his being to a different being but rather because of a turn onto a path created by God and seen—for now in this mortal realm—in the evolutionary paths leading from single-cell creatures to fish to reptiles to rat-like mammals and so forth and also the various developmental paths which an individual human being can follow – if the environments of that human are proper.

These various processes of evolution and development are acts-of-being best viewed as God’s acts of shaping all or part of His Creation, working in His self-limited role as Creator of this particular Creation, we might even say, “peculiar Creation.”

Many say: “There is no conflict between scientific knowledge and Christian beliefs,” but we can’t just wave our hands and say, “Trust me on this,” to our children, to our friends with wavering faith, to those we’re supposed to be bringing to Christ, or—least of all – to those who think modern empirical knowledge gives them definitive proof that God doesn’t exist or maybe that He’s a distant and uninvolved God. Metropolitan Zizioulas has taken a major step in a better direction by describing man’s path toward salvation as one appropriate to the mortal creature that man seems to be in light of a lot of solid evidence. I think this can be better done in terms of a Thomistic existentialism updated to consider modern empirical knowledge, especially the realization from quantum mechanics that relationships seem to be primary and ‘stuff’ secondary. In Christian terms, I am an object of a particular love of God rather than being some sort of essential entity describable in traditional ontological terms. Such thoughts can be the foundation of a Christian theology of the Sacraments which properly considers modern empirical knowledge as the Scholastic or Cappadocian theologies properly considered the best understanding of God’s Creation in earlier ages.



# 257 Developing Virtues the Thomistic Way

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=736>. It was finished and uploaded on 2010/11/17.]

You're a moral creature when you live by moral principles, many of them turned into habitual behaviors or at least behaviors you sometimes exhibit and always admire. To be a moral creature, you have to look outside of yourself to God's Creation in light of your best take on objective moral truths which are embedded in that Creation. In terms of modern knowledge about human beings:

1. We have certain racial attributes which can be nurtured into virtues or vices and these attributes, such as recklessness or sexual hunger or an inclination to save energy, are distributed differently amongst members of the human race. These attributes can develop into courage or mindless seeking of thrills, love of spouse or lust, prudence in use of personal resources or a slothful withdrawal from active responses to your environments.

These attributes were those which allowed our ancestors to survive and to reproduce successfully over the eons and we can imagine that sometimes the development of these attributes into vices provided at least a short-term advantage over more virtuous human beings. It still happens, but human beings selected for life in complex societies will have at least some greater propensity to develop human virtues as commonly understood.

2. As individuals, we are born with particular sets of those racial attributes, some of us being more reckless and some having greater sex-

ual hungers and some being inclined to lower levels of activity when possible. We can develop these attributes in the direction of virtue or vice.

Let me discuss the fundamental virtue of courage with a particular concern for moral courage which will have elements of a courage in the face of physical suffering but also elements of a courage in the face of social ostracism. Those two forms of courage aren't always found in the same human being.

It's simple, though not often easy, to develop moral courage. You set out to follow the moral principles you believe in and don't give yourself any room to weasel out of your commitments. But Thomistic principles tell us that human beings are organisms and that human moral nature develops in an organic manner. We can't simply will to be morally courageous and—presto—a magical transformation has taken place.

Step by step. Daydream tough situations if you will. They say some athletes improve their response times in certain situations by having already imagined them in preparation for a competitive event.

In addition to imagining yourself in tough situations, you can also imagine yourself as being what you aim to be, a God-centered man or woman who behaves first according to Christian moral principles and then accepts the consequences good or bad.

Most of all, simply decide that you'll do what you deem right and worry about the consequences afterward. Brainwash yourself into being a morally courageous human being, one who just does what is right because you don't consider doing what is wrong and you don't consider being passive in the face of evil. Some of the biographers of George Washington claim he did exactly this when it came to the "public honor" components of his moral character—he trained himself from his late teens to act according to the model of an idealized portrayal of Cato, the man who fought against Caesar to defend the republican form of Roman government. Like Cincinnatus, another ancient Roman, Washington proved capable of holding the reins of great, almost absolute, power and then ceding that power when it was appropriate. Having developed his moral character without the direct guidance of a more mature man from his teen years, George Washington—though far from morally perfect—gives us a good example of an individual developing a particular subset of virtues the Thomistic way, moving step-by-step with the ultimate goal kept in mind but attention devoted mostly

to the next step, the next round of public duties in the case of George Washington.



## 258 The Invasion of Brain-eating Words and Concepts

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=782>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/03/10.]

John Hawks, prominent anthropologist and leader of the Neandertal Anti-defamation League, made some interesting comments in reviewing the article *Language processing in the occipital cortex of congenitally blind adults*, published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (Early online)* by Marina Bedny, et al. See *John Hawks Weblog* at <http://johnhawks.net/weblog/> for his review, *Language bootstrapping the brain*.

Professor Hawks notes that “language itself is surprisingly voracious in its ability to consume brain resources and redirect development.” If language can grab even those regions, we know for sure that the human brain is quite plastic, at least at certain stages of development. After all, as I first learned from a book concentrating on color vision: *A Vision of the Brain* [155] by the prominent brain-scientist Semir Zeki, the visual cortex is one of the most highly specialized of the ‘higher’ brain regions.

In his article, *Language bootstrapping the brain*, Professor Hawks summarizes the results of an experiment at MIT in the late 1990s in which the scientists operated on the brains of ferrets and connected the nerves from the retinas to the auditory regions. The ferrets, surprisingly enough, could see and their auditory regions became organized in the way of the typical ferret’s visual cortex.

At the time, Michael Merzenich, a leading plasticity researcher at UCSF, called this experiment “The most compelling

demonstration you could have that experience shapes the brain.”  
Our mental hardware wasn’t hard at all.

Hawks engages in "informed speculation," including:

Language has sharp elbows. It muscles its way into the brain, crowding out other neural functions. Language has the most powerful weapons at hand—a baby’s first word prompts an entire language community to pull the dopamine and serotonin levers of emotion and attention.

A function that was strongly specified by genetics, patterned early in brain development, would not plant itself in spare neurons like a weed in a vacant lot. Only a system that bootstraps itself upon experiencing language inputs could have such plasticity. The structure of the language environment fosters the development of the classic language areas, biased to appear in those particular places by prenatal developmental trajectories, but not built according to a genetic blueprint.

The blind subjects tell us that the ground for language processing is almost as fertile elsewhere in the cortex. Many brain areas have the genetic equipment to recruit and organize neurons into useful circuits for language processing. Language development is developmentally robust because it can rely on a rich language environment, not because of genetic standardization. The basic problems of language evolution must be explained by showing how robust language communities emerged. I don’t preclude genetics, far from it—weaker language environments may have become stronger because of evolutionary change. But that evolution must have been substantially domain-general, because language processing is not specifically canalized by genetics.

Quite a reasonable speculation. A baby is born into a community of shared knowledge, knowledge not only of ‘intellectual’ matters but also of physical skills and emotions appropriate to the community’s life and so much more. There is clearly genetic predisposition to learning language but language must be learned and must be learned in a community of language-using human beings. I suspect that the same would be true of the related and additional skills of literacy proper, the use of written languages and

the ways in which our abstract reasoning abilities can be both unleashed and focused. We might conjecture that literacy is also a bootstrapping operation and it takes generations to develop higher levels of literacy. Once lost, it will take a number of generations to regain the levels of literacy which are necessary to modern science as well as other parts of Western Civilization.

Yet, there might be built-in predispositions which can over-power even the use of language. By at least the 1960s, Richard Gregory, British brain-scientist, was warning (with television and the movies in mind) that the visual systems in humans are so important over the long-term in gathering food and finding reproductive opportunities that they will awaken at strong stimuli and grab resources so that other regions of the brain, especially those of higher thought, will be shut down while the new stimuli is evaluated. Television and movies are a potential danger to proper development and use of our minds, but the modern tendency to place colorful, glossy pictures even in mathematics textbooks would seem to be a gratuitous way to damage minds or at least to make minds flabby.

Our minds grow in the context of particular communities. Not that mind or what it does is inherently 'subjective' or 'relative'. Those peoples who are developing civilizations, that is—higher minds, are moving across the same objectively existing plain, though not all are bound to start the journey nor to move in reasonable directions at all times. We can say each human tradition will have its own treasures of books or music or art or factories or farms or stores of blood-drenched weapons or many of these which it can pass on along with knowledge of how it used those treasures, in ways morally well-ordered or ill-ordered. As John Henry Newman told us, our words mediate and store and—far too often—deform our beliefs, even those which refer to the greatest truths. When we try to stubbornly hold on to words and concepts from an earlier time, when those words and concepts are no longer appropriate, we deform even the greatest truths by forcing them into old wineskins. For the greatest truths always show up as new wine, not matter how ancient their first appearance in human thought.

A living tradition will adjust to new knowledge of the world when appropriate, forming new words or redefining old words and injecting new concepts into the thinking processes of its adherents, including those who adhere in less conscious or less aware ways. If a tradition isn't truly alive, its language and concepts will still invade the minds in formation within its domain, rigidifying rather than imparting life. If a tradition is in forma-

tion, its language and concepts will be ill-formed and fluid, allowing great freedom to creative thinkers and artists and doers of all sorts but leaving many minds in a barbaric state, that is, a state of confusion and disorder. A society in such a barbaric state may well destroy those creative thinkers and doers. It may well destroy itself, even if it's embedded in a great tradition of civilization.

For some comments by Professor Hawks on the relationship between language and concepts, see his essay, *Number as cognitive technology*, at <http://johnhawks.net/weblog/>. Professor Hawks proposes that numbers are technology, an invention of an important sort, a use of a pre-existing but simple concept of number, rather than being a new concept which develops in the human mind as human knowledge grew. I have a problem with this only because my view of the mind leaves me with great difficulty in distinguishing between technology and concepts or—more generally—between our understanding/use of the world and our minds. After all, I've taken the Thomistic claim, "Things are true," and expanded it to, "Truths are thing-like."

What does this all mean? In Chapter 250, *Preliminary Thoughts on the Evolution of the Human Mind*, I talk about multiple levels of development of the mind. The human brain evolved on the species level and then mind develops over various levels of scale on the cultural and individual level. We shouldn't really think these levels are fully separable. They don't overlap so much as they interact and interpenetrate each other but that's a very complicated and complex issue and beyond the scope of this short essay.

We can make greater sense of human nature and how it came and comes into being by letting ourselves be guided by the views of St. Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century. So many years ago, he observed that human beings are organisms, developing in ways appropriate to organisms—by way of active response to their environments. The brain-scientist and philosopher Walter J. Freeman has even claimed that Aquinas, out of all major thinkers, provides the best general guidance for modern brain science. I would suggest that even Darwin's thoughts would have been not different but more coherent and richer if he'd been a Thomistic thinker. See Chapter 83, *Is Christian Morality a Natural Morality?* and some of the following chapters for my review of and responses to Professor Freeman's book, *How Brains Make Up Their Minds* [35].

## 259 The Resurrected Will Need to Be Flooded With Oxytocin and Vasopresin

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=795>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/04/04.]

The brain-scientist and philosopher Patricia Churchland is giving some lectures on a specific and partial answer to the question: What can neuroscience tell us about morality? A short news article about these lectures can be found at <http://danapress.typepad.com/weblog/2011/03/what-neuroscience-can-tell-us-about-morality.html>.

Her main point according to the article is hardly a surprise to those who've been keeping up at all with developments in the brain sciences. Oxytocin, which I've seen referred to as the 'maternal hormone', and vasopresin increase sociability and apparently do this by decreasing fear levels and increasing trust levels. This reminds me of something I read in a book about human personality, perhaps in one of Jerome Kagan's books. Research psychologists tune up tests which look for links between brain-states and hormone levels by using dogs from certain breeds. There is a certain scale where dogs, not surprisingly, used as guards—such as German Shepherds—are the most fearful especially about things or living creatures which enter their 'personal space' to speak roughly. Fear leads to aggressiveness, at least in animals with the physical capabilities of effective attack. At the other end of the scale, they use hunting dogs, especially retrievers which have been bred to be fearless and highly sociable. Retrievers have been bred to be fearless so that they'll go charging into brush or jump into waters they don't know. They've been bred to be sociable for a variety of

reasons including the fact that hunting expeditions often involve sharing a blind or quarters with dogs and human beings they've not met or not seen for a year. It might well be that the same physical state, genetic or otherwise, creates the fearlessness and the sociability.

The point about this use of breeds of dogs to tune up those studies is that a Golden Retriever is full of so much of some happy-juice or fearlessness-juice that he often acts as if stupid—though a member of one of the very smartest of breeds. A Golden I once owned would repeatedly go right up to dogs which had attacked him and try to make friends and he could repulse the other dog only because he was so big and strong for a Golden. It seemed to take about ten attacks or so before he'd counter-attack. On the other hand, dogs from one of the 'guard' breeds could turn out to be nasty towards most creatures even when raised as pets in loving families. I don't believe genes are the only key to this because it apparently takes only about seven generations of deliberate selection to produce a pet-like family line from wild canines of various sorts. How many more to produce a Golden Retriever or other peaceful and fearless line? I don't know but they only started breeding retrievers as helpers in 'gun' hunting about the middle of the 19th century and it didn't take long in evolutionary terms. There's more going on here, maybe the mother's body activating particular possibilities in the puppies and maybe other factors not yet discovered. Yet, those other factors could be labeled as 'somatic', transmissible at least for some number of generations. That's still flesh-and-blood.

It's no different with human beings. Our race has many behavioral tendencies, some of which will contribute to peacefulness and others to aggression and still others to mostly unrelated character traits. Not all of these tendencies are found in all family lines to the same extent—a very complex issue. I know families where the members are generally much more pleasant and gentle than most human beings. I also know families whose members tend to be aggressive, sometimes to good and moral purposes and sometimes just to satisfy their own desires.

Sons do tend to be like their fathers, though I've read of dog-breeders claiming they tend even more strongly to be like their maternal grand-sires.

A fascinating line of research and, for now, we can only wonder if we have even identified many of the important questions or if we're set to be as surprised as Darwin himself was by the rapid emergence of those complex behaviors in hunting dogs which we could call gun instincts, that is, the tendency of even my pet Golden to move forward and start a weaving,

searching movement when he heard guns fired nearby. He was afraid of some loud sounds, but he would show no fear when honor guards fired during parades or various ceremonies. That wasn't because of any experiences with me—I don't hunt and I've fired guns a few times in my life and only at firing ranges.

A sociable and largely fearless creature can, of course, fear potential predators greatly, and other events or things. Even fearless dogs are said to have some strong instinctive fear of bears. I've read that in the days when dogs were used to distract, perhaps more accurately—torment, bears while the hunter is getting there and setting up for a shot, they had to undergo very demanding testing to select those most willing to follow a bear's track and there would be much training beyond that. They, naturally enough, will be inclined to go the other way when they know a bear's around.

It's quite interesting that fearlessness, and trust, seem to be the foundations of sociability though a well-ordered human community will also contain a number of fearful men and women. There's a certain quality of fear which leads to violent reaction, on the part of a Rottweiler—bred for guard duty—or on the part of a soldier who's forced to live under constant fear for his own life or fear for the lives of the others in his unit.

“Be not afraid,” as Pope John Paul II said often. Trust in God and be not afraid. Trust in your fellow-men, at least those in your family or other flesh-and-blood communities, and be not afraid. You will be disappointed in your fellow-men often, even parents or children or dearest friends, but get over it as my Golden often got over an attack the previous day by another dog. You will also be disappointed in God but you can only trust that He is taking care of your long-term interests however poorly He seems to reward those who take up His cause in this life. Sometimes, God even seems to punish with special severity those who serve Him in a dedicated way.

Be not afraid.

Easy enough to say, but hard to do—unless your body produces large amounts of certain hormones. An interesting and disturbing problem for a Christian who wants to believe each man and woman and child can be saved if only each of those individuals turns to God. I think that's true in the end, but there's a better way to express the difficulty of this matter:

How could a man of violent and distrustful tendencies, a man of inadequate oxytocin flows in this life and inadequate perfected oxytocin flows in the next life, be happy in Heaven?

Wouldn't Heaven be hell for such a man? Is God then to change each man so he can be happy in Heaven? Would he then be the same man? Or would God have destroyed Hercules and have created a gentle Francis to take his place in Heaven?

I've maintained that we're embodied creatures. We modern men are coming to understand the complexity of relationships between many aspects of human nature, including between hormonal flows or brain events and personality traits. We're made peaceful by the presence of proper flows of oxytocin, to simplify more than a bit.

The question returns: What does this mean?

We don't yet know, but we should courageously and faithfully respond to God's Creation, seeking to understand what the Almighty has done in His acts as Creator—even when it leads to difficult questions. I might say we need good flows of oxytocin to have so good a level of trust and courage.

As Pope Benedict XVI said during a speech on 2008/06/07, "Modernity is not simply a historically-datable cultural phenomenon; in reality it requires a new focus, a more exact understanding of the nature of man." I don't think he meant more exact in terms of hair-splitting arguments according to the science and philosophy of the Middle Ages or ancient Greece.

If the virtues of man are tied to man's physical nature, then we should understand man in the best available way, build our moral philosophies and moral theologies according. We shouldn't give up on those who seem to be missing 'virtue-genes', whatever that might mean, but we should learn to respond to the part of God's Creation which is the individual human being. We should learn to teach young men of violent tendencies to control themselves—and that's unlikely to be done by forcing them to sit in classrooms as if they were a different sort of young man. In fact, it might well be that some young men become violent because they're forced to sit in those classrooms at a time when they have urges to be moving about, hunting and fishing and exploring the wilderness or maybe working with horses and cattle. It's frightening that the schools seem to be controlled by some who don't even understand any human diversity beyond a liking for different television shows.

Our modern tolerance is a strange sort of attitude which really sees others as being "as good as us" only because we know they are potentially just like us in all ways. We'll do our darnedest to help them to achieve that noble goal of being just like us.

I was a student who was more interested in learning than in doing well in classroom situations. In my early 30s, I was classified as someone unsuited for life in modern corporations by a psychologist working for a management placement firm—a seemingly good man who wished he could have at least offered me some good advice and had none to give. Like those young men who can't stay quiet in classrooms, I have also spent much of my life at the business end of that modern tolerance. It isn't pleasant. Though it might concern other physical attributes than oxytocin production, I figure that what I am is built deep into my being because even during those years of my late teens and twenties when I wished to be like those corporate widgets who seemed so happy, I couldn't do it.

I'll say no more along those lines. Scientists, philosophers, theologians, novelists, and Parris Island drill sergeants all have worthwhile viewpoints outside of the scope of the work of each other. There are things I'll be able to better say as a novelist than I can say as a philosopher or theologian, things I'll say better than brain-scientists or anthropologists or even drill sergeants.

[I didn't throw in Parris Island drill sergeants as a matter of whim. In *Where Resident Aliens Live* [149], a book written by Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon about the difficulties of retaining Christian faith as an undergraduate in an American college, they reprinted an article from the *Wall Street Journal* in which some of those sergeants spoke of a radical loss of moral structure in the young men coming to be trained as marines. They had seen this change happen all at once, circa 1990, and didn't differentiate between young men from different ethnic groups or those from unstable versus solid families. Interesting and strange and frightening.]



# 260 Much of Our Knowledge, Much of Our Thinking, Much of Our Moral Structure Lies Outside of Us

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=801>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/04/07.]

Our moral disorder lies outside of us because we inhabit morally disordered human communities. But let me start from a ways back. . .

In Chapter 259, *The Resurrected Will Need to Be Flooded With Oxytocin and Vasopresin*, I wrote about some hormonal matters which work from our insides to shape our personality characteristics. By the end of that article, I was qualifying the insight to consider external matters, especially those involving communal matters, such as the way we educate our youth, even the general way we treat youth.

In fact, as Gerd Gigerenzer showed in his important book *Adaptive Thinking: Rationality in the Real World*[61], much of our knowledge is in the environments around us. In a sense, those environments do some of our thinking. I wrote a series of review articles to discuss some aspects of Gigerenzer's findings and his insights into those findings. They are published in this book as the following chapters:

- Chapter 78, *A Review of "Adaptive Thinking", Part I*,
- Chapter 79, *A Review of "Adaptive Thinking", Part II*,
- Chapter 80, *A Review of "Adaptive Thinking", Part III*,

- Chapter 81, *A Review of "Adaptive Thinking", Part IV*,
- Chapter 82, *A Review of "Adaptive Thinking", Part V*,

What is true of knowledge in our general environments, human as well as the landscape, is true of moral knowledge in particular. This doesn't mean our insides are of little importance. We need a highly developed human intelligence to respond properly to the knowledge contained in our environments. When we respond to the moral knowledge contained in our environments, we need that highly developed intelligence and also some specific personality traits such as the social traits correlated with flows of oxytocin and vasopresin. Still, we can only respond to what's there to respond to, as Yogi Berra might have said.

We shape our own selves to respond to our actual human communities. There are those, natural-born explorers and culture-spanning merchants, who can somehow develop multiple groups of behaviors so that they can behave properly in London today and in Mumbai tomorrow. Those more flexible men and women are few and probably they would be few even if more of us had the opportunity to try and develop that flexibility.

Our moral habits are necessarily practiced responses to particular events in our environments, even if some are able to carry multiple sets of such habits. Few of us do much thinking about such responses so long as our environments meet our needs and some of our desires, so long as those environments are relatively stable, and so long as our moral habits are appropriate for those environments.

Once upon a time, we knew how to do business with the grocer down the street. We knew how to speak to our doctor and to our religious leaders. We knew how to treat a lawyer who seemed to have grown inordinately rich while handling the estates of wealthy widows. When we gave to local charities, we knew those who were distributing the funds and who were receiving those funds. We were able to assume our government was acting largely in the interests of the spectrum of citizens of various levels of wealth and political awareness, though it was partially under the control of shady political machines.

Were all of the items in the previous paragraph always true? No. Did we understand the imperfections of all men and those particular vices to which the ambitious are prone? I think we did to some extent and we may have actually increased our problems with such ambitious men, and now—

women, by being overly cynical and overly abusive in our language towards those anti-social leaders without doing something about their abuses of power. During the 1960s and later decades, it wasn't so unusual for those anxious to conform to the role of well-behaved citizens obedient to their government (the new and true definition of patriotism) to speak in downright nasty terms about these men they let run amok in Southeast Asia and other parts of the world. But they did nothing about those crimes.

I don't accept the idea that the 1960s were the decade when the breakdown in American moral structures began. I think it was more of a period when a lot of men and women and even children were forced to become a bit more honest that something in their communal environments had decayed. My observations, at least as reorganized in recent years, indicate that Americans in my parents' generation (born after WWI) had already begun to walk away from their responsibilities to the human communities, including extended families, which had provided some stable moral structure to American life. They said families were good but only accepted those obligations which pleased them and their idea of their family included only those family members who met some expectations.

This isn't to say that this country was ever in truly good moral condition—see my discussions in Chapter 348, *My Ends are Mad and Now I'm Also Stupid*, Chapter 408, *The Need for Abstractions in Moral Self-understanding*, and Chapter 410, *As the Ruins Crumble...* for a rather brutal assessment of the moral status of the American character.

In *Moby Dick*, Melville wrote of Americans as being in rebellion against God—we really don't like all the constraints He has placed upon us. We feel we should be able to pick and choose which communal ties we'll keep though we assume our children and others in their generation will live up to what we feel their duties are towards us.

I agree with Melville. Our laziness and self-centeredness is true to our natural tendencies but that's the problem. Freed from the traditional moral structures which held in Europe in prior centuries, Americans proved to desire the materialistic rewards of good moral order but haven't shown the moral responsibility necessary to maintain that moral order, or build new versions of it, in a New World. We proved ourselves to be somewhat primitive human animals without the proper attitudes to build a new civilization or even to retain what little of European civilization might have been brought to North America.

The men and women of our age aren't evil. They haven't been corrupted

by Satan. Nearly all of them do have to live in morally disordered communities which give them, at best, mixed messages. Yet, we should realize our parents and their parents built the primitive and morally disordered communities we lived in when young and we continue their work. . .

We build without love or devotion and long for our vacations so we can go to Florida or some Caribbean island. And, yet, as individuals, we are partially excused by our sheep-like natures and the sad state of the communities we inhabit. There is no strict cause-and-effect relationship which convicts us of first-degree murder of our communities but we are certainly guilty of community-slaughter. And we are also our victims and the victims of our parents' and grandparents' moral irresponsibility.

I'm trying to develop concepts and words to better speak of these problems which aren't the moral problems of pre-modern man, despite what some half-blind conservatives think. Nor is there anything which has happened in the growth of our material wealth and power which has brought with it any technical solutions to our problems of forming good communities and living good lives as some half-blind liberals or progressives believe.

The sheer growth in human population and the intermingling of those from radically different cultures have brought enough confusion and disorder to account for much of our situation. We have entered a New Age and we're passing through a period where the answers will likely come from human experimentation in new ways of living and from the analyses of those who are a strange mixture of the radical and the reactionary. We need new answers but we need to restore some of the good characteristics of human communities which existed before television brought the entire globe into our living-room and so many human beings went out into that globe to do little more than dissipate whatever moral character they might have had as village-bound craftsmen and farm-bound mule-breeders.

I'm not really pessimistic—in the long term. In *The Revolt of the Masses*, Jose Ortega Y Gasset told us the growth in prosperity and changes in attitude freed men from parochial lives but only tainted good had come of that release from restrictively local lives. The leaders of the West failed to even try hard at fulfilling their duties to teach the wisdom of the West to these masses or to help them to mature into morally well-ordered adults in this radically new historical situation. Few, if any, leaders rose from the masses themselves to try to develop the sorts of moral characters and minds which could bring about moral order in the new communities which were growing up willy-nilly.

God's story moves forward. The Body of Christ is forming slowly by painful processes. Some legitimate organs, such as the American government, have decayed into cancers or parasitic organisms preying upon the greater body. The human race which is the mortal stuff of that Body is only reluctantly, and under great pressure, accepting the need to mature and to grow into something not yet seen. We will move forward along with God's story. What choice have we?

I am pessimistic in the short time. We've shown no willingness to respond properly on our own to our new environments in this world of huge human populations and advanced technology. We'll be forced to respond. We'll be shaped by saws and chisels and files. It will be ugly and painful.



## 261 Is Schizophrenia Now Really a Disease?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=820>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/04/19.]

As I've noted in a couple of essays in this book, schizophrenia is a terrible disease, even by the standards of psychiatric diseases. Yet, there's something odd about even calling it a disease. See Chapter 91, *A Thomistic Take on Madness and Modernism*, for a discussion of schizophrenia in light of modern thought and aesthetic styles, which consciously respond to reality in ways which resemble some of the symptoms of that disease. That suggestion comes from the book, *Madness and Modernism* [126] by Louis Sass, a psychologist with deep knowledge in clinical practice and its history, brain research, art, literature, and other domains of culture. He casts some doubt on the 'reality' of schizophrenia, presenting historical and other arguments that it's a set of symptoms which are responses to modern, industrialized conditions on the part of deeply disturbed human beings. And he argued that the same symptoms are displayed, at least for aesthetic reasons, by modern artists and probably many others. I'm probably one of those—see my freely downloadable novels: *A Man for Every Purpose* at <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/aman.pdf> and *The Open Independence of the Sea* at <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/open.pdf>.

I once had a golden retriever who was very sensitive to human emotions or—shall we say—mental and emotional conditions in general. He didn't like to go near anyone who was drunk, even if he knew that fellow and would run up to him in a sober state. He once strongly shied away from one of his human friends and it turned out the fellow was on strong pain medication after the extraction of an impacted tooth. He also stayed

away from a friendly woman we'd encounter sometimes on our walks. She was schizophrenic and, when I first met her, she was either not taking her medicine or it wasn't working. Big friendly Rebel didn't want to go near her when she was telling fantastic stories nor was he willing to go near her when she seemed relatively calm. Then her treatments started working in a major way, for whatever reason. Her enthusiasm was strongly suppressed and it seemed her metabolism was generally slowed down. My retriever was not quite so reluctant to go near her but he still didn't exactly rush toward her.

The point is that her system was upset in an objective way detectable by a golden retriever's nose, whether she was in her schizophrenic state or one of her medicated phases. But that doesn't necessarily mean she had something called 'schizophrenia'. Nor does it necessarily mean her medications had brought her closer to some sort of normal state. She was disturbed, but did she have a specific set of wrongful brain activities? Maybe she was acting out her disturbance in a way she'd learned by her experiences? We shape our minds by our responses to our environments, but suppose there is some sort of a mismatch so that our minds won't be shaped properly or so we refuse to let our minds be shaped in a certain way?

In the fore-mentioned book, Professor Sass speaks of anecdotal tales of treatments for mentally disturbed human beings in pre-colonial Africa—these treatments disappeared before they could be studied. Native doctors provided havens for those who felt great stress inside of their selves. Inside those havens, the patients would 'act crazy' for a week or two and then rise, collect their belongings, pay their fees, and return home, supposedly at peace with reality.

In another problem domain, climate studies, which also deals with quasi-stable systems, Roy Spencer, professor at the University of Alabama in Huntsville and former climatological researcher for NASA, has questioned if we have a good cause-and-effect understanding of the relationships between carbon dioxide build-up and cloud cover changes or between cloud cover changes and temperature changes. See Professor Spencer's website at <http://www.drroyspencer.com/> for his discussions of the issues and for some of the to-and-fro involving Dr. Spencer and those colleagues willing to deal with challenges to the mainstream view. You can also see his postings about increases in atmospheric temperatures related to his ongoing work with NASA. His bio on his website tells us: "Dr. Spencer's work with NASA continues as the U.S. Science Team leader for the Advanced Microwave

Scanning Radiometer flying on NASA's Aqua satellite." That is, he's in charge of one set of measurements of those atmospheric temperatures.

I'm taking no position on the actual cause of increased atmospheric temperatures in recent years—carbon dioxide or cloud cover changes or mere chance or something we haven't even noticed. I am siding with Dr. Spencer completely on his main point—we need to be sure about the entire chain of causal factors and correlations on this globe with so many complex and intertwined systems. My position on mental illnesses is similar.

If brain-researchers, or climate-researchers, think to have already a good understanding of cause-and-effect relationships, they will have no problems finding evidence in support of some theory consistent with that understanding. If the assumed cause-and-effect relationships aren't at least in the right direction, involving the right entities or systems, it's hard to see how the research will converge on a more correct view anytime soon. Natural philosophy, and its more specialized children—physics and biology and so on, have a family history filled with theories that were plausible when proposed but proved to be quite wrong when further empirical information was gathered, and, yet, it took generations before thinkers were educated to accept new theories which could deal with the facts of the matter. I've seen no evidence that scientists of the modern sort are more creative, more flexible of mind, or more responsive to the best available view of reality than were the traditional natural philosophers of pre-modern times. Nor is there much reason to believe modern scientists are superior in those ways to theologians and philosophers, poets and businessmen. Just give all those thinkers in all fields time to dig ruts and they will try to travel them for time without end. It's a human weakness.

If we assume the climate has cause-and-effect relationships such that it can be disturbed by human intervention beyond the power of its own stabilizing mechanisms, then, in a time of a warming atmosphere, we'll find evidence that human changes to atmospheric gases can disrupt the atmosphere's self-stabilizing mechanisms. We'll be sure that quasi-stable system, the climate, will continue to warm up with the continued human output of what's really a modest amount of carbon dioxide for that quasi-stable system. If we assume the brain-mind complex is the same sort of entity, we'll find evidence that chemicals injected into the arm or psychotherapeutic treatments, will bring the brain-mind into a different and stable state.

That can be true but the atmosphere and brain have evolved over eons to be the sorts of entities capable of maintaining their own stability pretty

well. And both can stabilize, and have stabilized, in a disturbed state which is recognizably quasi-stable on short time-scales. A brain, or the atmosphere of a planet, which is disturbed in some significant sense might be able to do a good job of maintaining that disturbed state, which would have become the ‘preferred’ state in some sense. Researchers might better spend their time asking: Why has this system suddenly begun to change, perhaps to destabilize? Roy Spencer did this and realized he couldn’t answer some questions about fundamental cause-and-effect relationships involving different gases in the atmosphere, cloud-cover, and temperature.

In any case, it remains true that schizophrenia is a horrible disease and we should welcome any important results even if we seem to be missing a general understanding of the relationships between brain disruptions, poorly or wrongly formed minds, and behavior. It’s only in the past couple of decades that major brain-scientists such as Gerald Edelman, Antonio Damasio, and Walter J. Freeman have begun to produce a solid, however tentative, understanding of what the mind is and how the brain, indeed the entire human organism, generates it. The interested reader can read Professor Freeman’s *How Brains Make Up Their Minds* [35] for a short but idea-packed explanation from the viewpoint of one highly-regarded brain-scientist.

If I’m right, how can we tell if a disease exists if we only consider behavior or other external evidence, phenomenon at the interface with the environment which may be masking the true conditions in that brain? Perhaps we could find disruptions in the metabolism of brain-cells?

We see some possibly important results in this article: *One Step Closer to a Diagnostic Test for Schizophrenia* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/04/110405084302.htm>, where the claim is made they have found reliably testable metabolic changes in the brain-cells of schizophrenia. The advances of those Finnish scientists is good. They’ve identified some changes to the brain’s metabolism which—if verified by other scientists and perhaps other research techniques—can lead to better diagnoses of schizophrenic conditions and perhaps to better understanding of the changes in the brain which are part of the disorder. The question remains: what is cause and what is effect? How could an organ so well-adapted, in most cases, to dealing with our environments in a human way, sometimes be so out of sorts and in such a strange way, as if a character in a James Joyce novel found himself unable to escape from his surrealistic dreamworld? Professor Sass tells an anecdote in which

James Joyce took his badly psychotic daughter to Carl Jung. Jung could do nothing for the poor young woman and Joyce couldn't understand why she couldn't be helped. After all, she talked like one of the characters in his novels and those were works of genius—if a bit difficult to read. Surely, his daughter must be. . . Jung told Joyce that he, as a creative writer, dived into the river of madness but his poor daughter was chained to the bottom. Can I put it this way: James Joyce and his daughter, were diving into the same river known too well to modern men. Did earlier generations of man know much of this particular river of madness? Did they know it at all? Did they have their own rivers of madness or perhaps caves or deserts of madness?

If we think of the brain as being a well-determined and independent system, as a first approximation, then we see it will be interacting at an (somewhat abstract) interface with a similarly regarded—that is, well-determined and independent—environment or set of environments. That interface, at least the part which we could consider 'personal', is the mind. As the philosopher Stephen Toulmin pointed out in the early 1960s, the so-called 'randomness' of biological evolution is really the unpredictability of events at the interface of two well-determined and independent systems, an organism (or family line with proper complicated language) and its environment. This sort of view would lead to an immensely complex understanding of the human mind, its workings and its disturbances. I strongly believe such an understanding would be more realistic than the ones which come from the current understandings of the mind, dualistic or monistic, found in the most modern thinkers.

I'm also going to point to an article about diagnosis of Alzheimer's, *Alzheimer's Diagnostic Guidelines Updated for First Time in Decades* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/04/110419003653.htm>, which seems deceptively similar to a possible diagnosis of schizophrenia, but it speaks of progress which can—in principle – be more certain. Alzheimer's is a destruction of the brain which underlies the mind and is a progressive and clearly identifiable physical disease; at least it is identifiable by way of an autopsy and scientists seem to be developing more reliable means, biomarkers in blood and brain-fluid or brain-scans, to diagnosis it in a living patient. Alzheimer's is clearly a disease of the brain which is, in principle, subject to accurate diagnose and can be eased or somewhat cured by technical medical treatments after we come to a technical understanding of the biochemical changes in brain-cells as the disease

progresses.

The psychiatric diseases, such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, involve complexes of underlying brain-events and mind-events which are interactions at that interface with the ‘outside’ world that I discussed above. Without having a good understanding—however tentative—of the brain-mind-environment system, I don’t see how we can even know if schizophrenia is a disease, many diseases pretending to be one, or one form of a more general disease which is just the brain-mind complex out of synch with its environment in a general way which can’t be usefully split into smaller categories.

## 262 Shaped and Not Determined

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=824>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/04/20.]

Are we determined by our genes or by our environments?

Yes.

But, it's not so simple as that. Those genes are us and we are part of those environments which are hardly independent of human technology – culture in general—these days. But the complications are still more than that. We are what's shaped but also the ones who help shape ourselves by way of response. We are what's shaped but our environments, for this purpose, are determined by our perception of what lies outside of us and—to an extent—down in our toes. Our perceptions of those environments are more or less honest, more or less complete, rich or impoverished.

Even genes aren't what they used to be. Nowadays they don't seem to always operate in that good old-fashioned mechanical way. The more up-to-date genes have more complex operations so that they operate in different ways depending upon our early environments and also the environments of the previous few generations. (See the article *Epigenetics* at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epigenetics> for some background.) In general, the soma (body or flesh) of the fertilized egg-cell which is a recently conceived human being is not some sort of slave to its own DNA nor is the DNA a simple and mechanical system.

This is not to say we can transcend our DNA, at least not in a direct way, nor is it to say that DNA and soma engage in a war of domination. It is to say our DNA is complex and allows a wide variety of possibilities in interaction with our current environment and it's also to say that we should remember that DNA is some sort of collection of the biochemical responses to Earth's environments over the past three billion years or so—to oversim-

plify greatly. And it's to say along with modern embryologists: A complete set of genes isn't sufficient to make a dinosaur; you need a mommy dinosaur. The qualification is that it is quite possible that a modern elephant could be the mother of a mammoth if one of her egg-cells is fertilized with DNA taken from one of those frozen mammoths in Siberia and then implanted in her womb. But the resulting creature would be part modern elephant in ways which might be unpredictable. In addition, our environments are ever-changing and always presenting new opportunities and problems to us and to voles and to grasshoppers.

Besides the complications of epigenetics and the dynamic nature of the earth, there are some interesting problems posed by the insertion of alien DNA and possibly manipulations of our soma during our lifetimes by viruses, bacteria, or multi-celled parasites. I'll not discuss this in detail, but—for the benefit of those who have not heard of this sort of phenomena—I'll mention that HIV inserts negative images of itself in the DNA of human beings it infects. A human being infected by HIV becomes from that time a potential factory of HIV. Other, more complicated phenomenon can occur, not often leading to a stable species of three-headed dogs nor to supermen who can fly. Cancers or miscarriages are more likely.

But, my current interest is in the responses we make to our environments. The world offers possibilities to us, but creative human beings also offer possibilities not fully determined by their genes or inherited soma. The world itself responds, perhaps to destroy us for inadequate responses or simply because of bad luck. But the world does offer and we decide how to respond to opportunities and problems. And we make a counteroffer in response—if we are properly energetic and courageous. The nonlinear interplay of two systems results in new possibilities even if those two systems were themselves not only independent and well-determined but also linear. This raises issues of emergence vs. creativity but I'll pass over those for now. You can pursue just one small line of thought in this matter by reading Chapter 366, *Creation and Freedom*, for a short discussion of some of the ideas of Henri Bergson.

The main point is that we need to develop a different language to discuss our moral selves and our moral lives. We are not determined by supernatural forces nor by our genes. Nor are we creatures of some sort of free-will unanchored in flesh and blood, rocks and water. We are born as bundles of possible human beings, where those bundles were shaped over eons by the forces of evolutionary biology. We are shaped into particular human beings

by our responses to the particular environments, social and 'natural', into which we are born. There are metaphysical and theological issues and I'll say only that God knew all that would happen when He created contingent being and then shaped this world, but He left us with a limited but significant amount of freedom suitable for creatures such as us. While we are far from fully free, we aren't constrained by God's knowledge of what will happen. We share in the freedom which comes from the factual contingency of this world, this story being told by God.

We can participate along with God in the ongoing shaping of ourselves and our world, however subordinate our status and however weak our powers. To participate in this way, we must take the initiative and we must have faith that God has brought us into existence into a rational and morally well-ordered world. The faith and the corresponding courage to act can be faked until it becomes part of you.



## 263 Now Can We Use Video Screens for Target Practice?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=881>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/06/03.]

This article, *Poorer Reading Skills Following Changed Computer Habits of Children* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/05/110523171103.htm>, discusses a study in which the reading abilities of children have deteriorated since 1970 in two countries in which children use computers more often in school and outside of school. That is, reading ability “has fallen rapidly since 1991 in both the US and Sweden.” On the other hand, “[r]eading ability has improved steadily in Italy and Hungary,” where students don’t use computers heavily in school or outside of school.

As I’ve noted repeatedly, we shape our minds by actively responding to the world. We can misshape our minds by actively responding in the wrong way or to a misconception of the world. We can even misshape our minds by passively accepting what a television or computer pushes into our heads. We become literate human beings capable of maintaining and reviving a complex civilization, like that of the West, by reading books and learning how to think in the ways of the good authors. This doesn’t mean I’m much impressed by the books used in the American school systems for sure. There is much improvement that could be made, starting with tossing out textbooks in many subjects, such as history, at least for talented students who would be better off spending a school-year reading two or three serious works of narrative history and writing a number of short papers on specific topics in those books. Even in mathematics, “written-for-school” textbooks are used too heavily for the development of good mathematical reasoning skills. A good number of college textbooks and some written for

the likes of scientists outside a specialty can be very good in presentation of material and of reasons for the specialists focusing on specific questions and so forth. With so many good books to choose from, why do textbook publishers so persistently ‘develop’ and publish mind-numbing junk? That is one of several problems in modern education which deserve a book’s worth of discussion and I’m not the one to write any of those books.

For the most part, the study discussed in the article under discussion, *Poorer Reading Skills Following Changed Computer Habits of Children* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/05/110523171103.htm>, speaks for itself but I will try to balance any counter-reaction by saying computers can play a very good role in education when used properly. If students of some talent in mathematical reasoning are learning how to program or how the ‘insides’ of the computer actually work, then some real learning is going on. This would include future car mechanics who would be better off working in the way of members of the mechanics crews for racing-car teams—learning how to program chips to change the behavior of the engines and thus learning more about how a modern engine works.

Another example: if future writers or editors or book-designers were learning how to do computer typesetting why not use a readily-available and high-quality typesetting system— $\text{\LaTeX}$ . See <http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/LaTeX> for information. This system was designed by a distinguished mathematician and computer scientist who had grown dissatisfied with the low-quality of most computerized typesetting systems after the retirement of the last of the old-fashioned typesetters specializing in mathematics. See [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Donald\\_knuth](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Donald_knuth) for some background information on Donald Knuth. If those who wish to be involved with books were to learn such a system, with real typesetting commands to help separate ‘content’ and ‘structure’, then they would be learning something serious even if they later moved to radically different ways of typesetting books or e-books. Even if they came to believe that Knuth did a lot of things wrong, they’d have learned a lot just to reason to that conclusion.

And there have reportedly been good results from using computers in the education of students with autism or other conditions which involve problems interacting with other human beings.

I wouldn’t make an absolute rule that computers should be banished from schools, but any use of computers should be specifically justified by the development of meaningful skills, not those which merely make them

targets for marketing campaigns by companies selling systems for dummies. Most students, in fact, would be far better off learning the basics of reading and writing and arithmetic. Chemical engineers need those skills as much as lawyers and as much as conscientious citizens trying to learn a little about the wars their country is fighting in their name.



## 264 Maybe They Should be Feeling Sorry for Us

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=905>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/06/26.]

Families with tendencies towards autistic traits tend to cluster in regions with opportunities for the exercise of ‘systemizing’ skills: see the article, *Diagnosed Autism Is More Common in an IT-Rich Region, Study Finds* at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/06/110620103937.htm>, for a discussion of this interesting yet less than surprising discovery.

Specifically:

The researchers predicted that autism spectrum conditions (ASC) would be more common in populations enriched for ‘systemizing’, which is the drive to analyse how systems work, and to predict, control and build systems. These skills are required in disciplines such as engineering, physics, computing and mathematics.

The team had previously discovered evidence for a familial association between a talent for systemizing and autism in that fathers and grandfathers of children with ASC are over-represented in the field of engineering. The team had also previously found that mathematicians more often have a sibling with ASC, and students in the natural and technological sciences, including mathematics, show a higher number of autistic traits.

...

The growth of the High Tech Campus Eindhoven has led to Eindhoven becoming a major technology and industrial hub: 30% of jobs in Eindhoven are now in technology or ICT, in Haarlem and Utrecht this is respectively 16 and 17%.

...

The researchers found school-reported prevalence estimates of ASC in Eindhoven was 229 per 10,000, significantly higher than in Haarlem (84 per 10,000) and Utrecht (57 per 10,000), whilst the prevalence for the control conditions were similar in all regions.

Later in the article, one of the researchers points out that “the genes for autism may be expressed in first degree relatives as a talent in systemizing.” In other words, those who have autism to a dysfunctional extent and those who are socially disabled by a somewhat lesser degree of autistic traits will likely have relatives who are skillful engineers and—I would speculate—metal-workers. The economist Thomas Sowell wrote a book, *Late-talking Children* because he had to fight for years to keep public school bureaucrats from classifying his late-talking son as mentally disabled—the son ended up as a high functioning computer scientist who graduated with high ranking from Stanford University. From research, including some done on relatives of late-talking children, of a high-achieving sort, whose parents had joined a support group he founded, Professor Sowell discovered that high-achieving children who were late in speaking had a disproportionate number of relatives who were engineers, skilled craftsmen (such as electronics repairmen), medical doctors, or worked in other fields where at least some of the specialists were ‘systemizers’. This article would indicate they probably also had a disproportionate number of relatives who had more disabling forms of autism spectrum conditions (ASC). (I think it reasonable to assume that most high-achieving, late-talking children have ASC.)

ASC is said to be tied in to ‘systemizer’ personality characteristics. Systemizer talents can only be developed during periods of intense concentration on a very well-specified task. A truly talented tinkerer or car-repairman will concentrate on his task in a way not appropriate for a farmer who has to remain aware of a greater variety of environmental factors as he goes about his work, such as the condition of soil as it’s turned over and the impending weather. A poet crafting lines in his head or a mathematical physicist pondering the applicability of a particular equation to analyzing

explosions near a black-hole will concentrate in a way that would not be good for a barber who's expected to keep up his side of a conversation or a retailer who's watching for customers who head towards the door without buying any goods.

The researchers who appear in this article seem quite aware of the two sides of this coin. Perhaps there be more than two sides. There are Einsteins who are sociable when they wish to be but can concentrate wonderfully well on a difficult line of thought and there are autistic boys who can't stand to be touched and get lost in the task of counting leaves falling from the tree in the front-yard—if they can even function that well. There may well be others who lie in between those particular extremes. There might well be some locked into institutions who are socially dysfunctional but would make wonderful repairmen, who shy from human contact but could assemble complex mechanisms better than any existing robots.

I have found little evidence that we modern human beings are truly tolerant or that we make consistent efforts to help our fellowmen to function well given their abilities and disabilities. Our way of being tolerant is to take those with strange bundles of talents and disabilities and turn them into low-performing 'normal folk'. In an essay collected in one of his books, the psychiatrist Oliver Sacks tells of finding mentally-disabled brothers who also showed some of the traits of autism in losing themselves in a rather strange but wonderful task—they could identify random numbers at least as large as the ones tabulated by the most powerful of computers of that time. They would sit and engage in a conversation of sorts, one speaking a large random number and the other—after perhaps a slight delay – responding with a larger random number. Dr. Sacks used one of those tabulations of random numbers to get the brothers to produce numbers, later confirmed to be random, which were larger than any of the ones in those tables. Years later, he ran into the higher-functioning brother getting off a bus. He'd been de-institutionalized, was living in a halfway house of sorts, and was a socially useful dishwasher. With the pair broken up, the lower-functioning brother had to be put away in an institution which could be called a 'warehouse'. Both had seemingly lost their strange but wonderful talent.

I don't wish to insult those who try to provide care for those who can't even bath themselves, but we show a very bad side when we can't appreciate such a unique talent, one which might have also been usefully studied by mathematicians—the brothers were incompetent at basic arithmetic and

were clearly identifying random numbers by some unknown process. We don't appreciate such unique talents but we glorify the man who can spin in mid-air before slamming the basketball through the hoop and the one who can prance across the stage while playing on his guitar one of the three chords he's conquered.

More importantly, we modern men are uncomfortable with those who have any mental talents, unbalanced like those of those two brothers or balanced like those of Einstein. I've written before of my damaged abilities to concentrate. They were damaged by the structures of modern schools. When young, I'd just be getting interested in a math problem or another sort of line of thought and the bell would ring. Sometimes, I'd not even hear it and would first hear the yells of a teacher telling me it was time to move on so I could, as they say, continue my learning for the day. We don't wish any students to be solving difficult math problems when it's time to move to the lunchroom, do we? We don't want any students to be lost in thoughts of living through the events of the American Revolution, do we? There's too much math and history to be learned to put up with such behavior.

Learning is no better than a bureaucratically regulated chore for most. The best parts of the school-day are the periods of socializing so that the students can talk about the latest pop songs or the television shows they watched the night before.

It's been years since I've read any science fiction, other than a recent re-read of *Fahrenheit 451*, but I remember that was far from the only story or novel which spoke prophetically of the lack of respect of modern men for profound learning or deep thinking or any hints of concentration. I remember one about a future in which those with inclinations to think or learn were outfitted with earphones which blasted junk music into their ears on a steady basis to keep them from so much as following a line of thought. We have become that people who do what we can to drag our children and our fellow-citizens into the constant noise and turmoil of a disordered public life. How generous of us.

I've written about this issue before:

- Chapter 226, *If Only They were Athletes, Part 1*,
- Chapter 227, *If Only They were Athletes, Part 2*, and
- Chapter 97, *Math is Hard and Math is Lonely*.

It might be a sign of social insanity of sorts that we have so little respect for those who can lose themselves in analysis of some aspect of objective reality, whether at the level of abstract or concrete being. We modern men, at least we Americans of the early 2000s, prefer to live inside our own imaginary world which has degraded standards of what is true and good and beautiful. We can perhaps learn something useful, and true and good and beautiful, by paying attention to the accomplishments of someone with autistic traits, whether those traits are part of a well-balanced personality and mind or whether they are part of a socially-isolated boy devoted to some strange, but perhaps wonderful, task. I would even suggest that some of those who suffer from a relatively severe form of ASC, such a boy who spends his time counting falling leaves, might be more sane in some serious sense than those lost in trash-music and the empty socializing of a cell-phone world. Those leaves are part of reality, unlike much of what fills the minds of modern human beings.



## 265 We are Legion and so are Our Forms of Relationship

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=930>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/07/15.]

I've spoken of this issue before but there is an article about a fresh study, *Children's Personalities Linked to Their Chemical Response to Stress* at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/07/110708084005.htm>, that indicates:

Is your kid a “dove”—cautious and submissive when confronting new environments, or perhaps you have a “hawk”—bold and assertive in unfamiliar settings?

These basic temperamental patterns are linked to opposite hormonal responses to stress—differences that may provide children with advantages for navigating threatening environments, researchers report in a study published online July 8, 2011, in *Development and Psychopathology*.

This is to say that cautious human beings may survive better, even prosper better, in some circumstances while bolder and more assertive human beings may do better in other circumstances. It really is little different than saying that some human beings are better at developing and using their brains and some at developing and using their biceps and some can develop and use their ears and fingers so well as to become accomplished pianists. There are some who have more than one major talent and I've known some who can operate in more than one hormonal or emotional realm—cautious until they make a decision and then fearlessly focused on action from that point.

I'm not saying this research and analysis is trivial or useless, only noting they're researching us and, in this case, confirming St. Paul's observation that we have our own particular natures, some to preach and some to lead communities and some to heal and so forth. Human beings aren't uniform products and there is every reason to believe our race wouldn't have survived if our ancestors had been such.

I'll return to the article:

The researchers also documented the dove or hawk tendencies of the toddlers in a variety of unfamiliar situations. Children who showed dovish tendencies were vigilant and submissive in the face of novelty. The toddlers clung to their mothers, cried, or froze when encountering new surroundings. Hawks used bold, aggressive, and dominating strategies for coping with challenge. They fearlessly explored unknown objects and new environments.

What is that sound in that cave: a treasure of water in a desert region or an irritable predator about to emerge?

This article actually deals with the production of cortisol in the two populations of children when both are exposed to the stress of violent parental arguments at home. The conclusion was stated by co-author of the study, Melissa Sturge-Apple, as "When it comes to healthy psychological behavior, one size does not fit all."

We're different from each other. We are differently sized but we also have different mixtures of various human traits. We move in different ways and move towards different goals or desiderata of various sorts. We form a seemingly chaotic body of humanity, a flock composed of goats and even bison and elks and not just sheep.

What a mess. We all have our strengths and weaknesses, our own tendencies to various vices and virtues—which are often different developments in different contexts of the same human attributes.

It's not that we're individuals milling about. Nor does the traditional, Pauline, idea cover this entire complex mess. We can be said to be members of the Body of Christ, body of humanity if you prefer, but that's only a hint of a greater richness which I hope to be starting to comment upon in the near future. But I'll go a little further in my hints than St. Paul did.

As St. Paul told us: We're members of bodies, human communities, including the ultimate community which is the Body of Christ. We aren't just individuals milling around and forming accidental attachments. In the context of this article, we can imagine these toddlers, perhaps ten years down the road, having self-organized groupings in which the doves and hawks play different roles. They have different relationships with each other, with parents, with friends outside the original group, with community leaders, with ministers or other religious leaders. Those relationships involve a complex set of forms, some being repulsions and others being attractions. Some of those relationships might have the form of quark attractions, weak and non-disruptive near by but growing so strong as the entities draw apart that only destruction of the system or one or more entities can break the relationships. (Technically, in this last case, it would have to be an environment heated to an extreme state, perhaps by a brutal war or social revolution. In that case, a lot of relationships would be disrupted and a lot of entities destroyed.)

I have a vague vision of a human race as complex entities, each a whole unto its self, but each connected to other human beings by these relationships of a more complex sort than can be verbalized in traditional vocabularies. This opens up possibilities of an historically-aware development of a rich and insightful language as fully qualitative as the languages of traditional literature and philosophy and psychology. In the past, our ancestors—not so aware historically as are we—couldn't work so deliberately in fields of science or business or literature or music or technological innovation. Concepts entered our efforts of self-understanding in a slow way, over generations.

There are problems with this goal I'm setting.

First, we modern human beings are in a period of decay only a short few centuries after developing an intense historical awareness on the part of a good percentage of the population of the West. Serious multi-volume biographies, and one-volume abridgments of those same serious books, were read by well-educated insurance brokers and high school teachers and clergymen and—at least in my mother's family – machinists. It's likely not true that many modern men and women have enough historical awareness to participate in the process I'm trying to initiate.

Second, I'm proposing a way of enriching our understanding of the world and of our own selves which requires a sophisticated understanding of modern knowledge of our physical universe including knowledge of life on earth. That understanding is rare and not likely to increase any time

soon as we probably will shortly enter a period of economic and political instability—and maybe serious hardships.

Third, the actual movement towards a newer understanding of our world, of created being in all realms, will be powered by imagination, or it won't happen at all, at least not in a viable or attractive form. The modern imagination seems to be in worse shape than the modern mind.

And so it is that I'll end with an emphasis of one speculation I'm raising and also with a strong warning.

As for the speculation: I'll point out that the major claim I'm making here is that we who write or speak or think about social and moral and political issues should start looking at the relationships between human beings with a goal of enriching our words and thoughts by opening our eyes to the possibility of various sorts of relationships, or equivalently—forces. Some of those forces are repulsive between certain types of human beings, at least under some circumstances. For example, children who are doves might avoid relationships with hawks under peaceful circumstances but might seek those relationships in a violent world where our own warlords can help protect us against Viking and Mongolian invaders. Other forces might be undetectable nearby but might be strongly attractive if distance is increased, as is true of quarks inside of neutrons and protons. One case where they might be true is families where relationships between siblings might be casual under most circumstances but might be very strong if a totalitarian government tries to pull their family apart. More of that sort of analysis later, though maybe not for months.

As for the warning: I'm heading down a path of enriching our ways of thinking and talking about a complex world which is home to complex human creatures with constrained but significant moral freedom. I'm not trying to reduce human beings to creatures who can be studied and potentially controlled by the methods of the modern positive sciences. I'm trying to abstract from the modern knowledge about physical forces and to use those more abstract bodies of knowledge to develop richer understandings of human beings and other concrete entities which share this realm of created being with neutrons and stars and interstellar magnetic fields.

Any true and meaningful discussion of human beings has to take the overall form of moral narratives, biographies and “true fictions” and histories at various scales of human life and over various realms of human life. Yet, we must remember those narratives are far truer and more meaningful if we can speak more accurately of the creatures which are the moral actors

in those narratives, if we can speak more accurately of the ways in which they relate, if we can speak more accurately of the ways in which they can move along both the physical and the abstract paths they choose to travel or are forced to travel.



## 266 A Bit More Complicated Than Many Would Suggest

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=949>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/07/23.]

I'm no expert on stem-cell therapy research and I won't try to say too much, but anyone who thinks miracles are guaranteed by any form of stem-cell therapy, morally acceptable or otherwise, should read this mostly optimistic but realistic article, *Carving the Neural Stem Cell 'Niche'* at <http://www.dana.org/news/features/detail.aspx?id=33672>.

Researchers have known for a while that many diseases which once seemed to be a problem in a very particular sort of cell are in fact caused by problems in their context, perhaps neighboring cells or cells they depend upon for some biochemicals. The small support cells, glia, which surround neurons seem to be involved in some neurological disorders, indicating they aren't 'just' support cells. Replace the neurons with cells grown from stem-cells and the surrounding glia will soon enough 'poison' the neurons—the disease will return.

This article is more concerned with what might be called the biochemical bath in which new cells might be inserted. Can that bath be supplemented to add the necessary biochemicals for successful treatment by stem-cells. Probably, at least in many cases, but researchers are going to be asking a variety of tough questions as they advance towards viable treatments. For example, did the diseased cells become such because the biochemical bath is itself somehow wrong? Then you have to worry that the blood-cell problem involves the liver or a problem with the hippocampus in the brain involves other brain regions, perhaps those which produce common brain chemicals such as dopamine.

We're organisms and even the different parts of our bodies have environments or contexts, relationships to biochemical baths and flows of other biochemicals, perhaps being constrained to specific areas or being thrown out of balance by another organ's production of a biochemical with multiple uses and effects throughout the organism.

We have to think of ourselves and other living creatures as being complex and particular organisms. We aren't just a sack of bones and organs and miscellaneous cells to be manipulated, tuned-up, fixed by a mechanic of the heart or a chemical technician specializing in blood.

DNA isn't some sort of independent master of organisms—it is part of those organisms which are very complex environments indeed. Neither are the particular organs or types of cells or individual cells of that organism independent of their environmental context as part of that organism. Neither is the organism itself, especially a social mammal such as a human being, independent of its context, including its social, economic, political, cultural environments.

Oh, the world is so complicated for those who like to draw flow-charts thinking them to be definitive rather than just indicative.

# 267 Our Grandchildren Are What We Eat

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=977>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/08/08.]

This article is interesting though hardly surprising: *Can PTSD Become Hereditary?* found at <http://www.miller-mccune.com/health/can-ptsd-become-hereditary-33703/>. It tells us that we can pass on to future generations the psychiatric problems we develop during our lifetimes.

To simplify a lot:

Our genes carry out some very important tasks for the organism of which they are part, such as providing active templates—tiny assembly plants—for proteins. Those genes are not some sort of unalterable instructions given by a god of evolution; they are not somehow shaped over long periods of time and unalterable over short periods of time. At the very least, the activity level, say from none to low to very high, can be set by the organism as it responds to its environments.

To simplify just as much:

Each generation of men then has to respond to its environments with given resources, including the starting-point of their genome inherited from their family lines and set to some levels of activity in the womb. Neurochemical balance and proper neuro-anatomical development can be re-established but it may take a few generations of stable, well-behaved environments.

Let's consider a society of peaceful and prosperous farmers and fishermen and traders in Scandinavia. Let them suffer through a few generations of truly harsh weather, a Little Ice Age or something similar. A society of ruthless Vikings emerges. Reading a little bit into the research into the effects of climate change conducted by the late Reid Bryson (an opponent of Global Anthropogenic Climate Change theories for what that's worth), we can conjecture that a promising young civilization, that of the so-called mounds-building Amerinds of the Mississippi river valleys, was destroyed by adverse climate events. The descendants of that demolished civilization were nomads with minds and bodies well-adapted to a pre-civilized life. I'd argue, only on general principle, that the changes to the bodies of Vikings and Mississippi Valley Amerinds were deep and lasting, lasting for some number of generations. I'd argue that way partly because that makes more sense of history and even the biographies of friends and acquaintances, than does the idea that each of us comes into our life clean of any contamination or blessings from what happened to parents and grandparents. Sins are visited upon the children despite the claims of shallow-minded theologians and philosophers and social-reformers, men and women who know little of history and science and haven't thought clearly about what they do know.

This isn't an endorsement of a strict determinism or pagan fatalism but I am claiming we should look at our own recent ancestors and see what their environments were like and how they responded to them. Then look at your own environments, your schooling and—perhaps—your upbringing in some faith, your social climate and economic incentives and opportunities, your political possibilities or at least those presented to you, your general culture. To a certain extent, probably a large extent, this can allow you to see yourself a little more objectively and a little more clearly. If you know a little history of the human race and a little more of your own family line's history (such as Irish Gaelic or Chinese Han), if you know a little bit about the brain sciences and biological evolution, a little bit about modern technology and about its possibilities and dangers, a little bit about the nature of spacetime and matter and energy, a little bit about the possibilities of human thought raised by modern mathematics, then you know a lot that can help you see yourself more objectively and more clearly. I'm not saying this is the 'real you', but I am saying it allows you to see yourself in many of your aspects. It's a modern liberal education in a manner of speaking, one that ideally does draw upon a rich knowledge of the old liberal arts but also upon modern empirical knowledge.

We are shaped by a variety of factors and we have at best partial control over many of those factors but we have no control without self-awareness. In particular, to exercise moral freedom we need good understanding of the ways in which we've been shaped and constrained by factors inherited from our grandparents or even from those apish ancestors who lived tens of thousands of years ago. Our freedom to a large extent is that of being able to reshape ourselves and to redirect our movements into the future, gradually and slowly. Our freedom isn't that of a free-will without any sort of inertial constraints. Our freedom doesn't even lie in the present so important to the fans of free-will. Our freedom lies in the future, or—more precisely—it lies in our movements into that future, our responses to our environments, which responses will shape our future selves. We're organisms and we grow into freedom by growing toward a chosen state.



## 268 Even Our Genomes Seem to be Organisms of a Sort and Not Chemical Computers

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=986>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/08/15.]

As we explore God's world, it turns out to be just as complicated and complex as some had suspected many centuries ago. And more so. Over the past century or so, DNA was discovered and shown to be that shadowy agent of heritability which was so important a part of the theories of Darwin and the variants of that theory developed by his followers. For a number of decades after Crick and Watson had discovered the magical shape of DNA, after others had developed sophisticated understandings of the stages of producing proteins by way of RNA, DNA was often presented as a straightforward and absolutely dominant set of recipes for constructing proteins, instructions for growth and managing metabolism, and so forth. Turn to page 124 and you'll see how the brain proteins are made which activate neurons so that they form a frontal lobe on a human being. Or something like that.

It had always seemed unlikely to me, and I believe many others who know far more than me about this topic, that a 'linear' set of instructions could produce such varied and rich results as we see in living creatures on Earth. Amongst other problems is the development of complex behaviors and maybe changes to bodily structures within too small a number of generations to be the result of Darwinian selection processes. Darwin himself noted the rapid appearance of dogs with instincts leading them to search upon hearing a gun. Wildlife biologists have gathered circumstantial but

solid evidence that grizzly bears in the Rockies, mostly males, became noticeably smaller after white men took up residence in the area or at least moved through regularly. There are many other interesting problems of this sort in evolutionary biology, with those working on brain and mind issues perhaps leading the pack in finding interesting problems of the sort which help to guide our exploration of our environments and help us gain a richer understanding of those environments and maybe those greater entities: the universe, the world, all of Creation.

So many interesting aspects to Creation and so little time.

This short meditation, on nothing new to my thought, is motivated by a study, *Your Genome Structure, Not Genetic Mutations, Makes You Different* found at <http://www.wired.com/wiredscience/2011/07/genome-structure/>.

Interesting, but I suspect that scientists are only starting to explore a realm of nature which is complex beyond the reach of our current intellectual tools. I suspect that human genomes will prove to be analogous to our greater organisms in richness and complexity.

I've noted before that the philosopher and historian Stephen Toulmin warned biologists back in the early 1960s that biological evolution produces 'randomness' because it occurs as an interface of two well-determined but independent systems: the organism and its environment. It might well prove to be the case that a similar situation holds at the interface of our genomes and our soma (our flesh and blood, roughly speaking).

Time will tell, but I'll hazard a guess that studying a complex genome will prove to be much like studying the number line in having a extraordinary richness of patterns beyond anything our imaginations could currently reach.

Not to worry. So long as we continue to explore Creation with the proper attitudes, our imaginations will grow and strengthen as will our various tools of measurement and analysis.

## 269 Self-aware Development Rather than Planning

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=991>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/08/20.]

In the late 1980s, a Ph.d. psychologist working for an executive placement firm told me that, out of all the people he'd ever tested or interviewed, I was the one least suited for life in a corporation. Some might say that to be good news in terms of the **potential** for good moral character, but it's certainly bad news in terms of job prospects, especially for someone not really having entrepreneurial talents. By the way, the major reason he had for saying I'm ill-suited to corporate life was my living mind which he said was not desirable in American corporations and not common there. This doesn't mean there aren't smart or clever corporate creatures, only that their intelligence isn't the sort to be described as "living mind". I'm not so sure there are many living minds to be found nowadays in any of the realms within the West, not in academia, not in religious institutions, not in the offices of publishers, not in the news media. Of course, most of these human and mostly bureaucratic organizations are organized in ways similar to General Motors.

In any case, I found it a little bit surprising to read this article: *Conformity Does Not Necessarily Mean Good Team Work, Study Finds* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/08/110801094317.htm>. Then I realized I could write a book about this subject, but this is only a rough sketch of an introduction to that book.

I like putting in some of my volunteer time on projects where I'm one of ten or twenty or even fifty volunteers. I dislike attending meetings and—partly because of my time constraints—I also dislike being one of the or-

ganizers. Otherwise, I have too good a reputation of being a good team-worker, helping to cook at some projects or wash pots and dishes at others or organize supplies or whatever. I get asked to work at too many affairs at my parish, though I'm not currently active as a volunteer at other communities. Others like to organize or shop or visit merchants to solicit donations. Fine. I prefer to wash dishes and then quietly return to my books and computer when it's done.

It all works out. To a remarkable extent, these sorts of volunteer projects are self-organizing **not** because everyone shows up as generic human creatures ready to be told what to do. Nor do they enter those projects as free-willed human creatures ready to do whatever seems to be most profitable.

In general, we enter public spaces as particular creatures with particular intentions (growth paths as organism), constrained by our own human natures, soma and genome and mind formed by our responses to our environments. Of course, the formation of our minds take place in peculiar environments and much in the way of our responses is made possible by our specific cultures. What is not made possible is excluded, for the most part. New possibilities can be raised by non-conformists, by those who experience unusual mental or spiritual states, by those who learn or experience something unusual from another culture or from some recently explored region of God's Creation.

Freedom itself, of the sort which concerns us modern human beings, is something which arose in the empirical world as an apish creature became a different sort of apish creature, one living in communities in which new possibilities have arisen because of the relationships which develop as large-scale and complex human communities develop.

Let me summarize, at the risk of over-simplification, and I'll warn any new or casual readers that I'll be pulling in ideas from my worldview, the entire narrative which combines my metaphysical system and my Christian beliefs with a variety of realms of empirical knowledge to give my approximation of the story which God is telling – His Creation.

Human beings have behaviors, attitudes, and minds which exist at the interfaces of various human communities, nuclear families and extended families and local polities and churches and so forth, and those complex human beings are **not** under any sort of direct control of a free-will or any other agency, immaterial soul or whatever, which exists at a point or less so that it's not subject to the laws of our physical universe. Human beings

are physical organisms, as St. Thomas Aquinas and modern biologists teach us. We human beings are also the behaviors we exhibit as we live at those interfaces with so many parts of Creation.

An individual human being, a human physical organism, is only the foundation for a more complex creature which is organism plus a lot more where the “lot more” is mostly relationships. At the same time, we have to realize that—consistent with the so-called ‘radical’ interpretations of quantum mechanics—relationships create stuff, even living stuff. There is a very complex, recursive and iterative, process going on. Relationships create stuff, beginning with God’s love from which He created all that is not Him. And stuff formed by increasingly complex relationships will allow the formation of more complex relationships. We are physical organisms which are our behaviors (including thoughts) at the interfaces with those various realms of Creation and we are also the rapidly evolving technologies and skills we make part of our lives, assuming we make them part of our lives in a way that enriches us rather than just making us slaves to central powers or to the herd which lazy and compliant and fearful human beings form.

Relationships, at least serious relationships, are created by those who have some real stuff, in a manner of speaking. Those who are merely moving along with the herd aren’t in the process of forming the sorts of relationships which lead to rich and meaning-laden communities of any sort—economic or spiritual or intellectual. There is give-and-take to forming a successful social club just as there is to forming a successful multi-partner consulting operation. There is also a give-and-take when a social club successfully forms relationships with the local hospital and little league and give-and-take when a consulting firm of engineers form successful relationships with local manufacturers and departments of public works.

There’s a lot to explore in the general area of human social and moral order. I’m currently busy scoping out what I might contribute to an enrichment and complexification of our ability to discuss and analyze these aspects of human life in a world grown much more complicated and complex and rich than the most creative thinkers could have imagined even during the early decades of the 20th century when the ideas of Planck and Einstein and Bohr, Cantor and Russell, Nietzsche and Bergson, Joyce and Picasso, were starting to form a new human environment to which only those creative few could respond. A rapidly changing human realm of Creation leaves many of us ever more disoriented and incapable of dealing with

the changes by anything better than surrender to the central powers of our age or to the herd.

Those conformists who would fit fully into roles assigned them by others won't have any chance to develop the stuff to participate in the projects needed during a time of change, a time of opportunities and problems. More of us need to learn how to form teams of those sorts of feisty individuals who don't willingly follow orders from above unless they understand the reason for those orders and agree with them at least somewhat. In other words, we need to learn how to form teams in a radically different way from those which generally are formed, by directive, in our increasingly hierarchical societies with their secrecy at the top and with information and orders which come down on a need-to-know basis.

# 270 Discovering What Our Grandparents Knew 80 Years Ago

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=994>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/08/22.]

Is it surprising to learn there is a *Marked Rise in Intensely Sexualized Images of Women, Not Men*? See <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/08/110810133015.htm> to read the article.

It's funny we live in an age where we've learned so much that enriches the traditional understanding that men and women are shaped to their different roles in reproduction and we fail to transfer any of that newly enriched understanding to our public social and moral and political beliefs. For example, there is strong evidence from IQ tests that there are more smart women than smart men but nearly all geniuses are men. Since males and females have pretty much the same average IQs, this tells us that most dumb human beings are men. Why is this a surprise to so many? Why have so many reacted with violent emotions against this claim when I've made it in an otherwise calm discussion? Do we remain enchained prisoners of those sexual revolutionaries of the 20th century who conquered much and destroyed much more?

So far as I can tell, all traits developed in response to our environments have bad aspects, or at least aspects which are bad from some viewpoint. Human females have bodies and attitudes adjusted to their need to raise newborns which are describable as 'embryonic' and will need a decade and a half of care and education—or more. Unlike, say, female lions, female humans aren't as capable in violent activities as the males of their species.

Women are relatively weaker and slower compared to men than female lions are compared to male lions. They are more dependent upon men for protection and support, a fact easy to deny when we've become dependents of centralized powers and their various welfare programs and police forces. On the other hand, human romantic love is founded upon the particular weaknesses and strengths of human males and females. Maybe women and men gain more than they lose from women being physically weak and men having to protect them? Maybe much that is good about sexual relationships has been destroyed by our political system in which false promises of protection come from the central governments and boys are trained to call in the Seals to protect Mom.

And so I return to the article's specific topic: the 'pornifying' of women. Natural inclinations of men and women are developing in bad directions in our morally loose societies, which are less societies than mobs of individuals dependent upon central powers and impersonal systems of production and trade. Because of the traits which are so valuable in successful reproduction, women are more exploitable and probably more 'willing' in some ways to be exploited. I'll quote from the article I already referenced, *Marked Rise in Intensely Sexualized Images of Women, Not Men* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/08/110810133015.htm>:

A study by University at Buffalo sociologists has found that the portrayal of women in the popular media over the last several decades has become increasingly sexualized, even "pornified." The same is not true of the portrayal of men.

These findings may be cause for concern, the researchers say, because previous research has found sexualized images of women to have far-reaching negative consequences for both men and women.

...

"What we conclude from this is that popular media outlets such as Rolling Stone are not depicting women as sexy musicians or actors; they are depicting women musicians and actors as ready and available for sex. This is problematic," Hatton says, "because it indicates a decisive narrowing of media representations of women.

"We don't necessarily think it's problematic for women to be portrayed as 'sexy.' But we do think it is problematic when

nearly all images of women depict them not simply as ‘sexy women’ but as passive objects for someone else’s sexual pleasure.”

Our ancestors thought to raise their sons not to exploit women and to raise their daughters to avoid exploitation. Men were even raised to protect women. This was a matter of moral order and self-respect for both males and females. In their efforts to conform to the herd as directed by centralizers of power and self-righteous reformers of society, modern men in recent decades thought to raise their sons and daughters to be genial creatures of muted sexual characteristics. Those partially desexed creatures would respect each other because... Well, just because. A good enough explanation for two year-olds and also for the likes of modern political theorists and social reformers.

A number of years ago, I read *The Sexual Brain* [86] by Simon LeVay, a book that discussed the crucial role the brain plays in human sexuality. Professor LeVay, himself homosexual and an activist, put the female brain and the menstrual cycle at the center of that book. A thinker paying attention to reality, even one making claims of the moral goodness of homosexuality, has to realize we are sexual because we, as a race, reproduce. That’s why we’re still here and why human beings are likely to be living on the surface of the earth for many centuries.

Because of the different roles men and women play in reproduction, their brains are radically different and Professor LeVay emphasizes that even the brain of an effeminate homosexual is still a male brain. There are some men whose brains were not masculinized either because of genetic problems or because their mothers didn’t produce testosterone during crucial development periods when the male embryo can’t yet produce it or at least can’t produce enough. There are relatively few such men and we can currently do no more than sympathize with a hellish situation.

There are many things to be said on this general subject and we can explore matters in terms of history or biological evolution or moral freedom or political stability, but all these differences in human males and females have implications for pornography, visual depictions of human beings and human sex acts in advertisement as well what is sold in that seedy video store.

Men have brains which react strongly to visual evidence of sexual opportunities. *A quick Internet search indicates the situation is more complicated*

*than I remembered it to be. There is not a single brain-region but rather a vaguely defined network of brain-regions involved when men are sexually aroused by images. As a result—and speaking only of heterosexuals, men can be more easily aroused by the visual display of women’s bodies than women can be by the display of men’s bodies.*

This has implications for moral and social order, as do most human attributes whether common to most human beings or differing between the sexes or differing between ethnic groups. As is stated in the article: “These findings may be cause for concern, the researchers say, because previous research has found sexualized images of women to have far-reaching negative consequences for both men and women.” In more direct terms, women can be more easily exploited in certain ways. Just because of the different roles they play in reproduction, girls can be raised to be women who accept their exploitation and boys can be raised to readily exploit women in certain ways. An honest appraisal of clothing store catalogs and television shows and magazine covers tells us we have twisted the youth of our oh-so modern societies in exactly this way.

## 271 There's More Than One Way to Bias Results

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1042>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/09/23.]

The main point of this article, *Put Down That Game Controller: Researcher Suggests Video Games May Not Boost Cognition* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/09/110915131637.htm>, is that we should pay attention to the ways in which social scientists recruit participants in their study. The argument is that earlier researchers claiming to find improvements in such attributes as hand-eye coordination from frequent playing of video games had biased their results by recruiting ads which disproportionately drew test subjects already highly skilled in video games. This would be akin to recruiting NFL players for a study of the effects of frequent and intense exercise and practice at athletic skills and then concluding that such exercise and practice will raise you, the ordinary Joe, to a high level as an athlete. Chances are that guy from the Redskins was born a better athlete than you. His exercise and practice will help him compete with other talented athletes while yours would be a waste of time above what is needed for your desired level of fitness.

Sometimes a researcher has to accept certain biases in his study population or unusual conditions in the setting of the research. This should be considered by way of strong and properly worded qualifications in any summaries of results. And sometimes biased results provide good and important scientific information. Interviews with men coming out of intense combat can help in the development of programs to reduce chances of various psychological problems, but it should be taken only as an indication of the state of a human being in extreme circumstances. Moreover, the

psychological conditions of such men might vary according not only to personal attributes but also to upbringing and to the general attitudes of their culture and age. The river rats of the valleys of New England and the Highlanders of Scotland both considered it a simple matter of course that they had to strip naked from the waist down to pass through rivers in cold weather – wet clothes during a New England winter or much of the year in the Highlands could kill. Fathers in some cultures, such as the Roman Republic, raise their sons to a harsh and demanding code, teaching them not to compromise no matter the suffering or even the chances of death. Fathers of the modern West have tended to step back and let their sons be shaped by public schools and the entertainment industry.

My current lines of thought lead me to think there are two problem areas in studying human beings:

1. Even when a study is properly qualified, we should read about it under the understanding that human beings are of a very diverse sort within the general constraints of human nature. This is very, very likely the result of an evolutionary history during which exuberant and optimistic human animals were often able to take hold of opportunities but depressed and pessimistic human animals were right often enough that the genes for those traits also remained in family lines.
2. A human being has a certain rough shape from his genes and other preconditions, but he will be shaped by responses to our environments—the shaping process goes much better with active and even exploratory responses. In many of the specifics of our general human characteristics, we who grew up in the 20th century are more than a little different from the human beings of ancient Greece and from those of New Guinea in the 1400s. That's not all bad though it's likely we've adopted some of the gentler virtues while giving up on some of those necessary for the hard times which are coming.

We need to continue gathering factual information on human nature with the goal of creating true knowledge, that is, a wider and deeper vision, of that factual information. That wider and deeper vision can come only from when the knowledge from scientific studies is merged with the knowledge of history, including the knowledge of literature and of philosophical thought through time. Right now, I'm working on the goal of providing

richer and more complex tools for understanding human nature, individual and communal. Those tools may come from various sources, but I'm starting with the goal of enriching our geometric talk about paths through life and about our various sorts of abstract relationships. I don't think Euclidean relationships come close to describing the relationships of our modern complex, rich lives and communities.

My arguments for the unity of knowledge aren't just some sort of blue-sky vision. I'm not looking at the clouds and ignoring the hazards on the ground in front of me. Rather am I claiming that we can't even truly understand the knowledge gained in particular realms unless we have that wider and deeper knowledge which can mature into a greater understanding of our world or even all of Creation.



# 272 Human Moral Nature: An Overview

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1079>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/11/14.]

## 272.1 Preface

This entry is the core of a larger work. It's sketchy and incomplete but possibly worth the read.

## 272.2 Introduction

In the Gospel of St. John, we read:

As [Jesus] passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night comes, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." [John 9:1–5]

And the story continues to tell us that Jesus gave sight to this man who'd been blind from birth.

Sin is strange. The Bible, in various places, misdefines sin and this is the reason for the occasional but strong corrections made by Jesus Christ.

Medical problems are sometimes described as the result of ‘sin’. These medical problems include the likes of what is called ‘leprosy’, probably a skin-problem such as eczema, and blindness and epilepsy. The disorder, deep and ephemeral, of a world in which evolutionary and developmental processes take place is often described as sin in some sense, the result of a world imagined as having been created as a paradise and then some sort of great fall has taken place.

It’s even possible to speak loosely but truly in saying the writers of the Bible, well back to the time of David and perhaps before, were dealing with the question of “nature vs. nurture.” They were also dealing with the limits placed upon our moral freedom by the events of God’s story.

I’ll propose that sin or moral disorder in general is a result of a mismatch between a human being and the world—a deliberately vague way of speaking. In some of my prior writings, I’ve spoken in more specifically Christian terms but I wish to step back and maybe develop a way of speaking that allows non-Christians to engage in this conversation. I also wish to speak in terms general enough that I can more easily adopt new ways of speaking about human moral nature and about our moral journeys through this world. These new ways of speaking will draw upon richer and more complex understandings of being largely made possible by modern science including mathematics.

But what is morality?

From 1913 Webster’s dictionary as provided by The Collaborative International Dictionary of English v.0.48, we get the definition:

- morality** 1. The relation of conformity or nonconformity to the moral standard or rule; quality of an intention, a character, an action, a principle, or a sentiment, when tried by the standard of right. [1913 Webster [140]]
2. The quality of an action which renders it good; the conformity of an act to the accepted standard of right. [1913 Webster [140]]

Where do these rules come from? In discussing truths, even those of mathematics, I’ve claimed it makes best sense of what we now know to speak of being in terms of a spectrum running from very abstract forms to very concrete forms. So far as Creation goes, all that can be explored or accessed in any way by a creature, the most abstract form of being is what I’ve called the Primordial Universe, the truths manifested by God as

the basic stuff of Creation, the stuff from which successively more concrete forms of being is shaped.

Moral nature is a set of traits in a living creature, one formed in a very concrete level of being. We can almost speak, in an analogical way, of our moral nature as being itself a separate entity but the truth is that it's a combination of memories, behaviors in the present and in the near-term future, and planning and other cognitive and emotional activities in the more distant future. As I've noted before, our moral freedom in particular lies in the future. Next year, I'll realize my moral freedom in better formed habits that give me a healthier diet. Or so I hope. Few are born with the strong inclination to sacrifice themselves for their children, to die for the cause of liberty, to die for Church and God. For most of us, we anticipate sacrifices, visualizing tough situations and developing the little habits which will allow us to handle those situations—as some top-level athletes are said to do.

Morality can also be seen as the more abstract region of the spectrum which includes what we call 'ethics':

**ethics** The science of human duty; the body of rules of duty drawn from this science; a particular system of principles and rules concerting duty, whether true or false; rules of practice in respect to a single class of human actions; as, political or social ethics; medical ethics. [1913 Webster [140]]

Careful planning, moral anticipation, allows us to form our ethical habits.

In Chapter 438, I provided a diagram to help me present my claims that our understanding of our own moral natures can be enriched by borrowing, in a special way, from general relativity. Specifically, I had noticed that we speak of our moral paths through life in Euclidean terms but those terms seem inadequate for human beings who live in societies grown tremendously complex and rich. I stated that "I hope this makes my claim clearer and more plausible":

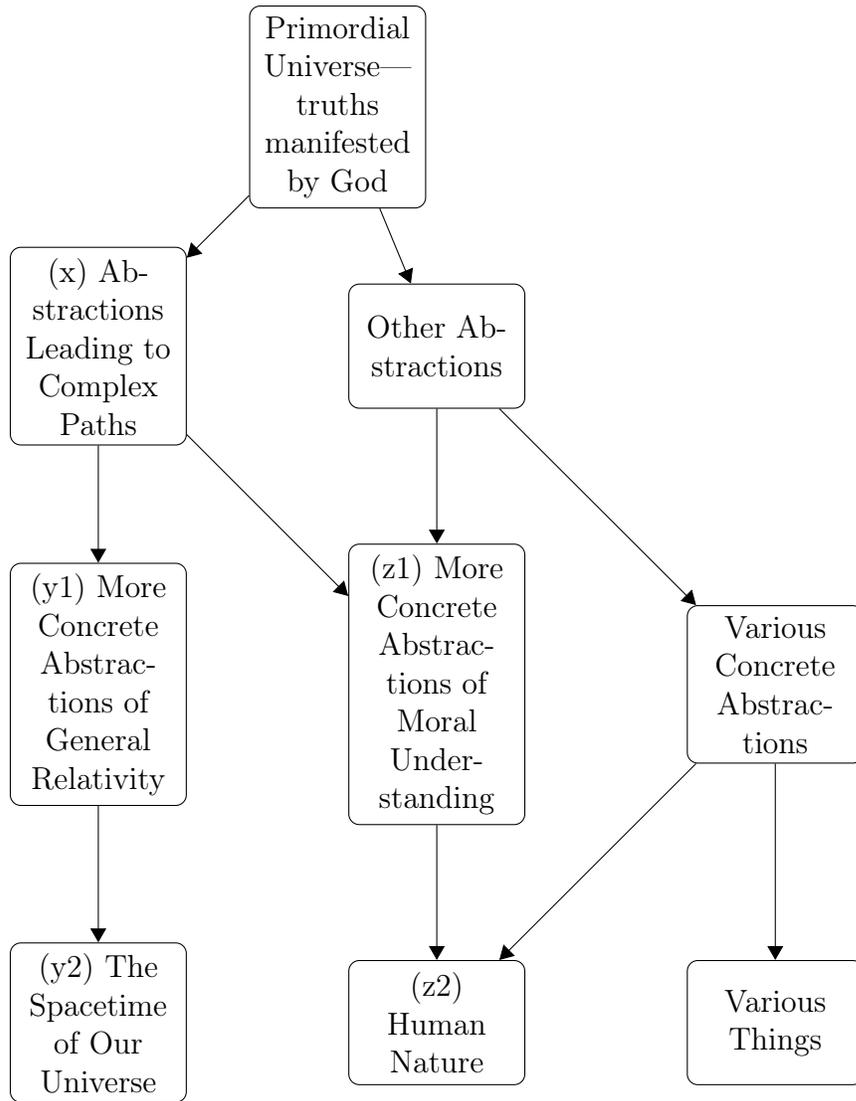


Figure 272.1: Simple Relationships of Abstract and Concrete Levels of Being

I'll continue to emphasize this issue of the spectrum of being, abstract to concrete, in my writings. Empirical being is one end of a spectrum, the other end being—roughly—what we might call metaphysical truths, the truths manifested by the Creator as the raw stuff of Creation.

The diagram above is misleading in one way. I explained this in Chapter 169 by comparing my way of thought to that of Plato where complex entities had what might be called Ideal Prototypes in a realm of the Real (Ideal in terms of most modern thinkers, philosophical or other types). The diagram for Platonic concepts of being from that entry is:

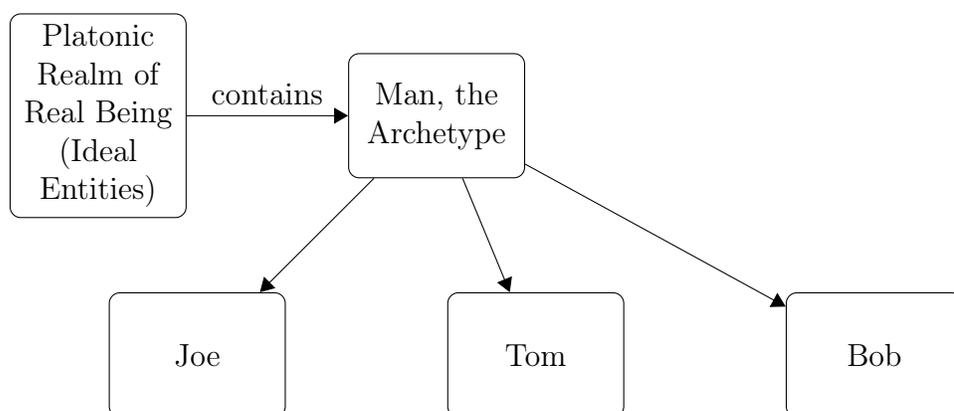


Figure 272.2: Platonist Particular Entities **Do** Come From a Single Archetype

Human beings are more complex than this would indicate and also share aspects of being with other living creatures and even with non-living entities. We can go back to the earlier diagram which shows my way of thinking about being and talking about being. This points to the richer and more complex truth but misleads only because it doesn't show—I don't know how to show for now—the tangles of aspects of being which move from one layer of abstract being to help form the next layer of somewhat more concrete being.

Our moral natures are part of our human natures on the whole, but in a very complex way that can be made clear only when we learn to speak in those richer and more complex terms. For now, try to imagine the clean, simple lines from one layer of being, relatively more abstract, down to the next layer of being, relatively more concrete, as being more like twisted

cables which don't really match up from one layer of being to the next in any simple manner. A qualitative mathematical description would be a very good thing, but such a description remains to be developed. Mathematical discussions usually don't involve badly behaved many-to-many functions. I most certainly don't regard man in terms of a 'mapping' similar to those of Platonists—see Chapter 169, *From Abstract Being to Concrete Being and Narratives*, for a short discussion of my way of looking at being compared to the ways in which being is implicitly described in modern physics as well as the way that Plato and his followers described it.

Let me shift a little to discuss this issue from a slightly different angle, one which will allow a richer discussion of the nature-nurture controversy in a more complete version of this entry.

### 272.3    Man as a Creature and Not a Metaphysical Entity

I've argued this point before: we can only speak about and generalize from layers of being we can perceive and explore directly. (Take 'perceive' in a very general way to include the use of much instrumentation and also indirect observations, even statistical analyses.) We should respect God's Creation by taking seriously those layers of being we can perceive and explore directly, by taking seriously analyses and conjectures based upon those layers, and by not committing ourselves to speculations inconsistent with those layers of empirical being. We should also be generally skeptical about making metaphysical speculations not plausible in terms of our best current understanding of realms of being which are directly observable and explorable—where we also recognize that many immaterial relationships and some immaterial entities (such as social groups) do show up in the realms of empirical being.

This doesn't argue that we shouldn't hold religious faith or theological claims, only that we should explain that faith and those claims in terms consistent with our best current understanding of the observable and explorable realms of Creation. Or else: we should remain respectfully silent if we can develop no coherent and rational explanation in such terms.

## 272.4 Man the Moral Organism

I've claimed that the human mind is formed on two levels: the species and the individual. In some of my writings, I've made a claim consistent with a fairly radical understanding of quantum mechanics:

Relationships are primary over substance. This is to say that relationships come from more abstract realms of being and are the shapers and raw stuff of concrete substance.

We are shaped by relationships and can shape other living creatures by proper relationships. In particular, we can perform miracles of a sort by loving even those who seem so unlovable. By way of love, in its greater or lesser forms—my favorite lesser form of love is wonder, we can shape ourselves and others into members of the Body of Christ. The relationships are real, more abstract than those studied by physics but the various sorts of relationship merge into each other at some higher level of abstraction.

In other writings, I've also begun to separate out social formation, believing the Body of Christ to be a real entity which unites individual human beings. As God is three Persons in one God, Father and Son and Holy Spirit retaining their individuality, so those who become part of the Body of Christ will retain their individuality while being true members of an entity which is such—not just a nominal designation for a collection of individuals. This shows in the claim:

The truth unfolds in time through a communal process,

or, equivalently,

The human mind forms in time through a communal process,

I could even add:

Human moral nature forms in time through a communal process,

Through a communal process do we even become truer individuals for we shape a true human nature by becoming part of the process of forming the pilgrim Body of Christ, the Body of Christ as it exists in this mortal

realm. We learn how to share the only true freedom, that of God, by learning how to live leaning forward into the future. I'll speak lightly of these communal processes for a while as I learn ways of speaking more truly. As I've noted a number of times, I'm convinced that the proper ways are in terms of the same abstractions from which mathematicians and physicists draw their qualitative and quantitative tools for speaking of the structures of space-time.

The formation of the species mind is what we call evolution and has actually been ongoing since the first self-reproducing organisms appeared on the earth. We could even say that the evolution began with the formation of concrete being as the universe expanded, beginning with the short and spectacular expansion we call the 'Big Bang'.

In any case, there is what might be called a set of family-lines, lines of creatures of direct genetic relation. This set is the human race.

Geneticists and various sorts of other biologists are working to unwind the complexities of how genes and soma transmit possibilities, constraints, and—how often?—well-defined traits and behaviors. Those aren't proving to be simple problems and there will be plenty of job opportunities for a number of generations to come.

## **272.5    Man the Responder to Moral           Environments**

Individual human beings start life with capabilities which are set in a complex way still being unraveled by biologists of various sorts, including anthropologists, and also those who study how we develop in specific social settings. We are born with a set of genes which are a mixture of those from the ovum produced by our mother and the sperm-cell produced by our father, but the way in which our particular possibilities and limitations are determined is more complex than that. See the article on epigenetics at <http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Epigenetics> for some basics on "epigenetics [which] is the study of heritable changes in gene expression or cellular phenotype caused by mechanisms other than changes in the underlying DNA sequence." For example, in recent years, it's been shown that bad eating habits can have an effect not just on babies in the womb but even on grandchildren and perhaps beyond, even though the underlying

genes are not changed in ways other than their level of activity. This is true even if the intermediary generations had better habits.

The individual is constrained. Few of us are Albert Einstein and few Vladimir Horowitz. Not many can dance as did Fred Astaire and not many can impress followers and enemies in the way of George Washington. At the same time, we have to remember that each of these men developed their unique characteristics and talents to a high level by aggressively appropriate responses to their environments, to their opportunities and problems.

Given some rough idea of a human nature with its relatively weak specific characteristics, we can move on to that idea of an individual shaping himself, perhaps even to become a true morally well-ordered person rather than just a human animal.

## 272.6 Man the Character in a Story Told by God

Created being gives the stuff of the story but the story is a dynamic movement through time, inherently unpredictable (that is—factual) and—in my opinion as a Christian—under the direction and control of God.

We can think of the universe, the object studied by physicists and chemists, as one realm of created being. When we see the events in and of this universe as a narrative morally ordered to the purposes of God, it becomes what I call a ‘world’.

Morality is a complex and multi-layered concept in my way of thought. It involves a certain ordering of the created being, the very flesh of the human moral actor and the relationships he has formed with other human beings and non-human creatures and with the physical world and with God.

But the actor has to act. He has to respond to the world, learning his role by an interaction of what he is in his created being and what seems to be expected of him by the activity around him. He forms himself as a person, or fails to do so, and can intend—that is, grow as an organism—toward the state of moral person, a human being shaped as a true brother or sister of the Son of God in His human nature.

I’ve not fully developed any of this. It’s still very sketchy in part but it’s necessary, at least to my way of thought, to lay it out this way before filling in the gaps or fleshing out the skeletal parts. To my way of thinking,

this is the point where stories are needed to describe this story, the smaller narratives which are our lives with their moral difficulties and moral accomplishments and moral vagaries and the larger narratives—right up to the entirety of Creation – which our lives are part of.

## **272.7    The Body of Christ Becomes Perceptible**

Biology teaches about entities within family lines, the entities developing as individuals and the family lines evolving in what might be called a neo-neo-Darwinist way. So much has been discovered or hinted at since the emergence of the synthesis of genetic knowledge into evolutionary theory. In particular, we're learning that there are effects such as those labeled 'epigenetic' which tie us into our communities, especially to our parents and grandparents, in very direct and observable ways.

In any case, the human race is such a family line, that is, a line of organisms with a shared history as manifested in both DNA and also flesh-and-blood. But something else has come to exist, something which is the home of human beings in most ways. As a Christian, I believe that mysterious something to be the Body of Christ which came into existence in a frail and mortal form with the Resurrection of Christ or perhaps the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the followers of Christ on Pentecost. Non-Christians can think of this something else as the human race becoming a self-conscious entity of a very vague and complex sort.

History since the Body of Christ formed can be described as the biography of that Body. The Body of Christ as it currently exists has been shaped partially by its often disedifying history though it works also, vaguely and indirectly, towards the purposes God has intended for it from its creation. In this way, the Body of Christ is not different from other mortal organisms forming in this world, even saints bound for Heaven.

So it is that the Body of Christ is disease-ridden, drained by parasites, and loaded with cancerous organs. Not a pretty sight, but, it remains alive as do so many human beings, for their allotted time, however much they are also moral and physical messes. We must remember that the opposite of love isn't hate but indifference. I'd add that the opposite of purity isn't lust but rather passiveness in the face of what can be loved properly or

improperly. In the end, it's life and not moral purity which drives us or leads us to the Body of Christ and to God.

## 272.8 A More Concrete Take on the Nature of Morality

Morality is a word which covers some aspects of human nature when it's well-shaped in response to Creation understood in terms of God's purposes. As such, morality itself has some aspects which draw more or less directly upon abstract forms of being and others which draw upon concrete forms of being. Perhaps most importantly, morality has aspects which draw upon the story God is telling in and with this universe, the story which is the world, that is again, the universe seen in light of God's purposes.

We should realize that good men can shape themselves to those purposes even if they don't believe in a personal God who is all-loving and all-powerful. It's also true that those who believe in such a God can be badly malformed in moral character—as a result of their own responses to this world misperceived and misunderstood. Melville came to the conclusion that Americans were willfully so malformed, trying to live in a world they preferred to the one the Creator has given us.

Americans are a nice people, morally well-ordered for a world different from the one in which we happen to live. We are shaped for the world which has been shown in *Father Knows Best*, *Leave it to Beaver*, and countless movies from Hollywood. As such, we are a dangerous and destructive people when we come into certain types of conflicts. We destroy countries and kill large numbers of people and—just like Hitler's logistical genius, Adolf Eichmann—can't understand why anyone could hate us when we feel so good about ourselves. We go in heavily armed and assuming that good people there will be just like those in television shows about American families living in Plastics town. When those people don't appreciate our efforts on their behalf, we know there are no good ones amongst them and we fire.

I use this example often, not because I hate my own people, though I'm not exactly a fan of the vast majority of American leaders since the generation of the Founding Fathers. I use this example of my own American people being morally malformed, morally insane as Melville put matters,

because we're a good example of a people who seem so morally good when in certain circumstances and are, in fact, quite willing to make a number of sacrifices for others, but are monsters of a unique type when unleashed upon the world with more power than we can even understand.

I think other peoples in the West, including the Germans of the 1930s and 1940s and the British over the past few centuries, are much like us Americans. We stubbornly stick to several wrong ideas, such as the (often implicit) belief that moral goodness is realized or at least confirmed when we feel good about ourselves. In *The Quiet American*, Graham Greene said that we Americans feel the world exists to give us opportunities to feel good about ourselves. Even as those middle-class Germans, so horrified by Hitler's goals as they were revealed, could feel good that they were doing their duty by their families and their communities, holding down respectable jobs and paying their bills and going to church each Sunday.

One major theme in my various writings is the need to make peace with empirical reality. In this context of moral nature, we need to realize that a moral nature formed in response to willfully held illusions of reality will be a psychotic nature of a special sort.

## 273 Embodied We Are

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1090>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/12/01.]

Mind and body are not separate nor is body for real and mind a mere epiphenomenon. The body is concrete, objective stuff but mind is a set of relationships with both concrete and abstract being.

During recent weeks, I picked up links to various articles which reaffirm our embodied natures. From our bodies of physical stuff, we think to look out into a world but we don't even truly see it unless we engage in active exploration, unless we actively respond to what we find out there. It's a boom field, this business of exploring our embodied natures. The article titled *How Touch and Movement Contribute to the Development of the Brain* can be viewed at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/10/111014080017.htm>. But the well-formed brain itself makes it possible to develop the skills that allow us to continue our exploration of our environments. It must be so, there is a scientific study titled *Big, Little, Tall and Tiny: Learning Spatial Terms Improves Children's Spatial Skills* at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/11/111109125737.htm>. And it likely is true, though the researchers might have gotten some things wrong, because it is consistent with the body of modern knowledge about human nature, knowledge so consistent with the teachings of that Medieval man, St. Thomas Aquinas. Man is an organism. Man intends in a true sense when he is developing as an organism in a properly willed, properly thought-out, way.

Little of this new knowledge should be truly surprising to those who are self-aware, who have deeply experienced and come to know the way that a simple cold can distort perceptions and thoughts and fundamental attitudes. Many in this therapeutic age might be more surprised to learn that *Training*

in ‘Concrete Thinking’ Can Be Self-Help Treatment for Depression, *Study Suggests*—see the article of that title at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/11/111117202935.htm>. Learning how to deal with this thing-ish world can cure depression. Anchor yourself. The world can be nasty but those who deal with this world as it is can think straight and not have their thinking distorted in a way we’d label as ‘depressed’. There was recently a discovery I’d mentioned in an earlier entry that the physical problems, including posture problems, of bipolar disease—a truly nasty psychiatric disorder—develop years before those psychiatric problems. No one knows quite what that means yet, but it’s hardly surprising to learn that changing our posture can affect how we feel and how our brains work: go to <http://www.scientificamerican.com/podcast/episode.cfm?id=mind-body-mind-blower-posture-affec-11-11-28> for a short introduction and a podcast titled *Mind-Body Mindblower: Posture Affects Estimates*. Sit up straight, just as your Grannie told you to do.

I suspect that a very interesting study might be done on the relationship between psychiatric disorders and various disorders of the proprioceptive systems of human beings.

Are snakes nasty partly because they crawl through the dust? Were they selected over the ages for such an embodiment because they were a line of particularly nasty reptiles? As I recall from reading *Lord of the Rings* decades ago, noble creatures had noble postures and noble ways of moving through the world. Gollum was a crouching and slouching creature and the orcs moved as if stomping life out with every heavy-booted tread. I’m not a big fan of fantasy but Tolkien seems to have had good insight into some moral issues.

Were Lord Byron’s mental and emotional problems increased by his club-foot? (He was descended from a line of the Gordons which had a terrible problem with male-only bipolar disorder. I’m descended from a different line of the Gordons but there seems to be a certain amount of alcoholism and depression, male and female, in my family line.)

Should we be teaching children how to stand properly and how to move properly? Should all young humans be taught to stand tall, proud in the proper way?

I myself am coming out of a short period of writer’s block which followed an intense 3-week volunteer project in my parish—the last week was the period of no electricity and no heat in my part of New England. I think my histamine levels sky-rocketed, perhaps partly because of damage to my

tendons and general exhaustion and so forth. My arms often throbbed with what I suspect was a healing process. My mood was often dark, a sort of paranoia I often suffer when I have tendinitis or a cold or sinus infection or any other disorder which plays with histamine levels. During that dusky, though not truly dark, period, was I slouching? Was I looking at damaged trees and the blue skies of an abnormally mild November from a bad angle?

I am embodied but that doesn't mean that my body enslaves me. It doesn't mean this thing-like world enslaves me. Somehow, I've a small bit of moral freedom, mostly in the future, but that future nature of my freedom allows me to leverage that freedom. I can learn the ways in which I'm constrained, sometimes to the edge of slavery. I can move a fraction of an inch to the side to slip out of those constraints over the next few years. I can maneuver around the traps and snake-pits.

Why is the world as it is? Why did God create a world with so many problems, so much pain and suffering, so much death?

Perhaps we gain our freedom, a proper creaturely freedom, by learning how to look to our future self, to choose to be a better self, healthier in body and mind, healthier in our relationships to our own selves and to our human communities and to our world. Perhaps this active self which seeks its own true good and the good of all those around it is the dynamic self which can be happy living in community with the saints and with God? Perhaps we can learn how to be God-like by learning how to properly stand and move and how to properly look at the world and think about it?



# 274 The Analysis of Free-will and Other Metaphysical Misdirections of Empirical Thought

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1119>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/12/12.]

In a faraway region of spacetime, I asked the question which resulted in Chapter 385, *Is this evidence against free-will?*, where I start by noting:

Over the past decade or more, neuroscientists have found strong evidence that we start to act before we're consciously aware of our own actions. This is a problem to those who believe in free-will in the sense of a power of an autonomous agent. It isn't much of a problem to one who accepts the views about moral nature which were taught by St. Thomas Aquinas.

If we think of free-will as being some sort of agent with true freedom from the constraints of our biological selves, our human organisms, then we can reach any absurdity in the same way that we can say: If pigs can fly then true peace can come to men in this mortal realm. This is to say that free-will of that sort is an absurdity, an ill-conception in a manner of speaking. If such a free-will existed, it would be our master and we would not have any freedom at all. We human creatures, biological organisms, would be illusions of a sort.

St. Thomas Aquinas knew better, though he often stated his insights in highly compromised ways—especially in his two *Summas*, perhaps his

great works only in number of pages. I'd advise reading his commentary on *St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians*. (A translation is freely available at the website, *Nova et Vetera* – <http://nvjournal.net/files/Aquinas-Corinthians.pdf>.) In a word, Aquinas knew our human natures to be embodied and his mistaken idea of a subsistent (not 'immortal') soul or mind (organ of thinking under either term) was a result of his fear that an organ of flesh could never be dynamic enough to allow for conceptual thought. A dry-as-dust Mr. Spock of sorts, a 'soul' or 'mind' had to be pasted on to our human selves to allow us to engage in such acts of forming the concept of 'species'. Modern brain-scientists and other physical scientists have proven that neurons made of the stuff of neutrons and protons and electrons are easily dynamic enough for such a task.

Modern scientists have also discovered reasons to disbelieve in any disembodied human will, let alone one fully 'free' of the states and events of our bodily stuff. This article, *Is Free Will an Illusion?* found at <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=is-free-will-an-illusion>, discusses some of the arguments for and against free-will, mostly philosophical arguments of a sort I consider to be somewhat empty and meaningless. Even some of the better insights from modern psychology are presented as minor corrections to an inherited view of moral freedom which was a stretch to start with and seems now to be thoroughly implausible. This might seem strange since *Scientific American* would be expected to show a bias towards, yes, science. And scientists, as I noted at the beginning of this essay, have made a variety of discoveries involving human brain-activity and motor-activity which throw cold water—deservedly – upon most theories of this 'free-will' thingie.

If we were to address the philosophical issues, we should start out with discussions about the nature of a human being, a biological organism. Is it possible for such an entity to have a component corresponding to what philosophers seem to be describing when they talk or write about free-will? I'd say, "no," with no reservations. If you, the creature of flesh and blood, control that free-will do-hickey, it isn't free. And, again, if it is free from you as a highly-constrained biological organism, it's some sort of agent which is free from your control and would be your master for good or ill.

In Chapter 219, *What is Freedom?*, I said:

In the modern world, we tend to think of freedom in terms of satisfying desires. To be sure, even many who live for that

false sort of freedom seem to realize that we then become no more than our desires or, more horribly, the thwarting of those desires—a terrible and humiliating state in either case. Hannibal the Cannibal is the most free of all modern men because he has become his desires and he has gained the power to satisfy them. Hannibal the Cannibal is the role-model for our politicians and our lawyers, our investment bankers and our corporate executives, our athletes and our entertainers. He may even be a role-model for many clergymen.

And then I pointed in a different direction with a quote from Henri Bergson:

[W]e are free when our acts spring from our whole personality, when they express it, when they have that indefinable resemblance to it which one sometimes finds between the artist and his work. [11] [page 172]

In truth, you the human organism engage in acts of volition, acts of will, which are constrained in a number of ways, most importantly – as I often claim: you often have some substantial but limited freedom to change yourself but yourself in the short-term will almost always act according to the way it has been shaped in the past. In that same essay from an earlier time, I also provided this quote a book by the neurobiologist and philosopher Walter J. Freeman:

An intent is the directing of an action toward some future goal that is defined and chosen by the actor. [35] [page 8]

I then comment on that quote from Professor Freeman:

In Thomistic moral philosophy, ‘intent’ defines human morality and freedom. We don’t freely will to be a good man or a good woman, we choose to struggle towards that state of goodness. We don’t freely will to cut down on our drinking or stop smoking, we choose to move towards a state where we don’t continue our bad habits or bad thoughts because our brains and our bodies and our relationships to others and to our environments have all changed. We should realize that the very process

of forming intents can be a bit vague if only because we don't see the goal clearly until we're well along the path. I've certainly deluded myself often about the goal of becoming a Christ-like man and I've also deluded myself about the nature of the path I have to travel. The forming of our moral intentions is an ongoing process and not an action taken once and for all time.

The modern concept of free-will is useful to entrepreneurs, political or commercial, as they go about their task of destroying local community life to draw us all into the gigantic marketplaces of a land where natural cultural and physical boundaries have been dismantled. That concept of free-will leaves most human beings stripped of their defenses against those entrepreneurs and other predators and parasites of a cosmopolitanism and imperialism rendered all the more damaging to human beings by the pretense, in the U.S. and other countries, that we remain dedicated to traditional human values.

Our moral natures are now but our freedom lies in that future we can only dimly see as we intend, that is—plan and act, to develop the proper attitudes and habits, to become the human being we'd like to be. Return to Bergson's words above, “[W]e are free when our acts spring from our whole personality,” and remember that our whole personality is that of a biological organism, one of flesh and blood, of liver and heart and brain and relationships to other creatures and to the world as physical environments.

Read or re-read the article, *Is Free Will an Illusion?* at <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=is-free-will-an-illusion>, if you wish. It makes some good points but in such a clumsy way. The author adopts the mainstream understanding of free-will, moral will, and all that, before starting to add and truncate and he points towards the sort of Baroque understanding of man which underlies our therapeutic society and makes it so hard to make sense of our own selves, hard to figure out how to move forward to that better future which can be seen so clearly—as a possibility—once we act according to the insights found in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas and Walter J. Freeman and also found in my writings. That cleaner way of understanding human nature, cleaner in a way that strongly indicates “more truthful,” allows for cleaner discussions and for an “Aha!” moment when you see what's going on.

## 275 We Prefer to Cooperate With Those Like Ourselves

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1254>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/04/30.]

I've written about evidence that we like to live and work with those similar to ourselves, though there is still some substantial uncertainty about the mixture of culture and genes in the understanding of "similar to ourselves." I've also written of my strong belief that this world, our universe seen in light of God's purposes, is the story of the formation of the Body of Christ. As I see it, that Body is Christ's brothers and sisters, similar to ourselves and dissimilar, united in an image of the truest community; as God is Father and Son and Holy Spirit in one God, so the Body of Christ will be a multitude of human beings, including the human nature of the Son of God, united in that one Body. In this sort of community, each person or Person retains their individuality while sharing fully in communal acts and thoughts and feelings.

Okay, so that taken care of, there is some more evidence coming in that we can detect those who are genetically similar to us and prefer to cooperate with those most similar to us. In this article, *Genetic Similarity Promotes Cooperation: Study of Simple Organisms Reveals Preference for Those Who Resemble Themselves* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2012/04/120418204358.htm>, we read:

In a dog-eat-dog world of ruthless competition and 'survival of the fittest,' new research from the University of Leicester reveals that individuals are genetically programmed to work together and cooperate with those who most resemble themselves.

A tendency for similar individuals to cooperate selectively with one another, even if they are not close relatives, can evolve spontaneously in simple organisms. This may help to explain why cooperation is so widespread in nature, the study suggests.

The modern world has had much in the way of education programs and other efforts to suppress that inborn tendency of organisms which evolve under conditions of cooperation so that they cooperate best with those similar to their own selves. I suspect there are a variety of very complex genetic and epigenetic mechanisms to further strengthen this tendency in social animals, such as wolves and men, and those mechanisms would be scattered across a variety of loosely linked genes, hormonal and other biochemical responses of egg-laying or live-bearing mothers, and perhaps other aspects of our reproducing selves. I might claim there has been an ongoing effort by those who have exaggerated our individualistic characteristics, the Liberals – both the intellectually coherent Classical Liberals and the somewhat scatterbrained and improvisational Collectivist Liberals, to suppress such tendencies, nativist or exclusionary or whatever term you wish to use.

Back in 2007, I wrote about this issue with regard to the work of a scholar, Robert Putnam, who deals more with the cultural aspects of human social life, though the genetic and cultural aspects aren't really fully separable, to say the least. In that essay which is included in this book as Chapter 218, *Networks of Public Spaces Rather Than One Square*, I wrote:

There's been a buzz of sorts on parts of the Internet because of a major study written by a pro-diversity liberal, Professor Robert Putnam of Harvard. That study indicates there are some serious problems with diversity. He thinks, or maybe hopes, those problems to be of a short-term nature. There might be other ways than a simple choice between a cosmopolitanism that melts down local communities or at least renders them ineffective and a return to tribalism.

There's an overview article on Putnam's study, *The Downside of Diversity* found at <http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/08/05/news/diversity.php>". The article begins:

"It has become increasingly popular to speak of racial and ethnic diversity as a civic strength. From multicultural festivals

to pronouncements from political leaders, the message is the same: our differences make us stronger.

“But a massive new study, based on detailed interviews of nearly 30,000 people across America, has concluded just the opposite. Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam—famous for *Bowling Alone*, his 2000 book on declining civic engagement—has found that the greater the diversity in a community, the fewer people vote and the less they volunteer, the less they give to charity and work on community projects. In the most diverse communities, neighbors trust one another about half as much as they do in the most homogeneous settings. The study, the largest ever on civic engagement in America, found that virtually all measures of civic health are lower in more diverse settings.

“‘The extent of the effect is shocking,’ says Scott Page, a University of Michigan political scientist.

“[Michael Jonas, *Boston Globe*, as published in *International Herald Tribune* on August 5, 2007]”

It’s not healthy, not in moral nor emotional nor mental terms, to try to fix reality by overriding it. We should be trying to form that Body of Christ, the greater and most inclusive possible human community, by being honest about our instincts and moving on to broaden the scope of our ways of thinking and our ways of acting, not by overriding instincts which are good in a limited way. The overriding of instincts which are good but too limited is more likely to end in moral confusion or even outright moral disorder.

We have to learn how to work towards changes which will take place over generations rather than rushing into rapid reforms within the scope of some 5-year plan of either a Socialist or Collectivist Liberal bureaucrat. Modern do-gooders tend to be a lot like those Californians of the common jokes, somewhat bubble-headed and “wanting it all and wanting it now.” The problem we now face is that objective developments in history and misdirected human efforts have done a lot of damage to the human communities in which our better behaviors and thoughts can develop so that we cooperate well with those like us, leaving open that possibility of expanding the scope of those better behaviors and thoughts. We’ve done damage even to our instincts to do good in limited communal contexts in our self-righteous efforts to mold everyone to be good to everyone.



# 276 Biologically-based Altruism is More Complicated Than We Might Think

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1260>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/05/10.]

Many thinkers in history, philosophers and others, have imagined they could deal with moral issues by conjecturing a small set of sharply formed assumptions, perhaps a set of virtues which were said to be the building blocks of human moral character. Christians should have known better because the fundamental doctrine of moderate realism, similar to an empirical version of Aristotelian common-sense, tells us that any valid abstractions are drawn from what exists, thing-like being and its various immaterial aspects such as relationships between multiple things.

In line with some earlier thinkers, including Augustine of Hippo, I've claimed that virtues and vices can be useful but problems arise such as the unfortunate fact that virtues and vices are differently shaped versions of the same human traits. For example, lust—even of the type leading to rape, is a deformed version of the sexual attraction which is natural and good, which is a foundation of marital relationships and the forming of families.

We need to seriously examine our towering piles of modern empirical knowledge about human beings and other creatures, especially other social creatures, and to figure out a better way to describe and analyze our moral characters. I would expect a good deal of overlap with the descriptions and analyses of virtues and vices to be found in traditional works of moral philosophy and moral theology and political science and so forth. I would also expect some surprises as profound as those which came with the real-

ization that Maxwell's equations describing electromagnetism didn't obey the principles of Galilean/Newtonian relativity. That led to Einstein's proposals which were fully developed into Special Relativity by his subsequent efforts as well as those of a few other mathematicians and physicists. Mass and velocity and acceleration remained as valid descriptive elements but there were some important changes in our understanding of these elements, especially under extreme conditions which Galileo and Newton couldn't have explored. In a similar way, modern life with its technology as well as the sheer mass and variety of human life, has produced extreme social and political and economic conditions. I would expect these profound surprises about human moral nature to produce understandings which simplify to substantially the earlier understandings under many conditions but lead to surprises under the extreme conditions which are quite common in our time.

A recent article, *Not All Altruism Is Alike, Says New Study*, found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2012/04/120430140023.htm>, we learn:

Not all acts of altruism are alike, says a new study. From bees and wasps that die defending their nests, to elephants that cooperate to care for young, a new mathematical model pinpoints the environmental conditions that favor one form of altruism over another.

The model predicts that creatures will help each other in different ways depending on whether key resources such as food and habitat are scarce or abundant, say researchers from Indiana University and the National Evolutionary Synthesis Center in Durham, North Carolina.

The article tells us about one complication which seems obvious in retrospect:

For example, some creatures cooperate for the sake of defense, others to find food, and others to care for young, [Michael Wade, a professor at Indiana University and a visiting scholar at the National Evolutionary Synthesis Center] explained.

There are some interesting ideas to be explored in this field, some of which may have practical implications for politics, charity work, family life, and who knows what else.

Often do I quote the historian Carroll Quigley:

The truth emerges in time through a communal process.

This is true of truths manifested in purely empirical ways and also of the allegedly grander truths of metaphysics. In fact, a truer and more humble metaphysics would recognize the truths which emerge as men explore empirical reality. A grand and absolute truth may not be so grand nor so absolute if it conflicts with a humble fact drawn from study of creaturely nature.



# 277 We Are Hunks of Clay, Not Creatures of Metaphysical Attributes

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1272>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/05/24.]

Lust is a deformed version of the virtue of love, the binding force in a number of human relationships including those involving God. Moreover, the passions and more quiet feelings we know as love are those which evolved amongst social mammals. It's quite a plausible speculation that our ancient four-legged ancestors first began to melt inside when looking into the faces of infants with their soft features and outsized eyes and ears. Did love between Mom and Dad come from a transference of their separate loves for Junior? Maybe. It makes for a good tale and is supported well enough, if still speculatively, to be more than a just-so story.

Our characteristics aren't drawn from the opposing and non-overlapping lists which have come from the imaginations of philosophers and poets and theologians and pranksters. Many of those lists, to be sure, were essential parts of efforts which were highly plausible and which formed part of the historical development of human thought. Some remain the foundations of our best ways of educating our youth and our own selves in proper ways of behaving and forming relationships in stable environments, but they aren't dynamic. They have little to do with individual creatures who develop inside of evolving and developing communities, all part of a grand scheme of evolution taking place over billions of years inside of a universe evolving and developing over a greater amount of time. Systems of virtues and vices are pseudo-metaphysical schemes in which the definitions are no less and

no more than a snapshot of a world which can sometimes be stable but can sometimes change at a rapid pace.

On a more positive line of thought: I've noted before in my writings, we should be careful to think of our human selves as creatures of a strange clay-like stuff. The clay changes over time as our species evolves and the environments, including human relationships, which shape that clay also change over time. We are born with specific potentials and also some clearly defined characteristics. We become specific human animals as a result—at least ideally—of active responses to our environments and even some understanding of the entire world or even the entirety of Creation. For most human beings, these greater understandings aren't the result of personal exploration in strange lands or libraries, results further refined by analysis and contemplation. For most human beings, these greater understandings of world and Creation or Cosmos or whatever are the cultural air we breathe in and the economic food we eat. They are those environments which shape us.

What about those with damaged minds or bodies? Are, for example, terrible mental and emotional disorders the result of some potentially good trait going bad? I don't find it at all surprising that there is some evidence that even bipolar disorder might have some benefits in this messy world—see [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/bipolar\\_disorder](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/bipolar_disorder). In the article, *Research Explores the Positives of Bipolar Disorder* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2012/05/120503115927.htm>, we can read:

The problems of living with bipolar have been well documented, but a new study by Lancaster University has captured the views of those who also report highly-valued, positive experiences of living with the condition.

Researchers at Lancaster's Spectrum Centre, which is dedicated to the study of bipolar disorder, interviewed and recorded their views of ten people with a bipolar diagnosis, aged between 24 and 57. Participants in the study reported a number of perceived benefits to the condition ranging from sharper senses to increased productivity.

The research was designed to explore growing evidence that some people with bipolar value their experiences and in some cases would prefer not to be without the condition.

Participants described a wide range of experiences and internal states that they believed they felt to a far greater intensity than those without the condition. These included increased perceptual sensitivity, creativity, focus and clarity of thought.

We can also read:

Dr Fiona Lobban, who led the study, said: “Bipolar Disorder is generally seen as a severe and enduring mental illness with serious negative consequences for the people with this diagnosis and their friends and family. For some people this is very much the case. Research shows that long term unemployment rates are high, relationships are marred by high levels of burden on family and friends and quality of life is often poor. High rates of drug and alcohol misuse are reported for people with this diagnosis and suicide rates are twenty times that of the general population.

“However, despite all these factors researchers and clinicians are aware that that some aspects of bipolar experiences are also highly valued by some people. We wanted to find out what these positive experiences were.”

I'll suggest that the manic phases of bipolar disorder might well be hints of the 'high-energy' state we might enjoy in the world of the Resurrected where the saved share the life of the Son of God. The depressed phases might be a hint of the calm. Those who are resurrected to be companions of Jesus Christ might well enjoy both states at once, rather than the lukewarm state to which human beings accustom themselves in this life.

On a more mundane level, this issue is of some personal interest. After all, I do work, creative thought and writing, which has forced many into cycles of high-energy and quiet study or contemplation or simply energy-gathering. Perhaps some are attracted to creative fields because they naturally take to such patterns of work. I might be one of them. I naturally take to periods of quiet reading and the pursuance of lighter lines of thought and love the mood surges when lines of thought come together and I can put some words together to communicate what's been happening inside of me. I don't suffer from, or benefit from, the extreme mood and thought swings of a Lord Byron, but I certainly wouldn't want to give up my more

moderate swings even though I sometimes feel low-key at times when my external circumstances wouldn't justify any sort of depression.

## 278 Genetics Without Historical Context

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1301>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/06/11.]

Here's an article about hunting for your ancestry by way of genetic analysis: *Ancestry testing goes for pinpoint accuracy* found at <http://www.nature.com/news/ancestry-testing-goes-for-pinpoint-accuracy-1.10785>.

The article warns that interpreting the results of genetic tests can be difficult. Apparently, some of the testing companies have not only advanced equipment and well-trained technicians but also reputable academic researchers as advisers. That may not matter in all cases since no one knows how to explain some of the complexities of genetic analysis in ordinary language nor can the experts themselves understand all those complexities. The results of tests from even the most sophisticated companies might well be wrong. Among other problems, the techniques can't yet correlate large numbers of genes well enough to clearly distinguish, in an example found in the article, a stretch of genes found in males from Scandinavia and North Africa.

What would detailed information give us if these technical problems are one day solved? So far as I know, I'm nearly all British in my ancestry—perhaps a mixture of Celt and archaic British and Germanic or Nordic of various sorts. (For this essay, I define 'British' in terms of residence as of a thousand years ago or so. By 'archaic British', I mean the residents of the British Isles before the Celtic and then Germanic immigrations, conquests, and other uninvited intrusions.) My father's side is mostly of English ancestry, coming probably from the Birmingham region with perhaps a drop

of Native American blood. My mother's side is a mixture of Highlander (true Scots who were members of a Gaelic tribe of the northern regions of Ireland: 'Scotia' was the Roman name for a region occupied by Irish Gaels), Anglo-Norman, Lowlander (labeled 'Lithonian English' by some historians and said by some to be largely Anglo-Saxon and perhaps some of that 'archaic Brit'.) Would I gain much to discover the exact percentages or to discover that, say, 4% of my genes are from the Lakota Sioux or maybe to discover that some guy from Greece slipped into my ancestry? It'd be interesting to discover I carry genes from someone as exotic as an Apache or a Babylonian Jew, but would it mean much to me? Serious genetic studies across all or some of the human race, some of which are ongoing, might tell us much that would be interesting and important about the large-scale movements of peoples. Such studies might also help us to answer such questions as: did various invaders exterminate or absorb the native populations? Recent research indicates that at least some Neandertal populations were absorbed by breeding into growing populations of modern human beings rather than being exterminated: see John Hawks' website at <http://johnhawks.net/weblog> for information and intelligent, professional analyses of the issues of human origin and some related issues. He also defends Neandertal man with great enthusiasm.

Math is difficult, Barbie. Genetics is difficult, Ken. And so is history. . .

One danger in all of this is that we might forget that genes are important but you don't come into or leave this world as a freestanding individual built according to some specs found in your genes. The advocates of cultural shaping or even cultural determinism were off-base but they were on the right continent. We are hunks of clay with particular characteristics and lots of undeveloped possibilities. We are shaped as others interact with us and as we interact with others and with our environments, including the entirety of our cultural settings. We are born into narratives, histories, and we will ourselves live in personal narratives, biographies, which interact with a large number of other narratives, including those of the non-living world. Within broad possibilities given by our genetic makeup, the entirety of the human species and then successively more specific family lines, we become moral creatures, of various qualities, by responding actively to our environments.

Let's say I get a genetic analysis and it confirms I carry Gaelic (Celtic) genes and Anglo-Norman (Germanic-Nordic) genes and English genes from the Birmingham area (I'm guessing those ancestors of mine were mostly

non-Gaelic Celts but they might have been at least partly Germanic or partly Gaelic). What does that mean? I have enough understanding of the history of those peoples and of some of my ancestors in recent generations so that I can draw tentative conclusions about the possible traits found in their genes or perhaps activity levels of genes coming from environmental factors—let's label this last effect as 'epigenetics'. (See <http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Epigenetics> for an introductory overview.) My Gaelic ancestors greatly preferred the pastoral life, in Ireland and the Highlands of Scotland and the backwoods of Kentucky. My Anglo-Norman ancestors were good at organizing or participating in large-scale projects, including military invasions and the imposition of hierarchical structures on conquered countries. My other (presumed) British ancestors have proven their worth as farmers, shopkeepers, factory workers, and managers—very modern of them. This seems to open up a lot of possibilities for my family line, though it's doubtful many will have more than a small share of all those implied talents and moral qualities.

The situation remains far from clear even given all my assumptions including that of improved technical understanding of genes and of our various human family lines. Were my ancestors typical Gaels or Anglo-Normans or Celts? Are epigenetic and cultural effects strong enough to mitigate any undesirable traits or to weaken any desirable traits displayed by my ancestors? Can my culture or my personal efforts help me to be a little different than any of my ancestral groups if I or my family or my other communities so choose?

Our world is a narrative composed of an unimaginably large number of smaller narratives. That narrative is set in a concrete world of concrete entities. Those entities and that world have been shaped from more abstract stuff which remains yet in the perceptible and tangible stuff of this world. To understand this world, we need to understand both the narrative (history in the context of this essay) and also the stuff (genes and other bodily substances in that same context). Without the larger scale perspective, without a knowledge of context and perhaps a very broad context, knowledge of our genetic makeup remains useful for medical purposes but it's worthless for understanding ourselves and our other possibilities. Even medical knowledge is improved by knowledge of the foods our ancestors ate or the level of their physical activity.

We're concrete creatures and not just a catalog of possible or actual medical problems, some good medical traits, and a variety of possible traits

of other sorts. We are flesh-and-blood us, for good and bad.

## 279 Intelligent Design: Technology and Biology

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1315>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/06/22.]

One of the problems with a good understanding of some domain is that we adopt such understandings as rigid habits of thought even when they deal with empirical matters and should be rethought as we learn more or as new possibilities emerge as a result of human activities. We forget we're mortal creatures in a story during which more knowledge and deeper understandings of established knowledge emerge over time, at least if we live courageously and faithfully. The story is what it is but we move forward gaining richer and more complex understandings the story, its living characters, and its nonliving stuff.

The take-down of Intelligent Design in the realm of biology, to my own experience, will usually ignore the fact that complex systems can never be intelligently designed in the way that a child will design and build a simple car from Lego or from other similar or more powerful toys. Intelligent Design not only fails in trying to understand the world of carbon-based life-forms, it also fails in trying to understand the world of asphalt road-systems, though it can explain cars to a greater extent, and steel-and-concrete bridges, though it can explain concrete piers and steel arches to a very great extent indeed. Sometimes systems which work in some sense end up doing more harm than good, such as a well-designed, well-built bridge which destroys a community by interfering with the general flow of life in that community. As time goes on, a variety of adjustments are made to road-systems, to working methods in machine shops, to computer networks. It's likely a project will fail, sometimes in a spectacular and embarrassing way, if

it doesn't properly consider that greater context. Anyone wishing to explore these issues can look into the writings of the engineer and historian, Henry Petroski—see [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Henry\\_Petroski](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Henry_Petroski), an expert in failure analysis, who has written intelligently and in a truly humanistic manner about the greater context of engineering.

Let me concentrate on computer networks for discussing this lack of validity of Intelligent Design as a general concept; it's not just a good idea wrongfully applied to understanding the forms and functions and relationships of living creatures. The Internet itself as first proposed by the Pentagon's 'blue-sky' technology division, DARPA – see <http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/DARPA>, was to be a flexible network which would adapt its communication routes to disasters, such as a nuclear attack, though the system lived on a rigidly designed physical network. The system was designed to use selection processes more directly oriented to specific goals than the processes of evolutionary theories in biology, but the designers tried to leave the Internet as flexible as possible. There was an attempt to move away from strictly mechanistic, rationalistic design techniques of the sort which are assumed to be true intelligence by advocates of Intelligent Design and by many others. We don't yet know the results, but it could certainly be argued, and has been argued in various ways, that the Internet is very successful as an open system which can be changed in various ways to meet the various needs of its users, ranging from insurance companies to journalists to social clubs to teenaged would-be engineers or software designers to teenaged gossipers to various sorts of consumers or producers or archivers of music and literature.

Not only is Intelligent Design a misapplication of rationalistic thought to evolutionary biology, it's a very limited understanding of intelligence, of mind if you will, and it pretty much excludes intellect as defined by Jacques Barzun:

Intellect is the capitalized and communal form of live intelligence; it is intelligence stored up and made into habits of discipline, signs and symbols of meaning, chains of reasoning and spurs to emotion—a shorthand and a wireless by which the mind can skip connectives, recognize ability, and communicate truth. Intellect is at once a body of common knowledge and the channels through which the right particle of it can be brought

to bear quickly, without the effort of redemonstration, on the matter in hand.

This capitalized and communal form of live intelligence truly is live intelligence just as a human community truly is a form of human life. The intellect includes all that knowledge found in the memories of pipe-layers and the files of a local government: where are the rock ledges which might create problems for future sewer projects. It includes knowledge of how to shop in the local retail stores, going to farm-stands for fresh fruits and vegetables at the right time and knowing where to find veal loaf for the Polish cousins when they come to town. It includes the knowledge in the hand-movements of the local fiddlers and the local painters of murals. It includes the knowledge held by only a few nowadays of what worthwhile books remain on the shelves of the public library. It also includes the engineering and other knowledge which allows proper installation of optical cables and the proper way to start up a link to the Internet and the knowledge of useful or interesting sites on the Web, including the websites of various local institutions.

On the whole, intellect isn't always rationalistic or even necessarily self-aware. Nor is our personal intelligence. Self-awareness of the wrong sort can tangle up the fingers of a musician or even the thought processes of a talented student tackling an interesting problem in high school calculus. Conservative thinkers of the sort who appreciated tradition and the way it changes behavior, makes it intelligent by some plausible standard, have known this for centuries and perhaps there were some who knew this in ancient times.

Flexibility can be united with this sort of intelligence in a form which can be embodied in ways below the self-awareness of most human beings, though one or the other can overwhelm. A flexible system with a good tradition can decay, melting into a hunk of putty or rigidifying into a concrete wall.

Flexibility isn't found just in thriving human communities and well-functioning human technology. It's also found, to a very high degree, in nature. For example, bacteria live in a sea of various sorts of antibiotic resistance genes which can be taken up by specific lines of bacteria though only some can be active in any given bacteria and there are sometimes trade-offs with other characteristics conducive to bacterial prosperity. This is intelligence, though not the rationalistic intelligence of Intelligent Design

nor its ancestral and more plausible form found in the writings of some brilliant thinkers, and many lesser thinkers, of the Age of Enlightenment.

There is a general feeling, one anticipated by many a science-fiction author from days when computers were large and clumsy calculators, that our networks of technology will soon take on a limited sort of life, perhaps even becoming self-aware and self-sustaining and self-reproducing. There is talk on the part of credentialed experts that drones might soon be a physical equivalent to computer viruses, self-reproducing and capable of taking on or shedding particular parts or characteristics. I can't evaluate the timing of this sort of technology but I'd be pretty sure it's coming before too many decades go by though I'd prefer it be developed for peaceful purposes.

Our simpler tools, such as a carpenter's saw or a surgeon's scalpel or writing systems, become part of us as we learn to use them skillfully as the chemist and surgeon and philosopher, Michael Polanyi told us – see [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Michael\\_Polanyi](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Michael_Polanyi) told us for an overview of his life and work. I dealt with this issue in Chapter 613, *Does the Body of Christ have Non-human Components?*, which I wrote in response to a *Scientific American* article on the effect of Internet usage on our memories. I have no problems with God's story working out as it will work out, though I know that some changes which are all-right with God will scare and disorient us, especially if they come too fast. In the short-term, the primary issue is that the development of our minds is increasingly occurring in response to highly technological environments though we seem intent on proving that we can also use technology to dull our senses and our minds and to reduce our physical health or to otherwise harm ourselves or our important technological systems..

The current celebrity computer viruses, Stuxnet described at <http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Stuxnet> and Flame described at [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Flame\\_\(malware\)](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Flame_(malware)), have their own individual ways of invading a host of the right type. They start out dangerous and have the potential to become viruses invading and harming a variety of computer networks, including factory control systems and power plants and airplanes and so on. They allegedly are capable of acting a bit like biological organisms living at a rapid pace. They change in ways that correspond at least somewhat to biological evolution. Most changes, as is true of biological evolution, will end in failure, by bad luck or because the software entity (or living organism) resulting from the change is dysfunctional or at least not as functional as other entities filling the 'living' space. [Disclaimer: I'm not

claiming to be exploring new ground here nor to be developing these ideas in a good way from most perspectives but only to be exploring old ground for colonization by my ideas.]

To return to my starting point, this entire mess and far greater potential mess caused by computer viruses, not just the recent celebrity viruses, supports my claim that so-called Intelligent Design doesn't work even when we try to understand technology. I'd just say it's not a viable way of thinking about this world nor all of Creation. Nor is it a viable way of analyzing either natural or man-made systems. More generally, it doesn't accord well with the way reality works. To a Christian, that means that it's a misunderstanding of the thoughts and thought-processes which the Almighty manifested in this world. We need to understand viruses as well as primates, computer viruses as well as computer systems, to understand the story God is telling. We need to understand systems beyond rationalistic understanding, systems which can be understood only by building a narrative understanding of this world which understanding respects our knowledge of stuff and the relationships it forms and a lot more knowledge which can't often be put into a schematic form.

In Chapter 174, *Moon-dust Really is More Ethereal Than Earth-dust*, I explore, in a particular context, the nature of Creation and the nature of a proper mind as an encapsulation of that Creation. My summary also provided pointers to more detailed discussions of this issue:

This moon-dust is thing-like being which exhibits some of the nature of more abstract forms of created being such as that we know as quantum wavefunction. I've claimed in my writings that the abstract being from which thing-like being is shaped remains in that thing-like being. We and the things around us are yet the truths manifested by God as the raw stuff of Creation, the stuff from which all created being is shaped. Moon-dust provides an interesting and unexpected support for the Thomistic claim that "Things are true" and also of my additional claim that "Truths are thing-like." For one of my earliest, but still relevant discussions of this issue of abstract and concrete realms of created being, see Chapter 159, *Negative Theology in Physics and Metaphysics*. A somewhat more advanced viewpoint, with simple graphs, is developed in Chapter 169, *From Abstract Being to Concrete Being and Narratives*.

The abstract stuff from which we're shaped is still here and particularly here in moon-dust.

Mind isn't just a set of rational operations nor is technology just a set of fully controllable mechanical entities. A fuller understanding of mind, of Creation, including such human contributions as technology, can come only on the foundation provided by a better understandings of being in its full spectrum from abstract to concrete and in an understanding of the nature of narratives in this concrete world.

# 280 Liberating the Self From Creation, Liberating the Brain From Mind

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1355>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/07/23.]

I've nearly finished reading *The Americans: The Democratic Experience* [13] by Daniel J. Boorstin. I didn't have any particular plans to comment on the insights and delicately ironic prose of Professor Boorstin until I read these words:

For while Eliot, reformer though he was, still thought and talked about "subjects" of study, Hall, Dewey, and their followers thought and talked about the pupil. While Eliot aimed to emancipate the student from narrow, antiquated subject matters, giving him a freedom to "elect" the subjects of greatest interest, the others aimed to liberate the student *from* subject matter, to emancipate him to be himself.

I took some high school history courses (I think two) from a mildly eccentric but competent and learned man. Once, one of my fellow students started to pontificate on some matter and Mr. Bosquet stopped him short and said, "You have no right to an opinion until you know some facts about the matter."

The problems caused by the American attitude toward the student are still deeper than we might think from Mr. Bosquet's statement to a pupil-centric pupil, but it gives us an insightful and hardheaded start in understanding why my worldview, though far more humane than the views of the

educrats, condemns this ‘pupil-centric’ education and strongly indicates a return to subject-centric education would be wise and might help us to become far better individuals and far better peoples. It might even help us to understand how to go about building a new, and far more glorious, phase of Western Civilization.

There’s no denying that Hall and Dewey and their followers won the war to control the American educational system and probably destroyed the American mind in the process. Certainly damaged that communal mind a lot along with a lot of individual minds. Certainly forced those desiring a healthy and active mind, a mind in contact with the intellect of the West, to avoid ‘learning’ too much in mainstream educational systems. (To be sure, some were lucky in being mentored by honorable and capable teachers, but that was purely a matter of luck. I wasn’t one of those lucky few.)

First, some wikipedia links to overview articles about the lives and works of the characters mentioned in this essay:

- an article on *Daniel J. Boorstin* can be found at [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Daniel\\_Boorstin](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Daniel_Boorstin),
- an article on *G. Stanley Hall* can be found at [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/G\\_Stanley\\_Hall](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/G_Stanley_Hall),
- an article on *John Dewey* can be found at [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/John\\_Dewey](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/John_Dewey),

Both Boorstin’s book, which deals with Hall and Dewey in multiple places, and also the articles at Wikipedia tell us that their followers have been more guilty than the masters at some of the excesses of this ‘child-centered’ business.

Now, I move on to my critique.

There is no creature with a mind, blank-slate or determined from conception, which presents itself at five to the kindergarten teacher. There is also no more than a hint of intellect, capitalized and communal mind, in the vast majority of 14 year-olds. Any competent teacher has to be responsive to the student’s needs and interests, strengths and weaknesses, to their progress or lack thereof, but teachers and students don’t come together to become buddies. They come together to each do the work appropriate to their role in their communities. And that job is mostly the development

of the individual and intellectual (communal) aspects of the mind of that student. For various reasons, that job seems to be best done by courses which deal with sometimes artificially defined ‘subjects’.

Of course, the ‘subject’ isn’t the real point but rather the reality to which the subject points and the goal is to nurture a mind which gives its proper attention to that reality. A school subject might be a natural science or human history or a human art or philosophy or theology or any of many other realms or aspects of reality. We develop human minds by a proper response to reality and that response can usually be at a high level only with the assistance of a sophisticated educational system. Even those with the talent to do creative work at some point can reach that point only by proper nurturing and guidance. A good school can help a mind acquire centuries worth of intellect in a few years—at least enough of that intellect so that the learning process can be self-sustaining, so that the student is ready to move on to being himself a true teacher or leader or thinker of a civilization.

Our brains are our own and the minds which arise upon a properly active brain are mostly our personal responses to reality, though those responses are—usually—best guided by expert teachers if those brains are to amount to much in the few years allotted to us in this mortal realm. The intellectual aspects of our minds are the communal responses to reality we accept into our own minds even though we might struggle against some things we see as errors or just unlovable in our traditions. We might even help to overthrow errors or to fill in some incomplete regions.

In any case, the student finds his real mind by giving his embryonic mind over to the subject, by losing his mind in that subject and allowing that immature mind to be reshaped so that it does not think about that line of mathematical reasoning but rather thinks that line of mathematical reasoning. The student should be preparing for those “Ah-ha!” moments which come after years of often frustrating study and leave the student in possession of Riemann’s insights into geometry and not just conversant about the textbook statements of Riemann’s accomplishments. The student should be helped not to stand over the founding of the United States, as if he were some sort of disembodied demon, but rather to find his mind actively carrying out lines of reasoning which flow along with the recorded reasoning of Jefferson and Adams and Sherman and Dickinson. He should acquire that informed and alert state where he is involved in those long-ago events but also detached and capable of a sympathetic and, perhaps, ironic

understanding. He should feel some upset, one part of his mind for another, as the representatives of heavily-populated states debated the structure of the Federal government with representatives of lightly-populated states because he should be able to think the thoughts of each group even if he comes to align his views with only one side.

A pupil-centric education system won't be oriented toward these higher states of the human mind. It will leave the student convinced he is inherently a person, a human animal with a difference. He comes in a five year-old human animal and leaves an 18 or 22 year-old human animal with misty memories of the stuff he learned for a bunch of tests. He will be in the dark about the nature of a civilization and the relationship between the human mind and civilization. He will be fundamentally ignorant of the ways in which a mind can be developed or a civilization built or nurtured and maintained. He will think he knows something when he knows no more than textbook and uninterested, not 'disinterested', summaries of something.

[In this essay, I've glossed over the power we have, especially in the modern world, to access external 'memories' of much in the Western intellect and even the intellects of other civilizations. We can also, for good and bad, quickly access the thoughts which can be considered those of individual minds over the globe. This is an interesting complication and possibly a game-changer. See Chapter 613, *Does the Body of Christ have non-human components?* for a very preliminary discussion of these sorts of issues.]

# 281 Social and Biological: Being Honest About the Basics of Human Nature

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1359>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/08/03.]

While making plans for my more serious reading over the next month or two, I happened to read the opening pages of a book I'll be perusing before long—*Sociobiology, The Abridged Edition* [151] by Edward O. Wilson, the Harvard professor who learned a lot about social insects and found that he could apply some of his general knowledge and perhaps more of his techniques of analysis to social mammals as well, even to human beings. The opening words for the first paragraph are:

Camus said that the only serious philosophical question is suicide. That is wrong even in the strict sense intended. The biologist, who is concerned with questions of physiology and evolutionary history, realizes that self-knowledge is constrained and shaped by the emotional control centers in the hypothalamus and limbic system of the brain. These centers flood our consciousness with all the emotions – hate, love, guilt, fear, and others – that are consulted by ethical philosophers who wish to intuit the standards of good and evil. What, we are then compelled to ask, made the hypothalamus and limbic system? They evolved by natural selection. That simple biological statement must be pursued to explain ethics and ethical philosophers, if not epistemology and epistemologists, at all depths. [page 3]

So far, so good, but we have to realize the tendency of empirical thinkers, of several respectable schools of thought, to see how we understand from the ground up but to fail to understand, or at least to fully accept (William James is an example), that there is a point where the richness and complexity of what we know begins to cohere in such a way as to imply the existence of two different and equally important realms of being:

1. The greater entity of which we are part, the universe which is one aspect of a story and a collection of stories in which events are morally ordered, and
2. Abstract realms of being from which the concrete realms are shaped.

Wilson certainly seems to realize there is something to be “pursued to explain ethics and ethical philosophers” but I suspect I’ll disagree with Wilson, certainly with some evolutionary biologists, about our proper ways of going about this business of pursuing a deeper and greater understanding by starting from that immediate understanding of evolutionary processes. I’ll speak to that issue shortly, but I’ll first note that Camus deserves some credit for seeing the need for an essential decision in human moral life, at least in the modern context where there has been a fundamental denial of the proposition that our duty, our only real option, is to accept reality and to understand it well enough to respond properly to it. It’s sheer moral insanity to think we can plausibly deny reality, to kill ourselves and leave that reality behind or to somehow make of reality something else. A full acceptance of reality doesn’t lead to passivity. It leads us to strong responses to and in the context of reality. In terms of Thomistic teachings, we should ‘naively’ accept what is and accept that our perceptions and properly developed thoughts deal with a reality given to us and not something we can judge or push aside in favor of a set of abstractions or dreams we prefer.

For example, we should start our understanding of our moral duty not to murder by first accepting the human reluctance, strong but far from absolute, not to kill any creature which presents to us a human appearance; I believe it’s mostly the face that does it. In any case, it’s probably mediated through that hypothalamus and limbic system. In Biblical terms, we can hear God’s Fifth Commandment, can understand it, and can have a good chance of obeying it even in tough circumstances just because of that human hypothalamus and limbic system. In philosophical terms, and those of a

novelist or poet, we have to make peace with a jerry-built moral nature and try to see if we can make of it something more complete and less defective, even if perfection is little more than a dream. A natural-law theorist should be less concerned with constructing ideal systems and more concerned with the strange fact that, regarding a reluctance to kill other members of the same species, wolves seem to be our moral superiors.

A human being is a moral creature defined in many ways by his biological and social nature but capable of looking for meanings which transcend the flux of this mortal world as it immediately presents itself. Those realms of being which are part of Creation but transcendent to the most concrete realm of being demand from us responses just as do the more immediate environmental demands related to survival and reproduction. We respond to those demands from abstract realms of being when we posit moral views making sense of both Aristotle and Darwin. If we can begin to make better sense of it all by considering the theories of Boltzmann and Einstein and the esthetic responses of T.S. Eliot and the history-based wisdom of Lord Acton, then we are really getting somewhere.

Mostly, we are driven, as were Virgil and Homer and many before them, to draw a story out of what we are and what we have learned about our immediate environments and all that we believe to lie beyond this concrete realm. This isn't men imposing order upon an alien universe but rather men responding to a universe which shows narrative characteristics, certainly in the events studied by evolutionary biologists. From concrete realms, men have ascended to ever greater understandings of more abstract realms of being, often by way of mathematicians and theoretical physicists studying surprisingly abstract relationships between concrete bits of matter. Matter isn't what we naively think it to be and neither is space or time or number for that matter. We look for moral order as we try to draw those stories from the histories of life, from the histories of galaxies, from the more particular and even nastier histories of men. This is not an anthropomorphic response but rather a response to a universe which made us men by demanding proper responses from our ancestors.

Men are inclined to look for a more general meaning, if only a mythical cosmogony. If meaning isn't found, that takes a bit of wind out of our sails. Entire civilizations can be demoralized and their moral structures begin to decay along with the moral order in the souls of individual human beings. More positively, a civilization can form if an Augustine finds order even if he himself is in a state of despair because of the problems of the moment,

problems brought about as an older civilization is collapsing.

Even when meaning is fading, as it was by at least the late 1800s in the West, some men, such as Thomas Huxley, will struggle to find a new meaning and, failing, move on and to live a meaningful life to all appearances. A couple generations later, Jean-Paul Sartre, fell into a frenetic, amoral despair. Sartre, who as a philosopher could be seen a greater Camus, did see the importance of existence and – in Wilsonian terms – rebelled very consciously against the sanity enforced by his “hypothalamus and limbic system.” Sartre could have helped the men of his age find a newer and richer meaning in a world suddenly richer than it had been, but also seemingly chaotic if only because of its newness. He chose to rebel against what he was, what he felt himself to have been without any choice on his own part. That rebellion was as good as a rebellion against our universe, indeed against all of Creation.

Yes, the man who is Camus is the human animal described by Wilson, and so it is that the biologist can continue his critique of that starting point of philosophy when the wonder of what-is is turned to a rejection of what-is. Professor Wilson tells us [151]:

Self-existence, or the suicide that terminates it, is not the central question of philosophy. The hypothalamus-limbic complex automatically denies such logical reduction by countering it with feelings of guilt and altruism. In this one way the philosopher’s own emotional centers are wiser than his solipsist consciousness, “knowing” that in evolutionary time the individual organism counts for almost nothing. In a Darwinist sense, the organism does not live for itself. Its primary function is not even to reproduce other organisms; it reproduces genes, and it serves as their temporary carrier. [page 3]

The basic point which Wilson makes is a good one even though he weakens his overall position with a claim that life is genocentric. Genes are part of an entire organism, and it is the entire organism in the full range of its developed body, organs and behaviors as well as genetic systems, which is selected. The organism, genes and soma, are a reflection, an encapsulation of sorts, of at least adequate responses to environmental problems and opportunities. Wilson is right that the organism is part of a family line but it’s simplistic to reduce evolution to a process centered upon genes. To

the extent genes define us, and there is a great deal of truth in that claim, they do so as reflections of the responses of many creatures over the eons to their environments. However imperfect and incomplete, we and our fellow-creatures are encapsulations of what lies around us by way of responses to opportunities and problems over those eons. If we wish to make a better, if still reductionistic, summary of our situation: we aren't our genes so much as we are the heirs to our ancestors' responses to their environments. Genes play an important part in this narrative, but only a part.

There are two immediate claims I'm making. One is that Wilson is right in his most central claim and perhaps I'd go beyond him. To try to judge the goodness of our own existence is an act of biological insanity and all that which is human and which we judge to be greater than 'mere' biology, morality and cognition and other human traits and skills, comes from the responses of a human animal to what his environments offer him and from the responses his ancestors made to their environments, including those offers which seem very threatening. We even have some evidence from spectacular cases of child abuse and neglect that a human child raised in a non-demanding and non-stimulating environment won't even develop some of the most human of traits—kept from proper socializing to the age of 10 or even a little less, a rescued child can't even learn to use language in a human way no matter how much effort is made by the most knowledgeable and most compassionate of experts in the human brain and its development.

The second claim is that meaning lies outside of us though we make it our own by our responses to those environments. We know that our moral instinct against murder is strongly related to the rat's embodied reluctance to kill other community members who smell right and exhibit the correct behaviors. A weaker reluctance covers human beings we don't recognize as community members and a still weaker reluctance covers the likes of creatures with eyes similar to those of human beings. It's our duty not to recover some lost state of grace but rather to build upon a promising but incomplete and defective moral nature, to make it stronger and to help us to live in communities have grown, in complexity as much as size, well beyond families and tribes and even nations. But that situation came about because we live in a universe which, sometimes by sheer nastiness, elicits such moral responses at least from some evolving lines of creatures.

Meaning doesn't come to us when we sit on our couches, it leaks out of neither our innermost consciousness nor out of our genes, though both of those play a role; we aren't guaranteed to find meaning even by actively

seeking it but we are guaranteed not to find it if we don't seek it. The ways of seeking are many and, at the basic biological level, consist of those responses, artistic as well as practical, to problems such as occasional famines or to opportunities such as the newly discovered stuff which leaks out of very hot rocks and then cools into a hard and shiny form.

The language of 'emergence' used by Wilson in his first chapter is less apt than the Thomistic language of 'intention' in the sense of growth. Individuals developing during their lifetime can intend proper or improper paths through those lifetimes, though mostly we move one step at a time with only vague awareness of the path much beyond our front-most toe. Family lines can also intend, since it doesn't require consciousness, only a power to respond to the world by growing, developing, maturing, in external behavior and in internal characteristics as well.

Our particular human natures are odd in that our complex brains can 'make' minds which allow us to partially transcend our biological natures while we necessarily remain within the context of our environments. Yet, it's part of our human nature to live in a such a state of awareness that we also live in greater realms of Creation, some of which are described to us by mathematicians and theoretical physicists and some by philosophers and still others by poets and priests and musicians. Our sanity must be of a higher type, to consider not only our immediate or near-term biological needs even when supplemented by a conscious awareness of our role in the evolution of our genetic lines, but also to consider the greater possibilities, some are clearly good and some bad and some could be either, which lie outside the boundaries of any events or even any open possibilities in the history of life on earth to this time.

I've proposed that we have been given a very rough understanding of a greater story and of a greater set of possibilities from which we can choose while participating in that story, the story of the development of the greatest possible human community, the Body of Christ. This is seemingly a strange turn in a discussion of evolutionary biology from the sociobiological perspective and, like any other meaningful future we could imagine, we can't fully understand it but we can understand it well enough to test its narrative rationality and perhaps its desirability. That's pretty much what I've been doing for the past 25 years, writing novels and philosophical narratives which seek meaning in Creation as understood by this Christian. I've said before that I do philosophy and theology in the way of a novelist and I'll strongly claim this to be the best way during an age when we need

to make sense of a world which modern empirical knowledge shows to be richer and more complex than we can yet handle.

Unfortunately, one of the problems we've inherited in our biological nature is a tendency to remain within our comfort zone and so it is that most human beings, even those aware of our fundamental problems and opportunities – going far beyond even our specific political and economic problems and opportunities – will continue to follow old ruts and hope our problems will be solved by some sort of magic. Or maybe they're morally paralyzed by pessimism and fatalism and can do no better than to carry on as if our problems were merely results of cycles which will soon bring us to better times. See Chapter 409, *Individuals and Herds*, for a short commentary on a discovery of anthropologists of similar behavior on the part of Mayans who were aware of their destruction of their local environments and continued behaving the same old ways until they finished destroying their own civilization.



## 282 Do We Need Heart and Hands as Well as Mind to Understand Reality?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1370>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/08/15.]

I've been delayed in my reading program, but I'm getting slowly back to work on Hans Reichenbach's *The Direction of Time* [122].<sup>1</sup> I've also gotten behind on my writing on this topic of time-direction though Chapter 472, *Why Does Time Move Only Forward?: Some Preliminaries* contains some comments I made after reading Hilary Putnam's preface for this the reprinting by the University of California Press.

So far as I can tell, a major reason I've falling behind in my readings partly because my mind and eyes are blurred by a minor sinus infection but the main reason is a reluctance to deal at this time with still another modern thinker, Hans Reichenbach, who tries to create an understanding of reality which involves only explicit and conscious cognition, abstract reasoning and schematizing and all that.<sup>2</sup> Pascal lost in his efforts to protect a

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<sup>1</sup>Since first posting this essay on my blog, I've finished reading this book, though I very quickly browsed some sections. I began to think his solution, branches of entropic subsystems, had little to offer as a solution to the problem of the direction of time and a quick check into John Earman's *Bangs, Crunches, Whimpers, and Shrieks: Singularities and Acausalities in Relativistic Spacetimes* [31] told me that Professor Earman had a similar opinion. While not dismissing Reichenbach's book completely—he has some worthwhile insights, I decided to concentrate my limited energies on more materials more promising to my work, which is not that of an unbiased historical or philosophical analysis.

<sup>2</sup>This leads, oddly enough, to missing some points raised in later years by physicists,

respect for the heart in an age when men were sliding into a great error in understanding their own human nature and their own communal nature. A distorted version of Cartesian methodology conquered so that reason rules not only in its domain but in all domains of reality which modern thinkers recognize. But the tide of the battle has shifted, due more to the efforts of modern biologists than to those of theologians and philosophers, though the greater and more serious of novelists and poets and visual artists never lost their respect for a more complete understanding of how human beings understand.

My initial ways of discussing these issues just didn't feel right though I'd written a couple well-structured outlines and my initial short statements at the main levels of those outlines each seemed to be saying something meaningful. Yet, something was wrong. My outlines for much different versions of essays on this subject seemed well-organized and seemed to address important issues. But any attempts to expand those outlines into essays didn't work. The attempts didn't feel right because they didn't move along the paths I've following in my recent work. I was addressing technical issues at a detailed level and ignoring the limited idea of human understanding<sup>3</sup> found in Reichenbach's book and originating in that loss of respect for the role of the heart and hands in understanding reality.

To a thinker such as Reichenbach who was in tune with the Enlightenment phase of Modernism, this business of feeling would seem ridiculous. Reichenbach doesn't despise feelings as if we should be unfeeling calculators but he makes it clear that the understanding of reality should rely upon reason to the exclusion of feeling and doing. Just think matters through, organize those thoughts, and write a concise, tightly focused essay. Those of us who are taking the first steps in recovering a better and more complete human understanding of created being have to struggle not to find a more complete system of 'logic' so glorified by Reichenbach and other Modern thinkers but to find new and richer ways to discuss mind, heart, and hands as separate but complimentary aspects of human understanding. In passing, I'll note that, as I've written in the past, modern neuroscientists such as Gerald Edelman, Antonio Damasio, and many others have tried to restore respect for the importance of brain-body interactions and also

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such as P.J.E. Peebles, who have realized that the universe has its own properties, even purely in the terms of physics, and can't just be built up from its 'pieces'.

<sup>3</sup>Limited but incorrect largely by way of incompleteness.

brain-environment interactions even in our abstract thinking.

I'll write more about this after quoting from books of three thinkers. The chapters which are the source of the quotes have titles indicative of this entire discussion:

- Hans Reichenbach's book: *The Direction of Time* [122]; chapter: *The Emotive Significance of Time*,
- Jacob Neusner's book: *Judaism in the Matrix of Christianity*; chapter: *The Doctrine of Emotions and its Long-term Uniformity in the Canonical History of Judaism's Ideas*, and
- E.O. Wilson's book: *Sociobiology: The Abridged Edition*; chapter: *The Morality of the Gene*.

I have already discussed the relevant ideas from Wilson's book in Chapter 281, *Social and Biological: Being Honest About the Basics of Human Nature*. That discussion dealt with Wilson's ideas in the context of his critique of a statement made by Camus, the novelist and atheistic-existentialist philosopher.

I'll be siding with Rabbi Neusner, and largely with Wilson, rather than with Professor Reichenbach, though, as always, I'll have my own ideas to add to the entire discussion, partly because of my Christian beliefs and my tightly related understanding of created being, which understanding might well be adaptable to Jewish thought. In fact, any sensitive reader of Neusner's books will realize that he not only invites Christian readers but also Christian readings and Christian responses. This points to one difference between him and Reichenbach and also Wilson, at least as he was presenting his ideas in the 1970s. Neusner invites other readings of what we might call the texts which help us understand our world while Reichenbach presents a more or less monolithic framework of a rationalistic sort. This framework limits the discussion greatly, enforcing the dictate that rules all non-rationalistic understandings out of court, and also limits Reichenbach's influence on many who might find some of his ideas to be at least stimulating. Wilson's prose presents a still different situation to the reader: at times, his presentation as such doesn't seem to invite responses, other than assent or angry denial, but his material and fundamental ideas do, perhaps because his ideas were themselves a result of honest responses

to certain aspects of this universe, what I consider a certain realm or ‘part’ of Creation.

It’s interesting to note that Wilson’s thought is largely in synch with the Jewish and Christian traditional ideas about the nature of this world and the nature of human beings, though he presents his ideas in such a way as to make them unattractive to many traditionalists. This agreement between Wilson’s thought and that of at least this Thomistically inclined Christian is a result of different, but ultimately compatible, responses to reality. Wilson, at least in that book published more than 30 years ago, was genocentric to an excessive extent but certainly not enough to overcome the great insights in his version of sociobiology, so closely allied to the already existing version of Robert Trivers, a man who’d been said by some to be a superior evolutionary thinker because he had also been a lawyer and was better than most biologists at distinguishing between good and bad arguments.

In any case, it seems that extreme forms of genocentricism have, in recent years, been calmed a bit by the criticisms and ongoing work of embryologists and others who have shown development of a complex organism to be one of, shall we say, development of a complex organism in which there is not so much centralized control as interaction, including interaction with environments. Genes are at many times the dominant interactors but cannot themselves control a complex development process in which they are one (somewhat) independent system interacting with the maternal signals, the ongoing somatic developments, and the environmental possibilities and constraints. Even the underlying chemical structures of genes are now known to evolve somewhat independently of natural selection and other macroscopic evolutionary processes—though clearly those processes do have the final say. Those who survive and reproduce successfully leave descendants. The point is not that evolutionary processes are overridden by mystical processes but rather that the genes themselves encode certain information which makes possible complex interactive development. Genes are not some sort of a complete and deterministic recipe book.

With a substantial groundwork laid, I repeat the question I used as the title of this essay: Do we need heart and hands as well as mind to understand reality? To anticipate the rest of this essay: Rabbi Neusner gives a strong, “Yes,” from a Jewish angle; I give a strong, “Yes,” from a sacramental Christian angle; Wilson gives a strong, “Yes,” from a sociobiological angle; Reichenbach says, “No,” from what seems to be an Enlightenment

angle. I'll start with Reichenbach's answer.

First, I'll note that Reichenbach doesn't really deal with the issue, so much as he assumes the answer he likes. To him, perhaps to many thinkers in the late stages of the Enlightenment phase of what we parochially call "the Modern Age," the answer was given by great, if also greatly defective, thinkers of the High Enlightenment in the 18th century, men who took up a certain line of philosophical thought without caring much or thinking about its incompatibility with Western Civilization. Here are two relevant quotes from Reichenbach's *The Direction of Time* [122].

If we could stop time, we could escape death—the fact that we cannot makes us ultimately impotent, makes us equals of the piece of lumber drifting in the river current. The fear of death is thus transformed into a fear of time, the flow of time appearing as the expression of superhuman forces from which there is no escape. The phrase "passing away", by means of which we evasively speak of death without using its name, reveals our emotional identification of time flow with death.

Dissatisfied emotion has frequently been projected into logic. In theories of the universe it often reappears in the guise of logical queries and pseudo-logical constructions. [page 4]

I don't really have an issue with his naive analysis of the fear of death—as a naive analysis, but, somehow, the judge of all reality has become not even the entire mind but only those parts of the mind which handle 'logic'. Emotions, as well as mental processes not logical in a scientific sense, apparently do no more than distort the legitimate effort to understand reality by way of logic.

The desire to survive death and to live eternally, in the sense of unlimited time, a desire obviously incompatible with physical facts, has thus led to a conception in which eternal life is not life in time, but in a different reality. In order to escape the "passing away" with time, a timeless reality was invented. [page 4]

Death or life after death isn't the subject of this essay but rather the claim that a more complete understanding of reality comes from mind,

heart, and hands. We need thought both practical and abstract, feelings which are properly disciplined for the moral ordering of our lives, and actions toward an ordered life and an ordered relationship with the physical realms of Creation. Mind, heart, and hands.

In *Judaism in the Matrix of Christianity* [97], Jacob Neusner's collection of essays, we can read:

The doctrine of emotions in the view of the sages who created Judaism remained always the same. The reason derives from the social realities that give meaning to emotion and definition to the possibilities of feeling. If we begin with feeling, we end up in society. [page 51]

In this way of thought, emotions are produced by ties or relationships and then help to strengthen and shape those ties, shaping them to what might be called a communal heart but also helping to give birth to a communal mind, an intellect. In Chapter 127, *Intelligence vs. Intellect*, I quoted Jacques Barzun:

Intellect is the capitalized and communal form of live intelligence; it is intelligence stored up and made into habits of discipline, signs and symbols of meaning, chains of reasoning and spurs to emotion—a shorthand and a wireless by which the mind can skip connectives, recognize ability, and communicate truth. Intellect is at once a body of common knowledge and the channels through which the right particle of it can be brought to bear quickly, without the effort of redemonstration, on the matter in hand. [page 4]

We can return to Neusner's book to read:

In the language of theology of the Judaism of a later age the *Mensch* of the Yiddish language, the fully human person, must become the Israel-*Mensch*. And who is this? It is the Judaic human being harmonious in affection, action, and affirmation. Together these determine who is Israel, the Jewish nation—one by one and all together.

In the Western Protestant tradition of Edwards and Schleiermacher we take it for granted that emotions speak for the private

individual, not the nation. In the tradition of philosophy from the Greeks onward, moreover, emotions speak not rationally but irrationally. This other view, that of the ancient sages (a view that is also gaining currency in contemporary philosophy and psychology), sees the matter differently. It regards emotions as artifacts of culture and conceives that emotions lay down judgments. They therefore emerge as rational, public, and social, speaking not only for the individual but also to him or her. Feelings, too, define modes of symbolic behavior, as noted. When we examine the doctrine of emotions in the canonical writings of formative Judaism, we enter a world to which it is self-evident that feeling is subject to law and emotion is a matter of lesson and tradition. [page 51]

And:

[T]he heart belongs, together with the mind, to the human being's powers to form reasoned viewpoints. Coming from the sages, intellectuals to their core, such an opinion surely coheres with the context and circumstance of those who held it. [page 56]

I think Neusner would have made this particular statement still stronger, at least for my purposes, by bringing the hands into the above statement, but it's clear he does intend such an integration if we look at the quotes I supplied from his essay and certainly from the entirety of his essay.

I don't fully accept Pascal's famous claim: The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing. I believe the heart guides reason in many ways and also knows some things reason can't discover on its own, but I also believe that mind, heart, and hands can come to understand each other. In my way of thinking, those three human ways of knowing are different ways for a human being to learn how to participate in those divine acts which are called acts-of-being in my way of thinking, largely based upon Thomistic views of being. It's necessary that we human beings act according to all of these—mind, heart, and hands—but, if we were God, any of our acts would be all three at once. When God thinks, He also feels and acts. When God acts, He also thinks and feels. When God feels, He also thinks and acts. To do one is, for God, to do all three.

We are images of God, at least we can be such when we respond properly to our environments or—still better—all of Creation to the extent possible. We can become human persons, encapsulations of Creation, encapsulations of the thoughts God manifested and wished for us to share with Him, and when we do so we gain the attributes of a world: unity, coherence, and completeness. There are lots of triune attributes in Christian thought and at least some in Jewish thought and other traditions of thought, but we shouldn't think they map exactly to each other. Yet, a threesome, like a tripod, seems to be the simplest stable support in our concrete realm of being. And tripods clearly map to each other in at least some abstract ways.

I'll repeat the quotes from Chapter 281, *Social and Biological: Being Honest About the Basics of Human Nature*. These two quotes are from the first chapter of Wilson's *Sociobiology: The Abridged Edition* [151]:

Camus said that the only serious philosophical question is suicide. That is wrong even in the strict sense intended. The biologist, who is concerned with questions of physiology and evolutionary history, realizes that self-knowledge is constrained and shaped by the emotional control centers in the hypothalamus and limbic system of the brain. These centers flood our consciousness with all the emotions—hate, love, guilt, fear, and others—that are consulted by ethical philosophers who wish to intuit the standards of good and evil. What, we are then compelled to ask, made the hypothalamus and limbic system? They evolved by natural selection. That simple biological statement must be pursued to explain ethics and ethical philosophers, if not epistemology and epistemologists, at all depths. [page 3]

And:

Self-existence, or the suicide that terminates it, is not the central question of philosophy. The hypothalamus-limbic complex automatically denies such logical reduction by countering it with feelings of guilt and altruism. In this one way the philosopher's own emotional centers are wiser than his solipsist consciousness, "knowing" that in evolutionary time the individual organism counts for almost nothing. In a Darwinist sense, the

organism does not live for itself. Its primary function is not even to reproduce other organisms; it reproduces genes, and it serves as their temporary carrier. [page 3]

In other words, modern biological sciences including evolutionary biology support the idea that emotions aren't some sort of imperfection in the human being nor do they merely exist to give us epiphenomena to color our existence in a world which is 'just material', let alone 'only logical'. Most biologists who have had reasons to express opinions on the importance of emotion to thinking don't even consider emotions to be primarily short-cuts to conclusions we would reach by thinking if we had the time. There is that element in feeling but also in thinking and doing. They are different aspects of acts-of-being, more fundamental than even substance, and thinking can help us when our feeling is inadequate—as any Catholic would know from reading a guide to confession which will tell us an intellectual repentance suffices when we can't muster up the proper depth of feeling. Similar statements can be made about all these three aspects of human efforts to participate in God's acts-of-being: feeling, thinking, and doing. They can each help the others along and perhaps a resurrected and perfected human being would become God-like in that he would no longer feel, think, or do without doing and feeling and thinking, all three at once and in each and every act.

We are given a sort of concrete human nature, including a very complex brain, which allows us to shape ourselves to encapsulate some relatively greater or lesser part of Creation. We understand Creation, created being, by these active responses, those of Fred Astaire and those of Vincent van Gogh as well as those of Albert Einstein—a viewpoint advocated by such prominent neuroscientists as Gerald Edelman and Walter J. Freeman, both of whom have written books which provide pleasure as well as wisdom to the truly literate reader. The neuroscientists Jerome Kagan and Antonio Damasio are but two who've written accessible and widely available books on the irreducible importance of emotions to human life.

If we are to understand Creation, spacetime and matter and all other components and aspects, then we'll understand by shaping ourselves to encapsulate Creation. We won't understand Creation if we start by misunderstanding ourselves and trying to fit created being into 'logical frameworks'. We have no such 'logical frameworks' in our brains in which to fit Creation and have no reason to believe Creation could fit into any such frameworks

if they existed. In fact, even when we try in ways more proper to human nature, we're too small and too imperfect to understand much more than a vanishingly small bit as individuals and not much more even at the level of the community of the entire human race. But we're making progress in some understanding some parts and aspects of Creation, a surprising amount of progress given our small and imperfect selves.

Do those components of human understanding, feeling and thinking and doing, really respond to irreducible components or aspects of Creation? Let me first paraphrase Einstein in words he wouldn't use but I don't think he would object to the general thrust of my ideas: Our understanding of created being should be as simple as possible, but no simpler.

Reduce reality to its various components and aspects but stop reducing when you reach components or aspects which cannot be used to fully explain or to 'reconstruct' each other. At that point in the process of analysis, it's time to look for explanations which include all those seemingly fundamental components and aspects. You might be wrong and the next few generations might busy themselves taking your fundamental components and aspects apart to find aspects still more fundamental.

God acts and feels even as He does, and so forth. The Almighty is unified, and coherent and complete, in ways that aren't possible to us—at least in our mortal lives. Why can't we be unified in this way?

As noted above and in many of my essays on this blog, the concrete forms of being in this universe are the results of the fragmentation of more symmetric forms of created being, more abstract forms of created being. Physicists, in the Standard Theory of particle physics, have described an electroweak force which is the more symmetric entity which shattered into electromagnetic force and weak nuclear force as the universe expanded and cooled after the so-called Big Bang. The electroweak force can be described and understood in many ways but it's electromagnetic force and weak nuclear force which are manifested in our concrete realm as particular forms of that more abstract force. In a similar way, we are concrete creatures who have evolved and developed within a universe made from broken pieces of more symmetric, more abstract, forms of being. Feeling and thinking and doing are tightly related and can even help strengthen each other and can even cover for one another under certain circumstances.

As I said above: Reduce reality to its various components and aspects but stop reducing when you reach components or aspects which cannot be used to fully explain or to 'reconstruct' each other. We can replace

'reality' by 'this concrete level of being' and then we can understand, by analogy to modern physics, that we can construct plausible understandings of being in which feeling and thinking and doing are broken pieces of but one symmetric act-of-being, but those three components, again—in analogy to electromagnetic force and weak nuclear force, are irreducible components or aspects of minded creatures in this world of concrete being.



## 283 We Must Always Remember the Environment

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1379>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/08/21.]

The blog of the public policy think-tank *The Independent Institute* has been running short essays by John C. Goodman, the author of a recent book, *Priceless: Curing the Healthcare Crisis*. The latest essay is *Can Entrepreneurship Be Copied?* at <http://blog.independent.org/2012/08/20/can-entrepreneurship-be-copied/> where we can read Dr. Goodman's claim:

In mathematics, Gödel's Theorem says that no complex, axiomatic system can be both consistent and complete. What I am proposing is something similar for social science. Although some habits of highly successful people can be identified and copied, not enough of them can be copied for each of us to become highly successful ourselves through copycat behavior alone.

This is Goodman's Nonreplicability Theorem.

I think the appeal to Gödel's Theorem is questionable but his claim makes an important point about entrepreneurs being able to act in ways often mysterious to the rest of us, at least until the action is over. I also think Dr. Goodman misses something important. We must remember that a human being isn't an individual so much as he's a partially formed entity which is actively responding to his environments, at least to the extent he can be said to be a free and moral creature. Those environments include all the human communities, families and churches and neighborhood and sports leagues and so forth, as well as his physical environments such as

a family farm or nearby forests or lakes or seashore or the ground which contains some mineral never before considered important.

The entrepreneur—indeed, as I said, any human being who is truly free and moral creatures—is what he is and is able to do what he does because of his active and intelligent and morally well-ordered responses to those complex environments. The entrepreneur is particularly inclined to work in regions of uncertainty to satisfy needs or desires of others in some sort of marketplace. He's a pioneer who may or may not settle down and establish himself as a fellow of great prosperity. He may even fail because he misinterpreted something in his environments or because he was unlucky or ended up competing against someone luckier or more capable. He differs from the rest of us in dealing better or at least more courageously with conditions of uncertainty and in responding to those conditions in such a way that he might add to some important aspect of the well-being of his communities.

## 284 Human Beings Are Different as Are Their Environments

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1387>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/08/28.]

We're born with certain physical characteristics, some good and some bad, some allowing us to excel and some limiting our possible accomplishments. Modern psychologists have shown that the physician Galen was largely right in his general principles which he taught nearly 2,000 years ago. We are born with relatively well-defined temperaments and with other relatively well-defined personal traits. Freedom for a creature is built upon a foundation of more or less well-defined traits. Movements which can be truly labeled 'creative' are possible when a human being begins to respond to Creation, more firmly shaping his own (species) nature and his own particular traits, and thinking and feeling and acting in ways which lie in the sometimes large set of what's appropriate for a human being of his particular sorts of traits who lives in a specific context.

We now know that there are only so many resources available to the developing brain and a young man developing high-levels of skills in mathematics might be short of resources for developing the brain regions associated with social skills. We're not born as potential all-purpose supermen and superwomen. Nor are we born as well-shaped moral persons. Someone with the hormonal flows usually associated with timidity and shyness may well develop behaviors and attitudes which allow her to rule the roost and maybe the entire barnyard. Much of which is good for building on strengths and shoring up weaknesses comes from the wise guidance of adults trying to respond to the needs of the youth under their care in light of what is possible within and necessary for their human communities.

What does it mean to be different? Let me speak about the differences between human beings and members of other species. We share an immense amount of DNA with other species. Very roughly speaking, we share 95% of our DNA with chimpanzees. This should be taken as very rough because DNA is part of a very complex organism embedded in a family line which changes over time. It's not even clear how much of the DNA of humans or other species is active or even potentially functional; much is broken inheritance from ancient ancestors or of ambiguous status for unknown reasons. Much allows for multiple possibilities depending upon environmental signals or regulation by other genes acting for various reasons. Other facts enter into any measurement of our differences, as human beings relative to chimpanzees and also as individuals relative to other human beings. Yet, we can gain some insights by a simple consideration of that genetic difference between humans and chimpanzees. If we claim, just as a starting point, that we are '95% the same as chimpanzees', then it becomes obvious the other 5% is—to say the least—rather important.

Turning to comparisons of human beings from different ethnic or regional groups: the genetic differences might be small between desert-dwellers, descended from those selected Darwinistically as being capable of surviving in the desert, and mountain-dwelling Nordic peoples, descended from those selected for different survival characteristics, but those small differences might well be important in themselves and they can also produce large differences over the course of a lifetime. Small differences acting over a long time are important—this is, in fact, one of the basic principles of evolutionary theory and of the theories of many geological processes.

Do we think culture is unshaped by environment? Do we think Inuits and Hawaiians and Bedouins and Pashtuns developed cultures so well adapted to their environments only as a holding strategy while waiting for the British to bring them the factory system and Americans to bring them television? Do we think these peoples hold on to as much of their cultures as they can out of a misguided sense of nostalgia, an effort to get on a *National Geographic* documentary, or an obstinate refusal to become as good as an American from the (once?) booming suburbs of Atlanta, which refusal is perhaps motivated by a hatred of our freedoms and our goodness?

Once upon a time, Americans—at least many—were like Emma, the protagonist of the Jane Austen novel of that same name. She was good-hearted and dedicated to the propositions that she knew how everyone should live their lives and that those good lives she could envision were

mostly similar to how she would have lived their lives under the unlikely assumption that she would still be the same as Emma, the daughter of a modestly prosperous country squire, even if she had been raised in a farming family to have the skills and desires of a wife and mother of a similar such family. But Emma had good reasons to be fooled. She was a teenager and had observed that the young women from different circumstances than hers were still mostly like her. The more subtle, but often important differences, can sometimes be seen only by a mature eye. It was those smaller differences which made all the difference in that admittedly small region of English countryside, but a young woman with well-developed love for others and confidence in her immature insight could be excused for ignoring those small but very important differences. Americans are no longer like the Emma of the Austen novel. We have become as Emma would have been if she hadn't learned her lesson and had grown into self-righteous and perversely adolescent woman.

It's not likely that someone born into a desert town or a jungle village will even see the world the same way as someone born in a river valley town in New England. Moreover, someone born in Montana and accustomed to vast expanses of plains rising to high mountains won't see the world the same way as that New Englander. Richard Gregory has written of anecdotal evidence that the Zulus when they first emerged from their region of roundish huts set in rolling valleys were not subject to being fooled by those optical illusions where most human beings will wrongly see cleverly presented parallel lines as converging. Decades ago some scientists showed that kittens which didn't see vertical lines when they were growing up wouldn't be able to see poles when they were adults. And so they observed cats walking right into poles, multiple times, incapable in their maturity of learning how to see vertical lines.

Desert-dwellers almost certainly see the world differently from those who grew up in New England river valleys as I did. How about those who grew up in the bayous of Louisiana or the wheat-fields of South Dakota? Do the sea-coast dwellers of Great Yarmouth see the world differently from those who grew up near the beaches of Tahiti?

Are a given people musical, do they have rhythmical speech, because of inborn tendencies, or have they been shaped by generations of cultural formation beginning with the accident of a highly rhythmical and musical founder of their community? Or do initial accidents of culture and individual peculiarities enter into future Darwinian selective processes in a strong

and interactive way?

Do a given people literally have thick skin from growing up in a hot and dry land? Are they accustomed to sleeping on whatever ground is available and doing with little in the way of blankets when the night air grows frigid? Do you think this might affect their thoughts and feelings and behaviors? Do you think this harsh environment might have a major effect on who survives and upon who prospers the most amongst survivors?

All of this can be addressed from a different angle, as I did in Chapter 408, *The Need for Abstractions in Moral Self-understanding*, based on a blog essay published more than three years ago.

The details of [King Phillip's War] aren't at issue here except for a general background understanding. My interest lies in an important stream of thoughts and attitudes of New England European colonists which showed itself during the period of King Phillip's War, a stream which I think to represent a failed intellectual maturing process on the part of highly educated and intelligent men in confrontation with alien cultures. Instead of moving towards a proper abstraction that would have allowed a defense of their own culture but also an understanding of the human good in a different way of life, the European settlers raised their particular way of life to a self-righteous ideal. A conflict of cultures was seen as a war between God's servants, the White settlers, and Satan's slaves, the Indians. This stream, which may have been nascent in Puritan thought from the time they first stepped into that wilderness region of the New World, developed fully during the lead-up to the war as the Puritan leaders dealt with the growing resistance of the Indians to the expansion of settled ways of life.

A tolerance which is really masking a bigoted self-righteousness can lead to hatred and war, including genocidal war. At the very least, we will be disappointed if we expect the other to respond joyfully to our offer to help them become more like us. They will likely show at least confusion but may flame up with hatred which we'll misunderstand. They will probably harden their hearts even against good or necessary changes made obvious by their conflicts with us or by more peaceful interactions.

There's also a lesson to be learned about how to go about the human task of exploring God's Creation and coming to understand it. We are limited and prone to various sorts of mistakes even in our seemingly raw perceptions of our immediate environments. It doesn't matter in the end. It's simply another aspect of Creation to be studied and understood by the proper workers, physiologists and neuroscientists and instrument-designers and others. Those trying to understand at a more abstract level, theoretical physicists and philosophers and theologians and political theorists, should study the work of those scientists of perceptual organs and the brain, but should then go on with confidence that we can compensate for our limitations and defects when necessary. We can understand created being, Creation as a whole, if only in principle.



# 285 Qualities Traveling Without a Man

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1420>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/10/18.]

## **The Death of Plato**

The town was on edge that fateful day  
when stepped from the train a frightening sight.  
Qualities had arrived without a man  
for they were traveling fast and light.

Intelligent and diligent, steadfast and true,  
successful and loyal, honest and brave,  
they were every good how but not quite a who.  
A form without substance, a clear-eyed knave.

[Attributed to a youngish man enduring the early stages of a spiritual conversion, circa 1990. An older man still suffering from a spiritual conversion has only begun to understand how such a creature as he described, such “a frightening sight,” could come into existence.]

Earlier this year, I published an essay about the general intellectual, but specifically philosophical, incoherence of modern Christian thought. That essay is included in this book as Chapter 615, *A Stage Lower than Hypocrisy*. I used a quote from *The End of the Twentieth Century* [87], a pessimistic evaluation of our current situation by the Hungarian-American—and devoutly Catholic—historian John Lukacs. The quote is:

[A]t the end of the twentieth century, many people respect religion as well as science, together; but the respect is faint. (This has to do with the fact that we have descended to a stage lower than hypocrisy, the problem being no longer the difference between what people say and what they believe; now the difference seems to be between what people think they believe and what they really believe.) [page 224]

This “difference between what people think they believe and what they really believe” is a still more general phenomenon than discussed in the above quote. It is a problem affecting more than the relationship between religion and science. I’m beginning to think this phenomenon is masking something deeper, something discussed by Jacques Barzun in *House of Intellect* [7]. I discussed this something deeper in Chapter 127, *Intelligence vs. Intellect*, where I quoted Professor Barzun:

We [in the United States] have in fact intelligence in plenty and we use it perhaps more widely than other nations, for we apply it with praiseworthy innocence to parts of life elsewhere ruled by custom or routine. [page 4]

He also noted:

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

From all this, I concluded:

As a country, we’ve utterly failed to develop an intellect, that is a morally well-ordered understanding of our world. We don’t

really even seem to have done much to take the small, educational steps of developing a rational understanding of our relationships to Mexico or Cuba or even Canada. We're too smart and too proud to admit we're poorly educated adolescents—at best. In the sense of individual intelligence, we're as smart as we think we are, but we're pretty dumb and very ignorant in the sense of that intellect, that capitalized and communal intelligence, so important to being morally responsible members of these modern communities, so large and complex.

We've created those large and complex communities in various realms of human life, political and economic and cultural, but those communities are poorly founded—which is, at least for this discussion, the same as saying we haven't developed any understanding, any intellect or communal and capitalized intelligence adequate to the tasks of running such complex communities.

Much of our knowledge, much of our disciplined feeling, much of our proper behavior, is communal and not individual and must be developed at the communal level into which we must partially merge our individual selves. We prefer to imagine ourselves to be true individuals with our communal relationships being more contracts than parts of our being. As a consequence, we've lost most of our intellect while retaining a dangerously active individual intelligence. Similar statements can be made about our individual feelings and our communal feelings, our individual behavior and our communal behavior. For more than two decades, I've been bothered by a vague and unfocused version of this idea. For example, I wrote a conversion novel 20 years ago which was initially accepted for publication by a Catholic press and then turned down because a literary consultant advised them there is no market for serious literature in the American Catholic community. Over the years, I've met no more than a handful of seemingly devout Catholics who have any idea who Georges Bernanos or J.F. Powers or Flannery O'Connor were. You have to search hard to find any who've read any of the novels or short stories of such serious Catholic writers. Many of those same Catholics, some even trumpeting triumphalistic opinions have read all the books of Robert Ludlum, love the James Bond movies, and don't have a clue *A Christmas Carol* should be titled *An Xmas Carol*.

So far as I can tell, this is also painfully true for the entirety of the American citizenry, not just the Catholics amongst that citizenry. Note the shift in my language. Unlike that literary expert who had recommended my book not be published, I don't consider there to be such a thing as 'an American Catholic community'. We Americans are a the contents of a melting pot which continues to boil and continues to be stirred by forces set in motion by the explosion of too many individuals and small, unstable communities into the vastness of North America. For both good and bad we had become the people described by Wallace Stegner in his novel *The Big Rock Candy Mountain* which presented the more energetic of Americans as being restless, on the move, always in search of the poorly seen and seemingly undescrivable big break which would bring us to that Mountain, paradise on earth. We trek out toward it by paths which seem to be those of great individualistic opportunities. We are alive in many of the parts and aspects of our human natures which are individualistic, but we're greatly deficient in our intellects, our communal and capitalized live minds and also in the communal and capitalized parts of our emotional lives and our active physical lives.

We end up as strange creatures, many of us being seemingly mature men and women of active minds, disciplined emotions, and well-ordered habits and behaviors. All of this apparent moral order is individualistic and has a surprisingly weak influence on our communities. Something is terribly wrong with Americans and other Westerners in the 20th and 21st centuries, some deep lack of order, some hints of chaos which lie under the surface of our relationships with each other, with our communities, with Creation, and with our Creator. The simplest statement of the underlying problem, which is in fact quite difficult to state clearly, is: we form pseudo-communities bound together by easily breakable relationships, contractual relationships.

All of my novels have dealt with these issues, with one in particular being focused upon the problems of pulling our human selves together into a state of personhood, unity and coherence and completeness, in the modern West: *A Man for Every Purpose* can be freely downloaded at <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/aman.pdf>. It's interesting, at least to me, that in my novels I was able to deal 20 years ago with this general problem of the fragmentation of our individual selves due to our communal problems. It's taken these 20 years or so for me to rise to a more explicit awareness of these problems and the resulting damage to our own selves, most noticeably

our inability to achieve that state of personhood to even the small extent possible in this mortal realm.

The problem isn't with us as individuals but rather with our relationships, our communal selves. Without proper communities, we develop into very badly damaged creatures.



## 286 A Christian Sociobiology

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1425>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/11/07.]

### 286.1 A Little Background

Reading the works of others and occasionally rereading my own works is a key part of my way of exploring Creation from a Christian viewpoint. Often, it's seemed that God's way of drawing me forward is to lead me to books which raise important questions or provide ways of answering questions I'm already dealing with. It's been remarkable how often I've drawn a nearly forgotten book out of a box in my storage or have simply picked a book from the library shelf thinking to divert myself. I'll soon find out I'm reading that particular book at the right time to advance my thoughts in a fruitful way. So it is that I found myself reading Abraham Heschel's *God in Search of Man: a Philosophy of Judaism* [71] and E.O. Wilson's *Sociobiology: The Abridged Edition* [151] at the same time. This might seem the recipe for cognitive dissonance, but, along with Wilson's *On Human Nature* [150], I've found myself cultivating some pretty fertile soil.

As background, the reader can turn to Chapter 172, *Frozen Soul and Other Delicacies* and Chapter 175, *More on Matter as Frozen Soul*.

The question I'll be dealing with in this short essay is: Can Sociobiology Help Us to Understand Man?

Sociobiologists have discovered that overcrowding will often lead to the breakdown of natural hierarchical structures, that is, to the breakdown of ritualized hierarchical behavior, in social animals. When this happens, something akin to what a political scientists call a tyranny might develop. Certainly, there will be at least a movement toward, into or through, a

radical state of disorder, whether or not a Napoleon is there to reestablish some sort of order.

The best empirical results in the study of the effects of overcrowding are based on observations of animals in the wild and also controlled populations such as cats in overcrowded cages seem to be in good agreement with history and with ongoing breakdowns in order in many countries. The sense of overcrowding for a particular population will have a strong genetic foundation perhaps modified by human selection in the case of pets or farm animals and perhaps even modified by particular conditions even in the wild. In some species, animals and family groups living in a region might tolerate each other's nearness when food is plentiful but they'll desire more space, perhaps even in location of dens for sleeping and raising young, when food is harder to obtain. Others such as baboons will demand foraging space during the day but will cluster in groups for protection against predators.

Regular readers of my blog or readers of any of my books will realize I have little patience for any reductionistic ways of thought, materialistic or idealistic—though it's often a good way of understanding much about the concrete particulars of even a state so sublime as motherhood. Reductionism is fine as a methodology which provides material for further analysis and contemplation.

I understand created being as lying on a spectrum of abstract being, ultimately the thoughts God manifested as the raw stuff of Creation, to concrete, thing-like being. This view of created being is what led me, mostly seriously but partly tongue-in-cheek, to describe thing-like being as frozen soul. Consequently, it bothers me not the least to think of genes and glands and neurons as being, in some sense, manifestations of what we might very loosely call raw moral-stuff, however crudely and imperfectly manifested it might be in mortal men, let alone sharks.

Let me finish this short introduction by providing a short answer to one question. Can the sociobiological viewpoint even can give us a sacramental way of understanding human nature?

We human beings are at least creatures of flesh-and-blood. What we are beyond that is a matter of our personal development which is itself something of a result of the exploration into human possibilities. Some of us aren't bothered by this sort of connection to very concrete, thing-like being. I, in particular, am not bothered because I think of the concrete levels of being are shaped from the stuff of more abstract levels, that stuff is shaped from the stuff of still more abstract levels.

I think our bodies are not merely flesh-and-blood, though we have to consider our flesh-and-blood natures before we can understand more. I also don't believe our bodies are united with souls composed of different stuff from thing-like being. Our bodies can be better considered as frozen soul, the concrete tip of an iceberg which is mostly abstract being not directly accessible to perception or measurement or experimentation. But, and this is a big but, the abstract which lies ever in what has been shaped from it becomes apparent in the concrete when we explore and analyze that concrete being in proper ways. With a disciplined effort, we can see the frozen soul in the mother so tenderly taking her newborn to her breast. In that baby beginning to suck and to perhaps pinch with toothless gums, we can see that which is a human animal being introduced to the first of many communities it will encounter and sometimes join.

If we pay attention to all of created being—living and nonliving alike, we can start to see God united with man, the Body of Christ with all its human members united with the Son of God Himself in perfect union with Father and Holy Spirit.

The great task of modern man is to learn how to write and speak and think and act so that we can truly understand ourselves and our various communities as participants in a story being told by God, the story of the birth and development of the Body of Christ. We must make these ways of writing and speaking and thinking and acting our own so that we truly become members of the Body of Christ. Sociobiological ways of thought, though sometimes presented in an anti-theistic manner, can help us to accomplish this great task of becoming God-centered members of the Body of Christ by understanding ourselves as intending such, that is, as growing into those proper roles.



## 287 Is Man a Cosmos?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1448>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/11/27.]

In *Cosmology: A First Course* [84], Marc LachiÁlze-Rey writes:

The best definition of the cosmos is possibly the ensemble of relations between the constituent parts of the cosmos.

First of all, I'll point out that the larger context, the entirety of the introductory chapter, makes it clear that the cosmos is the parts as well as the relations between them.

In this essay, I'll be pointing out that the general idea expressed by Professor LachiÁlze-Rey is interesting in itself and also leads to other interesting topics involving complex entities in general, living and non-living. It's very much the same as ideas I've proposed in a greater context and I'll discuss that shortly after some introductory remarks.

Scientists, philosophers, theologians, novelists, poets, and others are engaged in a painfully slow process of developing concepts and words sufficient to integrate the claim of Lachieze-Rey and my more inclusive claim into our thoughts and feelings and acts. Once that thought and language have been developed, more abstract reasoning processes, including contemplation, will allow us to move from a universe to a world. As I define it, this universe becomes a world when seen in light of the Creator's purposes, when seen as a morally ordered story He is telling. In addition, I define a world, and also a person, as being unified, coherent, and complete. We're not yet at the point of making this part of our thoughts and feelings and acts. We are in fact rather early in our work of improving our minds so that we can understand all the new knowledge of Creation gained by modern empirical researchers in the context of being a true Creation, the work of a personal

God who is all-powerful, all-knowing, all-good. This is the same as saying we're still moving toward the state of a more fully enriched personhoods, where I think of human beings as potential persons both in their aspects as individuals and as communal creatures.

This modern cosmological view can help us to correct as well as enrich our views even of ourselves and our relationships to Creation and to God. It isn't some sort of spiritual stuff or spiritual relations we need to add in to move from the universe to the morally purposeful world but that humble art of narration, story-telling. This should hardly be a surprise to those who take seriously the Bible or St. Augustine or Cervantes or the recently departed Jacques Barzun; the reader who can follow Barzun's masterpiece of history, *From Dawn to Decadence* [9], and understand the underlying moral order bereft of any hint of moralism will be able to understand my claim in all its fullness, all its richness and complexity.

Human beings as human animals are comparable to the cosmos in the sense of a universe: we are "the ensemble of relations between the constituent parts of" ourselves, but 'ourselves' include much that lies around us, our communities starting with our families and also our other environments. We can become persons, analogous to a world, by living consciously in our morally purposeful narratives, including the greater one which is the world. Through this way of living, we can encompass the entire world, indeed the entirety of Creation—though only in principle or by sharing in the life of God in the world of the resurrected.

Let me summarize. As human animals, we are analogous to a universe in being not the sum of the parts but being the parts and the relations between the parts including our communities and environment. We become persons, like unto the world when we begin to encompass greater realms of created being, all the abstractions from which this concrete world was shaped, the abstractions which are themselves shaped from the truths God manifested as the raw stuff of Creation. When we reshape ourselves by proper responses to Creation, we become like the world, indeed like that entirety of Creation: unified, coherent, and complete.

Jesus Christ Himself is, in His immanence as a creature all that He has created along with His Father and their Holy Spirit. In principle, those mortal human beings who are developing, intending, toward a state of true personhood are also like this though far more limited in our capacity. Yet, if we accept His offer of true friendship, we will have this greater capacity through our communion with Him, through our sharing of the divine nature

of Jesus Christ.



## 288 Does Free-will Make Us Free? Does It Even Exist?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1458>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/12/03.]

Freedom as we idealize it is not at all an instrument or an agent to achieve our desires, good or bad. The lesser freedom of the tiger or the grazing deer can do that for us. Freedom as we idealize it is an aspect of the state of personhood, a state in which we are unified, coherent, and complete in our human being. An animal cannot be free in a meaningful sense, not even a human animal who has failed to rise even partially to the higher state of personhood.

Freedom is not a frictionless movement through this world, through the various stories in which we participate, though those who are free might have that air and feeling of such movement.

What is freedom?

In Chapter 380, *The Size of Human Freedom*, I dealt with some false ideas which were based upon misunderstandings of the term ‘random’, misunderstandings which have more to do with ancient pagan superstitions than with hardheaded scientific attitudes or even scientific materialism of a cleaner sort, let alone with a more sophisticated philosophy whether materialistic or otherwise monistic, whether dualistic or something better recognizing the profound depths and complexity of created being.

In *Creative Evolution* [10], Henri Bergson brought us closer to a good understanding of freedom by telling us:

It is then right to say that what we do depends on what we are; but it is necessary to add also that we are, to a certain extent, what we do, and that we are creating ourselves continually.

This creation of self by self is the more complete, the more one reasons on what one does. [page 7]

Bergson got it partly right in the above quotation and got some of the other parts right in other ideas he expressed in the small amount of his writings I've been able to read. In *Time and Free Will* [11], he came a bit closer to a more complete version of the truth when he wrote:

[W]e are free when our acts spring from our whole personality, when they express it, when they have that indefinable resemblance to it which one sometimes finds between the artist and his work. [page 172]

Bergson has a reputation for holding a view of organisms which verges on vitalism. Perhaps he deserved that reputation. He certainly had powerful insights into the relationships between time and particularity—highly relevant to the current discussion, as I discussed in Chapter 366, *Creation and Freedom*. Bergson also has some very good intuitions about the general nature of freedom and some elegant expressions of the corresponding insights. (I do read him in English translations, so the translators should get at least some credit.)

If Bergson can be justifiably accused of holding a vitalist worldview, he can also be praised for understanding freedom in terms of human being, in terms of our basic human animal selves, instead of introducing a separate agent: free-will or some variant thereof. Being the nominal master, but truly servant, of something called 'free-will' doesn't seem much more free than being the servant of our environments. If we are to be free, we must be free as complex organisms, as human animals intending (growing toward a state of) moral order, intending personhood—unity and coherence and completeness. Bergson pretty much nailed the description of what we should be intending: "[W]e are free when our acts spring from our whole personality, when they express it, when they have that indefinable resemblance to it which one sometimes finds between the artist and his work."

The God of Jesus Christ, in His role as Creator and Sustainer of this particular Creation, is not Himself free in the sense of some modern thinkers, free to act in an arbitrary way. In the very act of bringing into existence a specific Creation, God in His transcendence freely accepted the constraints of acting as a Creator of that specific Creation. In ancient Hebraic terms,

still valid in their main thrust, God offered a covenant which He accepted. Over the centuries, Jews and then Christians have explored various aspects of divine covenants but it all collapses to God's willingness to create and sustain a very particular Creation, including a differently particularized concrete world, and that willingness of God means that He's willing to act in certain ways appropriate to such a Creator of such a Creation. Our freedom is analogous, except that our being, including the raw 'pieces' of our whole personalities in Bergson's terms, is given to us and our freedom comes when we intend to be, as some say, the best we can be. The best we can be is to be unified and coherent and complete, an artist and his work, not just the artist.

In simple terms, I'm free when I'm a properly rich and complex version of me, when I've done what I've been called to do in life, having become the sort of man who could carry out my mission or at least made a good try of it.

So, freedom seems to be a simple matter of truly intending to be the sort of man who can carry out the mission I feel called to. In a surprising number of cases, men and women seem to know what they are called to be and, in an age such as ours, are so often frustrated in their life's mission because of the decay of the imperfect but reasonably well-ordered West including those who are frustrated even in their parental duties by the mainstream redefinition of those duties to being chauffeurs and facilitators as their children participate in programs intended to shape them as proper American consumers, supporters and dependents of centralized powers. But shouldn't we be able to be what we should be just by a proper amount of planning followed by the necessary effort to reach our goals, to make some headway toward perfection, or at least a state of good-enough? Isn't it easy enough to turn away from a civilization decaying still more rapidly in moral and cultural realms than in economic realms? Isn't it easy enough to take that first step toward a better future for ourselves and our descendants?

Unfortunately not. As Kenneth Minogue told us in *The Liberal Mind* [95]:

One cannot organize a work of art; nor write poetry to rule. The man who sets out quite deliberately to maximize his own happiness [or freedom] is likely to fail. Whilst one may, perhaps, be able to create vast pools of technicians at will, one cannot create political stability or a nation of mystics. There are many

things in the world which we cannot attain simply because we want them; and some are beyond our grasp precisely because we want them too much. [page 157]

The humblest of lives is a work of art if properly lived. We may see patterns, the opportunistic grab at means to a life of freedom, when we look at the lives of some judged worthy to be described in the biography sections of our libraries and bookstores, but, in almost all cases, those patterns appear only in the rearview mirror. I will again quote Professor Minogue:

There are no means which serve the precise end of freedom, for freedom, like happiness, is not an end that can be pursued. [page 158]

How can we obtain freedom? Once again, Professor Minogue has wise words for us:

[Freedom] has always been attained because of a spontaneous growth of interest in truth, science, or inventiveness; a spontaneous growth of moral principles appropriate to freedom; a spontaneous construction of the political arrangements which permit of free constitutional government. Spontaneity indicates that free behavior has arisen directly out of the character of the people concerned, and that it is neither a mechanical process, nor a “natural” reaction to an environment nor a means to the attainment of some end. Free behavior, in other words, is its own end. [page 158]

This is very similar to what I’ve been advocating. To become truly free, we must turn toward a deeper understanding of man as he truly exists, a citizen of a universe described in certain ways by Einstein and in other ways by Darwin. We must return to being the sort of man foreshadowed by Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, Galileo, Newton, as well as the likes of Cervantes and Bach and a host of early modern historians and literary exegetists and explorers and traders and even bankers. We must become men who pursue the truth for the truth’s sake, because it is the truth of Creation, the truth given to us by God to shape ourselves into His image. In terms I’ve used often: we must pick up our sticks and rocks, pretending

they are the tools we see our Heavenly Father using as He goes about His work. We must imitate His actions, learn to take His thoughts manifested in Creation into our own minds and let those thoughts become our minds. We must learn to love what is, just because it is the work of the Creator.

I'll make one matter more clear: we must turn to understanding ourselves not to control ourselves or to control potential criminals. We turn to such an understanding because the very effort will shape us into human persons, human animals who have become substantially unified, coherent, and complete.

When we do so, when we imitate our Maker in His work, we also imitate our Maker in His freedom. We learn to move freely, to think freely, to love freely.

It might seem odd that we learn to both imitate God and be free by studying the shape of spacetime or the strange nature of matter, by studying bones dug out of the sands and rocks of Africa, by studying the disedifying history of human communities and the often criminal nature of human individuals. It seems less odd to the extent we can recover a truer sense of this world as being part of a greater Creation, a work of the God of Jesus Christ.



## 289 Sex, Traditions, and the Modern Scientific Materialist

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1469>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/12/17.]

E.O. Wilson is often a fount of common-sense bordering on wisdom; I don't have to fully agree with a thinker to consider him sane and insightful. Wilson is a bit of a biological Calvinist but Jean Calvin and Jonathon Edwards were certainly sane if, in my opinion, quite wrong about some important matters. Oddly enough, in *On Human Nature* [150], Wilson disturbs the flow of sane words and opinions, in spurts, when he comes to the chapter titled *Sex*. He knows that no species can survive, let alone prosper, if it begins to act in ways at odds with the genetic heritage of that species and, yet, in a few scattered paragraphs shows himself to be carrying one of those strange fevers of modern academia when he chants some strange odes to the modern belief that women can be happier and more fulfilled if they become more like their fathers and less like their mothers, at least as fathers and mothers were a generation or two ago. Maybe he has moved on but I'll continue to review *On Human Nature* [150] as originally published in 1978.

Over the three decades or so since *On Human Nature* [150] was first published, the scientific content has held up very well, the general (almost philosophical) comments nearly as well, and the paragraphs where he seems to pander to modern American feminism date the book, though those ideas are still set in the rock-like minds of many politicians and activists and more than a few academics.

The story seems to be:

No, we aren't absolutely bound by our biological heritage but

we are bound by the most fundamental parts of that heritage, especially those aspects of human reproduction which are the foundation of our social forms.

However, we should nevertheless contort ourselves in the interests of helping women to take on roles at odds with their role in reproduction.

And, no, the truer traditionalist position on the roles of men and women doesn't entail that women are restricted only to mainstream women's roles as captured on television in the 1950s and 1960s, those roles being themselves a product of the Industrial Revolution, rather than a heritage from traditions properly understood. At their best, traditions reflect human nature and should guide general expectations, where I understand traditions to be the result of the responses of ancestors to their situations. Traditions are better the more they develop to be themselves responsive to changes within some spectrum of morally well-ordered human communities.

For a better understanding of the non-traditional nature of the 1950s American family, see *From Cottage to Work Station* [17] by Allan C. Carlson which tells of the way in which the roles of women from adequately prosperous families were restricted to the home in response to the social and moral problems of the Industrial Revolution. These changes were largely led by women from families of newly prosperous American and British Evangelical Protestants.

If we were a race of more open-minded creatures, those smart women who wish to become mathematicians or historians or lawyers could do so and could have done so in all societies past the stage where nearly every woman had to be bearing and raising children for the survival of her family lines. More recently, public institutions, medical systems and schools and public playgrounds and so on, have expanded so that, in the early stages of expansion, women remained in homes no longer the center of care of the young and the old and the sick or the incompetent. Such thinkers as Betty Friedan have testified that, at least in prosperous families, the resulting homes and the resulting lives of women were barren in various ways. That seems right to me. My maternal grandmother was an old-fashioned housewife and my paternal grandmother was a farm-wife on a family farm. Most of their daily work—making clothes and repairing clothes, managing food in an era when they had at best simple iceboxes, growing fresh vegetables, raising chickens, feeding the temporary workers during harvest-time,

and so on—aren't part of the economy of the modern household. (I didn't distinguish between tasks of my mill-town grandmother and my Oklahoma family farm grandmother.) The changes to a more barren home-life for women were partly caused by the bloating of the welfare state, encouraged by Christian leaders, which had various effects, one of which was that, by at least the late 1960s, the large family became socially and economically non-viable for most, perhaps economically nonviable in farm-country because the family farm was itself becoming unenviable.

With children old enough to be in school and little league and at the Boys' or Girls' clubs, some women, by the 1950s or so, seemed to be stuck at home as bored and restless decorations, not equipped to even properly entertain themselves. There are also undoubtedly some legitimate complaints on the part of individual women in fields where their talents weren't recognized or rewarded. Modern politicians are good at promising to fix various problems with their governmental hammers. And they carried through as best they could; our moral and social structures were pounded by those and other hammers forged in the modern world and that pounding came on top of social and moral structures already weakening for various reasons.

Wilson admits that feminism has sometimes not been at all attractive to its purported beneficiaries when he acknowledges that the daughters and granddaughters of truly radical feminists on Israeli kibbutzim willingly adopted very traditional roles for themselves. Wilson even tells us that efforts to engineer human beings, as individuals or communities, to forms contradictory to our basic genetic traits will result in very bad things happening. Some bad things were happening as a result of the re-formation of the family in response to the Industrial Revolution—see the novels of Charles Dickens or Benjamin Disraeli to get some idea of why it was that those Evangelical Protestants wished to protect children from the social horrors of that period and why it was that women felt it necessary to retreat from devastated regions of the social landscape so they could better care for the children.

So it was that, when feminism went 'mainstream' in the 1960s, some bad things were happening already. The 1960s were, in various ways, loaded with problems caused by the inevitable breakdown of the moral order of American life starting from at least World War I and not some sort of fresh revolution from out of nowhere. There were legitimate questions to be answered and the type of facts and partially refined knowledge to be found in books such as *On Human Nature* [150] could have helped, and will even-

tually help, to find good answers. Feminism as supported by our corrupt political parties and academic centers isn't one of those good answers.

If we push too hard, we're more likely to destroy the human race than to 'perfect' it. In a slightly less extreme situation, we're more likely to badly damage a country, such as Russia, than we are to turn it into a workers' paradise, where the workers have been perfected to a state suited to the paradise as designed by their betters. In a still less extreme situation, we've delayed the age of marriage and child-bearing for many, partly as a result of our mandatory school attendance laws, only to find a number of teenaged women having babies in very imprudent situations and other women perhaps having too few babies to keep their family lines going. Of course, we've rendered ourselves stupid enough to consider this an excuse for more social programs, by government or churches or other agents of knee-jerk responses, rather than a serious reason to rethink matters before we destroy more lives or even finish destroying Western Civilization. The motto of our do-gooders seems to be: if it hasn't worked so far, then let's do more of it.

One problem we have is the inability of most human beings, whether a product of nature or nurture or more likely both, to distinguish between class characteristics and individual variations. This is one of the problems which could be eliminated, in principle, by a proper theory of created being, one which recognizes that each complex entity, and perhaps each particle or other 'simple' entity, is a mixture of being from different levels of relatively more concrete and relatively more abstract forms of created being. As it is, most human beings, feminists and evolutionary biologists and politicians, need to be able to slot each entity in a category from some preferred scheme set by occult processes of some sort. It seems impossible, and we can pray appearances are deceiving in this regard, to hold an overall view of human females which protects the vast majority of girls and women and at the same time treats those women wishing to hold down one of those unconventional roles as respectable individuals. We're dealing here with a problem I addressed with respect to a horrible series of events in the history of colonial New England. See Chapter 408, *The Need for Abstractions in Moral Self-understanding*. Unfortunately, as I noted above, human beings seem to have, at best, rudimentary skills for dealing with the totality of being, abstract to concrete.

In fact, if we remember Jacques Barzun's distinction between (individual) intelligence and (communal and capitalized) intellect, it would seem

that a true intellect of the sort which begins to emerge as a civilization develops is simply a better way to allow most men and women, boys and girls, to participate in a more complex civilization or more complex form of religious belief without using their individual intelligences in realms which are perhaps beyond their reach—at some point, each one of us goes beyond the capacity of our intelligence. See Chapter 127, *Intelligence vs. Intellect* for a discussion of the distinction between individual intelligence and communal intellect as found in Barzun's book, *The House of Intellect*.

One of the problems with the Enlightenment distortion of human thought, a distortion seemingly congenial to Americans—Joe Six-pack as well as Lefty Chapbook, is that we imagine that since we have strong and living intelligences capable of dealing well with metal-work or understanding the writings of established novelists or philosophers or putting together political coalitions, then that means we can move right on to understand the American role in Afghanistan or the revelations in the Bible or the nature of truth or time or space or whatever. So far as I can tell there are many who have minds competent at dealing with specific domains of concrete being, often more than one such domain. It also seems that there are few who have the native talent, fewer still with the developed talent, to deal with those more abstract realms of being, fewer than that who can deal with complex mixtures of concrete and abstract realms of being. One reason for some not developing such talents is the time factor mentioned above, especially in our busy-work era. Little more than a century ago, smalltown lawyers or country parsons or the non-idle rich could sometimes produce modest or more than modest works in biology or history or mathematics. Nowadays, we're far more limited in the development of our human natures, a complex issue beyond the scope of this essay.

It's disturbing when Wilson goes into tizzies approaching psychosis in the chapter entitled *Sex*. After arguing that we and other creatures are our bodies, a statement I'd agree with so long as bodies are understood as part of created being as I understand it, Wilson works himself up into his tizzies after discussing the justice of a fairly radical sexual equality, which mostly seems to mean that the traditional and pseudo-traditional feminine roles are to be jettisoned as much as possible because they're yucky and not very admirable. Then we can admit women to the status of true human being; they can fill the roles more suited to many men—but far from all men—and a few women. Yeah! What about all the common-sense statements that we can only do great damage to ourselves, our children, and our communities by

trying to make ourselves into creatures having characteristics inconsistent with our DNA, inconsistent with the history of the human race?

Liberalism, in its varied manifestations, has replaced the idea of the human being with that of radical individuals filling roles in liberal society, bipedal hairless apes being stuff to be shaped to fill those biologically implausible roles in sociobiologically implausible societies.

The various forms of traditionalism are the result of sociobiological processes in which family lines of human beings developed social, political, economic, and religious structures which allowed them to sustain and reproduce their individual and communal selves under particular conditions (which, to be sure, sometimes go out of existence before those structures). A lot can happen in such a complex process and much of that 'a lot' is undesirable in some meaningful sense. Some of that which may be undesirable, at least to our Western eyes, is also inevitable in a sense. Take Afghanistan. Most men lead very harsh lives as nomadic herders or farmers of unpromising soil. The wives of the men have even less fulfilling lives. Be realistic. That's what Afghanistan allows. The type of men we consider brutal and exploitive are the types who can survive in a harsh environment. To be sure, better is possible but better doesn't come with do-gooders imposing American middle-class life-styles upon poppy farmers and nomadic herdsman or bandits. Nor does it come at the points of American guns. Stay in Afghanistan or move there and those descendants who survive will tend to be like those Afghans who don't quite meet our standards. So far as I know, even the Macedonians and Greeks that Alexander the Great left to guard the trade routes merged into the native population. The same seems to have happened with the Mongolians left by the Khans to fill the same role.

So, some traditions are generally what they are because their setting allows the human residents a limited range of options. Some traditions allow more freedom to take advantage of new opportunities, but perhaps the members of that tradition don't find those new opportunities to be attractive.

We can take this away: traditions, living and always—ideally—being modified by talented thinkers and insightful spiritual guides and clearheaded men of action, are our guides for building upon our biological natures to achieve higher levels of community lives, lives reflecting higher moral order and also higher cognitive understandings of ourselves and other entities and aspects of Creation.

We can also take this away: we had a pretty good group of traditions in Western Civilization. They were far from perfect, and, as I noted above, we had problems living by those parts of the traditions which reflected legitimate group differences while also treating members of groups as individuals. Yet, we have lost a lot with our immoral efforts to impose dreams upon biological creatures and their communities. I think we'll gain still more if we respond properly to our problems and opportunities. The usual story told by traditionalists is that the Enlightenment thinkers did their damage by stepping outside of their own traditions, outside of their own moral communities. Supporters of the Enlightenment way of thinking will claim the traditionalists were inflexible and had become mere bigots. There's a lot of truth in both views and that situation leads to the conjecture that Western Civilization, at least in its Modern or post-Medieval phase, has run its course. We're entering a new phase of that story being told by God, which story is this world. The legitimate scientific knowledge and general commentary of E.O. Wilson and other clearheaded sociobiological thinkers can help us to tell our version of this phase of God's story and, by so doing, we better enter into this story as God's servants and friends.



## 290 How Can We Describe a Human Being?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1498>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/01/17.]

I reread Jerome Kagan's *Galen's Prophecy* [80], a book about the struggle to make sense of such matters as temperament vs. character and the very nature of temperament, as part of an effort to gear myself up to write the sections on heart in my book on human nature (mind and heart and hands). Since our empirical understanding of these issues is far from settled, I'll be moving on to extend my overall narrative of Creation to encompass human nature, assuming that I can suggest a plausible overview that can help make greater sense of empirical facts, helping to turn them into knowledge and maybe greater understandings.

Many of Kagan's lines of argument deal with the confusion and lack of stability in ideas about human nature which have been created by efforts to impose upon the human being some *a priori* categories. This has produced some successes in studying thought, not many at all for feelings and emotions. Modern thinkers can see the error in this if only by reading a book in anthropology which points out that the basic emotions posited by ancient Greeks are different from those posited by Chinese thinkers through the centuries. Malays and others have still other schemes. Professor Kagan presents some representative examples in his book. Modern thinkers have done such things as adding a heretofore minor emotion (sympathy, David Hume) in a perhaps misguided effort to reach a highly desirable goal—seeing the good in emotions.

Empirical investigators have found confusion rather than certainty in the early stages of investigating even a so seemingly fundamental—falsely so—

concept as fear. Behavior and signs of emotion don't even work as guides because similar behaviors and, say, facial expressions can be generated by different brain-states and biochemical states. Moreover, similar brain-states and biochemical states can lead to different signs and behaviors of fear and other, maybe, emotions. The issue of subjective awareness of our emotions, which follows rather than leading changes in our various states of being, has something of an explosive effect, destroying most signs of tentative order.

This is hardly surprising to one who advocates that novelistic attitudes and forms of story-telling are our best ways of higher-level understandings of the world and the more complex entities it contains. As I see it, conscious emotions are part of our efforts to construct narratives to make sense of what has happened or is happening or might happen.

Professor Kagan makes a general statement about one aspect of these issues in the preface:

Some psychologists resist acknowledging the contribution of physiology because of a worry that if they let the camel's nose under the tent, he will soon be inside forcing all the residents to leave. I do not believe that the phenomenon of a shy or bold child will ever be understood with, or predicted from, physiological knowledge alone. Temperamental phenomena cannot be reduced to biology. Biological sentences cannot replace psychological ones, for the same reason that the language that describes the history of a hurricane will never be replaced with propositions descriptive of the single molecules of air and water in the storm because the former sentences refer to processes applicable to very large numbers of molecules. The camel will never become the only resident in the tent. [page xxi]

This is all very interesting and quite confusing since there is no way we now know about, as Kagan makes clear, to draw out any fact-based and plausible description of human emotions. He argues for the need to find such a description by empirical means; as I would say, we need to gather facts, analyze them and organize them into clean data and then into information, and then to create one or more systems of—perhaps competing—knowledge of human feelings. That is where we can begin serious efforts to understand our own selves, with poets or theologians perhaps leading the way.

I'll put in somewhat different terms a claim I made above: we need to have some plausible understanding of the world as a whole in order to understand the moral characters and other complex entities which play a role in that world, the universe seen as a purposeful narrative. I wrote several essays over the past six years dealing with this issue. Six years ago, I did so by way of a highly respectful critique of Jamesian Pragmatism—see Chapter 84, *What is Mind?: Pragmatism and Thomistic Existentialism*. A couple months prior to publishing that essay, I had published one dealing with the refusal of Henri Bergson to explicitly admit the existence of a world which was both itself an entity and 'container' of entities. That essay is included in this book as Chapter 189, *Henri Bergson: Almost Seeing a World*.

We should let the scientists do their work even as some of us start to construct worldviews considering what is solidly known about this world and, indeed, all of Creation and also what is plausibly conjectured. This is the realm of speculation, of the manufacture of glues to hold the mosaic together in tentative imitation of the unity which is to be found in this world and the greater unity to be found in all of Creation.

To do this and to help guide more specific and more empirical investigations, there is a clear need for a fresh understanding of being, what I, a Christian, would call created being. In terms used by Kagan in the quoted material: the camel has already entered the tent and he has two heads. Dualism is manifest as an ugly beast. Despite that analogy, it's a more subtle and much more attractive dualism than such intellectual and moral atrocities as the software theory of the mind or the information (DNA) theory of human identity, but it is an implicit dualism. Any form of dualism will threaten the unity of created being which would allow us to properly understand our world and all of Creation. Dualisms began as systems with the *a priori* categories: 'what we can understand by empirical means' and 'the rest of it.' Nowadays, there are more subtle and sophisticated forms of dualism or even manyism.

What reason has Kagan to claim some ultimate truth-value in the categorization of human nature into a category subject to 'biological sentences' and a category subject to 'psychological sentences'? He criticizes this way of thought when the *a priori* categories are more particular, such as any such categories of human emotions. What reason has he to even claim some ultimate truth-value in the categorization of atmospheric dynamics into a category subject to 'sentences about molecules of air and water' and

a category subject to ‘sentences about the history of a hurricane’?

I think his instincts are right. He has good gut-level reasons to think as he does, but he’s made a fundamental error of reducing a question of the nature of being, or of particular entities, to questions about human knowledge or human language. This is the original sin which leads to a corresponding fragmentation of reality. The world is divided into categories defined, in this case, by the attitudes which have led to the accomplishments and dead-ends of analytical philosophy. And these categories, though more mutable, aren’t so much different from the substance-dualism categories of body-soul, matter-spirit. I address the general issue of the modern fragmentation of knowledge in the freely downloadable book, *Four Kinds of Knowledge*[43], where I argue, however inadequately at times, for the ultimate unity of created being and, hence, of our knowledge of created being. I show the effects on human beings in the freely downloadable novel, *A Man for Every Purpose*[37].

In Chapter 475, *Physics, Politics, and Metaphysics*, I responded to an essay by Ken Masugi lamenting the tendency of modern political scientists to conduct only quantitative empirical studies to the exclusion of philosophical analyses and contemplations. I would recommend anyone interested in this subject to read my entire essay, but I’ll provide a quote summarizing much of my position:

In my critique of our general inability to understand created being, not just human politics, I’ve pointed to one way of expanding those limited understandings and maybe correcting those understandings by borrowing from those fields such as quantum physics and gravitational theory which have penetrated to some pretty abstract realms of created being from their particular viewpoints. Modern physics has shot past the limits on created being which traditional physics and traditional meta-physics had given us. We can expand our understanding of created being, including the possible sources of moral nature for a creature, and we can do that by trying to stand upon the foundations which physics and mathematics and other sciences have given to us and trying to see what lies beyond. What is the true nature of created being? Am I right when I say there is one spectrum of created being and that concrete being is shaped from relatively more abstract being itself shaped from still more

abstract being and so on until we reach the truths God manifested as the raw stuff of Creation? That is, am I right that we can consider matter as being frozen soul, in a semi-traditional way of speaking?

In other words, we should see depth of being in even the most concrete of nonliving objects and certainly in a human being. We see that human being as shaped from abstract realms of being which appear to us as layers 'below' his physical stuff. We also accept that all these layers of more or less abstract being come to us as manifested in that woman in front of us. The abstract is to be found in the concrete things which are shaped from the abstract as clay is still to be found in a vase. In Christian terms: as the Son of God became incarnate as a man, so does the raw stuff of Creation, manifested truths, become particularized as a man. In many ways, the two complex events are quite similar.



## 291 More About Our Inadequate Understanding of Created Being

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1522>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/02/04.]

In Chapter 290, *How Can We Describe a Human Being?*, I criticized the psychologist Jerome Kagan for making a mostly valid statement in a slanted way: “Biological sentences cannot replace psychological ones, for the same reason that the language that describes the history of a hurricane will never be replaced with propositions descriptive of the single molecules of air and water in the storm because the former sentences refer to processes applicable to very large numbers of molecules.” In my opinion, he would have been on more solid ground if he’d written about being and not language.

Kagan was right in pointing to the importance of language, words and sentences and—I would add—stories, but he missed the point that problems in our mis-understanding about, or lack of insight into, created being underly our difficulties forming proper sentences to speak about, for example, complex systems which seem to have properties which don’t come from a simple summing of their members.

Let me quote a professor of physics, Robert C. Hilborn, from an introductory work, *Chaos and Nonlinear Dynamics* [72]:

[W]hy study chaos? To answer this question, we have to cast off the blinders that most twentieth-century physicists have worn. The blinders have kept our attention focused on learning more about the microscopic world that underlies the phenomena we observe. We cannot deny that this has been an immensely successful enterprise both in terms of what we have learned about the fundamental structures of matter and in the

application of those fundamental ideas to the practical needs of society. In this drive toward the microscopic, however, many scientists have lost sight of the complexity of phenomena outside the tightly controlled domains of laboratory experiments. In some sense we expect that this complexity follows from the fundamental microscopic laws and is, in some way, embodied in those laws. However, the fundamental laws do not seem to give us the means to talk about and understand this complexity. If we are to understand and explain the universality of chaos, for example, we need to go beyond the specific predictions made by the fundamental laws for specific systems. We must approach this complexity at a different “level of explanation.” Instead of seeing chaotic behavior as yet another tool to help us probe the microscopic world, we should think of this complexity as an essential part of the world around us, and science should attempt to understand it. Nonlinear dynamics and the theory of chaos are our first (perhaps rather feeble) attempts to come to grips with this dynamical complexity. [page 60]

Professor Hilborn speaks of a different “level of explanation.” That phrase has a pretty strong feel of moving in the right direction; it’s a way of speaking which is compatible with the idea that the primary issue isn’t “a way of speaking” but rather the nature of created being. The problems with language arise because there is a true problem, a serious inadequacy and misunderstanding, about the nature of created being. Our traditional understanding of created being isn’t rich enough, isn’t complex enough to handle our existing knowledge about the physical world or about human communities as they have evolved and developed in recent centuries. I’ve written about this again and again, because it is the foundation of any plausible understanding of God’s Creation. For example, I spoke of the need to have a proper grasp of the relationship between realms of relatively abstract created being and the concrete, thing-like created being of our world in Chapter 408, *The Need for Abstractions in Moral Self-understanding*, which deals with the problems the New Englanders had in dealing with the concrete humanity of the native Americans. I addressed the general issue of created being from a wider perspective in Chapter 169, *From Abstract Being to Concrete Being and Narratives*.

I cannot stress too strongly that we need a new understanding of created

being, from a metaphysical viewpoint and also from the viewpoint of all fields of study which deal mostly with concrete being and narratives. We Christians, in particular, need a plausible understanding of the story God is telling set in the context of all of Creation, all realms of abstract to concrete created being. That story will be our ways of stating the Creed and talking about Jesus Christ's life and living in imitation of that life.

This isn't to deny the existence and importance of language problems, lack of adequate words and—I'd add—lack of proper grammatical constructions. It is to say that the language problems are due to deeper problems: the lack of proper concepts for understanding created being. We probably have to work on both language and conceptual problems at the same time, each component of a proper understanding rising at different rates and then being used to pull up the other components.

We seem to be in a situation where the knowledge of theoretical physics and mathematics are inordinately important in moving forward from our current state of seeming chaos, but, as is often true with so-called chaotic systems, there is order underlying the confusion and that order is gradually coming into our human view.

In Chapter 90, *Shaping Our Minds to Reality*, I discussed an insight from John Polkinghorne, a physicist become Anglican priest, on the problems even physicists have in gaining a conceptual understanding of quantum mechanics. Polkinghorne's insight came from his short book, *The Quantum World* [117].



# 292 Creation Is Us, It Also Are Us

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1567>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/03/14.]

What happens when someone loses a body part or use of and feeling in that body part? How completely can a human being adapt to a prosthetic device?

The article *Human Brain Treats Prosthetic Devices as Part of the Body* at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/03/130306221135.htm> tells us:

People with spinal cord injuries show strong association of wheelchairs as part of their body, not extension of immobile limbs.

The human brain can learn to treat relevant prosthetics as a substitute for a non-working body part, according to research published March 6 in the open access journal PLOS ONE by Mariella Pazzaglia and colleagues from Sapienza University and IRCCS Fondazione Santa Lucia of Rome in Italy, supported by the International Foundation for Research in Paraplegie.

The researchers found that wheelchair-bound study participants with spinal cord injuries perceived their body's edges as being plastic and flexible to include the wheelchair, independent of time since their injury or experience with using a wheelchair. Patients with lower spinal cord injuries who retained upper body movement showed a stronger association of the wheelchair with their body than those who had spinal cord impairments in the entire body

This leads me on something of a journey through my own developing thought.

If we are, as I speculate, to be truly unified beings in the world of the resurrected, we are most certainly not unified in this mortal realm. A baby is born with body parts connected by lines and networks of nerves to a brain which is a collection of brain-cells not yet fully functional neurons. The infant brain is more potential than true brain, but those cells have strange inclinations to reach out and to try to form connections. The connections which generate steady activity will be reinforced; the others will die, probably along with some of the brain-cells themselves.

There are also tentative connections to leg muscles and eyes and lips which connections are strengthened when used regularly as some sort of reasonable response to opportunities or problems. The baby learns that those funny things he'll eventually call fingers are somewhat responsive to his desires. He learns later on how to use his legs to crawl and then to walk. He learns what it means to feel pangs of hunger and his brain and glands react with initially obscure feelings of upset. By his active responses to his mother's breast, to his father's caressing hands, by his learning to pull back when gravity threatens to pull him down, that baby begins to unify his embodied self, a process that will, we can pray, continue as he forms his mind and his intellect, as he forms his individual and communal human being. Why would we think this process to have a firm boundary so that only the arms we're born with can be part of the brain's mapping of self? Why would we not think that our instruments become extensions of our bodies mapped into our self-images in a way similar to our arms and lungs?

I had written of this general issue years ago, in essays included here as Chapter 74, *Rules or Context?* and Chapter 106, *So What if the Human Mind is a Product of Evolution?*.

Over the past few years, I've been developing a line of thought: this world was created so that the Son of God could empty Himself to be incarnated in a creaturely nature and live, enjoy, suffer, die, and rise in a perfected human nature united with His divine nature. This Gospel story leads to our ongoing story, that of the development of the Body of Christ in this world. We are saved by, and only by, incorporation into that Body. We are perfected and completed, we become capable of sharing God's life in the world of the resurrected, by accepting as our own the communal human being of that Body. So it was that, in 2011, I wrote the original version of Chapter 613, *Does the Body of Christ have non-human components?*

where I discussed the possibility that the Body of Christ in His perfected, heavenly manifestation would include some of our technology. I concluded, “We Christians have a tendency to etherealize the nature of heavenly and of resurrected human beings. In fact, our resurrected selves are completed and perfected versions of our mortal selves. If our technology has become a part of us and our communities here on earth, even a part of the pilgrim Body of Christ, then we would be mutilated creatures if we were resurrected without it, without perfected and completed technology of the sort which can aid in that perfection and completion of a true human life and in that perfection and completion of the Body of Christ.”

I believe we are seeing a vast expansion of the possibilities of human being, individual to some extent and communal to a great extent. We’re also in danger of these processes of expansion being hijacked by those who would have us develop in ways that enrich them or increase their power. I’m optimistic about the long-run, not the short-run for sure, because of my faith in God and my belief that this world is the story of the Body of Christ. We could increase the odds of good dominating over bad and over evil even in the short-run if we were to get to work on understanding what is going on, which effort can be successful only if we have a good understanding of all of Creation and of the role of individual and communal human being in this story being told by God.



## 293 Communities Form by Way of Dependencies

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1576>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/04/01.]

There is a short article, *Myth of Family Meals in Parent-Child Bonding Gets Debunked* found at <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=myth-of-family-meals-child-parent-bonding-gets-debunked>, which speaks in a common-sense way though the title is rather misleading. What the underlying study and the article point out is that family meals are a result of healthy and strong relationships between parents and children rather than being a magical cause of such relationships. The article tells us: “Recent research in the *Journal of Marriage and Family*, however, found that most of the benefits of regular family meals were not actually the result of eating together. Rather, social scientists Kelly Musick and Ann Meier found, they stemmed from other factors in the family environment that facilitated regular meals, such as sufficient income, strong family relationships and authoritative parents.”

The study says more talking between teens and parents seems to take place in cars than elsewhere, but that doesn’t speak against a variety of shared experiences. Being together, sharing experiences, talking with each other, will—in most cases—strengthen a relationship. Eating meals together fall in such a category and so would raking leaves together or painting a room together.

But the question is, “What truly bonds human beings?” In this case, I’ll endorse an answer coming from sociologists and historians based upon analyses and contemplations of empirical information of a different sort

than that found in the studies discussed in the above-referenced article.

We form communal bonds by learning how to live with and within our dependencies upon each other.

By speaking of “authoritative parents,” not always admired by modern social scientists, the scientists who did the research are at least partially admitting such and maybe did admit such in the full report of their study. Parents don’t magically acquire some sort of authority by being anointed by some spirit from a better-ordered realm. Parents are authoritative because they are the ones who feed and house and cloth and teach their children or, at least, should have control over all those activities. This doesn’t mean parents always know the right way to care for and raise their children. There are others—such as grandparents and aunts and uncles, doctors, and clergymen—who can provide good advice or at least stories of how they’d formed families or seen others form families. It’s not necessary that the participants in this process of forming dependencies are aware of the material foundations of what should, we can pray, turn into loving relationships, but they have to accept, consciously or unconsciously, the bonds being formed by dependencies.

Anyone who’s observed a baby growing up in even the most loving family will realize that battles start early about who’s in charge; a baby thinks to control his mother and certainly her breasts for his own purposes. The mother teaches the baby that she’s in charge though greatly concerned about his needs and desires. These battles come and go throughout our lives and may even arise again in later decades when an elderly mother might be dependent upon those children who were once nourished at her breast and were taught the basics of human knowledge on her lap or as they watched how she went about her work and her socializing. Then again, even if Grandma is impoverished, Mom and Dad might be dependent upon her for advice in dealing with their own children. In the best of cases, much of this goes pretty smoothly, largely because the tendencies toward proper behavior are encoded in the different and differently activated genes of mother and father and children, in the genes of all human beings who are individual human beings and also inherently social beings.

As insightful thinkers such as Talcott Parsons (see [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Talcott\\_Parsons](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Talcott_Parsons)) and Robert Nisbet (see [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Robert\\_Nisbet](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Robert_Nisbet)) have noted: human beings

don't come together to be together, they come together to accomplish something. That something might be socializing around the campfire or it might be fighting a neighboring tribe or foraging for food. This is when everyone begins to see their dependencies upon the fellow with the good memory for generations of stories and the man who can take down a deer with almost each arrow and the woman who knows well which plants or mushrooms are poisonous. We form human communities by bonds of dependencies and not because of allegedly higher sentiments.

Dependencies are problematical in this age of the myths about free-standing individuals. Dependencies are also unavoidable and—certainly in my opinion—lead to great goods, but we're taught that we can and should free ourselves from any dependencies we don't choose for ourselves and we're taught to choose to be dependent upon the centralized powers, the national governments and corporations. We can have strong communities only if we're willing to become dependent upon those communities, families and churches or synagogues and local political communities and even nations don't form by magical processes but rather by hard work and the acceptance of dependencies. If we choose to teach our children to be dependent for their most important needs upon the central governments, the centralized school systems quite out of the control of families and local communities, the sports leagues, corporations which provide jobs and fast-food and hours of video or audio entertainment, then those children will form strong bonds to the gods of the marketplaces. If we teach them that they are bonded to their families and churches and neighborhoods only as a matter of sentimental choice, then they will form at best sentimental bonds, weak bonds, to these other communities. If we teach them, if we've made it a reality, that marriage is a contractual relationships where husband and wife aren't truly dependent upon each other, then they will form only sentimental bonds, weak bonds, to their spouses.



## 294 Reshaping Takes Time and Can be Painful

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1583>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/04/04.]

In this preview of a *Scientific American* article, *Urban Living Raises the Risk of Emotional Disorders* at <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=urban-living-raises-risk-of-emotional-disorders>, the question is raised:

[U]rban migration represents one of the most dramatic environmental shifts human beings have ever undertaken. So one might be tempted to ask: How are we adapting to our new digs?

Part of the answer is sad:

[M]emory and attention can suffer in urban environments, and psychologists have long known that city life takes an emotional toll. Urbanites are more likely to suffer from anxiety and depression, and the risk of schizophrenia increases dramatically among people raised in a city. Some researchers have calculated that children born in cities face twice, if not three times, the risk of developing a serious emotional disorder as compared with their rural and suburban peers.

In my way of thought, we can learn much from these sorts of studies but a greater understanding can come only with a greater understanding of the Creation which human beings, as individual beings and communal

beings, encapsulate when they shape themselves in response to their environments, then some totality of environments up to all of Creation. Proper responses, courageous and faith-filled, lead to explorations and speculations and deeper understandings which are set in purposeful narratives. It is in this very effort that human being expands, become richer and more complex, each individual and each community becoming more world-like, unified and coherent and complete.

A human being is more than an animal that can be shifted from one environment to another. His innermost individual and communal beings are shaped in many ways to correspond to his environment or multiple environments. As a result, he needs a story about his environments to understand those individual and communal parts of his own self.

I develop such a greater understanding from a sacramental Christian viewpoint in my recently released and freely downloadable book, *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53]. Much of what I write can be used directly in a Jewish understanding and much may even be usable for various other sets of beliefs.

In one section of that book, I speculated a little about schizophrenia. I'll quote that entire short section:

I've made the claim that modern men have some schizophrenic traits. In my first explorations of this idea, I was following the insights in *Madness and Modernism: Insanity in the Light of Modern Art, Literature, and Thought* [126], by Louis Sass, a clinical psychologist who is also quite knowledgeable in the fields of literature and art and history and more. This book is a multi-disciplinary discussion of two parallel phenomena, modern styles of thinking and art on the one hand and schizophrenia on the other hand.

Yes, we modern human beings are all schizophrenics, in a manner of speaking, though most of us have lost contact with reality in its wider and more abstract respects, including its narrative aspects in this world, without being aware that something is wrong. Early in the process of developing an American character, Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry James, Sr., and perhaps others believed that Americans are morally insane, in rebellion against a world that doesn't quite meet American

approval—though most of us are in a cowardly or even unconscious sort of rebellion.

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

If we read Professor Sass' book and pay attention to the stories told by some of the more interesting cases, we learn of someone who was apparently insane in an obvious way though given to a certain poetical way of speech (the daughter of James Joyce), and we learn of someone who had a grand understanding of the cosmos in which he was some sort of central figure wired to each part of this universe and controlled by all those parts—or maybe he controlled the universe, and we get more general summaries of those who simply constructed nonsensical narratives to make sense of their lives. I've spoken to some of those sorts of disturbed human beings, some are capable of living partially on their own, one might be walking past your house as you read this. One I used to talk to occasionally produced a narrative stream which made sense paragraph by paragraph but was eerie and nonsensical as the paragraphs piled up. She would sometimes reach a point where she was herself confused and not sure how to go on with her story which had the feel but not the formal and literary coherence of the more talented of modernist writers, such as James Joyce.

The other point I'd like to raise from *Madness and Modernism* [126] is the possibility, perhaps likelihood, that schizophrenia, as currently defined, developed in the industrial age, but I'd also like to note a seemingly conflicting claim by Julian Jaynes that ancient man was schizophrenic and experienced life as a narrative guided by voices in his

head. See the Wikipedia article on Professor Jaynes, at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julian\\_Jaynes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julian_Jaynes), for a discussion that seems pretty good to me and remember that Professor Jaynes is speaking about an age when human beings were being forced to live in radically new ways as human communities grew in size and complexity. This implies to me that schizophrenia is a disorder found in those who have trouble responding to complex social patterns, or perhaps to the ongoing development of complexity in social patterns. Those human beings are maybe dependent upon rigidly practiced habits learned from their communities. When those learned habits are inadequate during periods of rapid change—schizophrenia becomes common. Maybe. Such a speculation has the great advantage of being useful in understanding schizophrenia as a clinical disease and also as an extreme example of the breakdown in the modern mind, in its individual and communal manifestations.

Professor Jaynes didn't put his analysis in narrative terms, to my recollection of reading his major work on the subject 20 years ago, but it was clear the voices provided purpose and moral guidance—they were perceived as gods such as the ones which were some sort of manifest idealizations of human emotions and virtues in the *Iliad*. In fact, Jaynes thought the voices would appear as volition, the decision-maker for befuddled creatures which had not yet learned to integrate higher self-awareness and various sorts of abstract reasoning into their 'core selves' (my term). This can lead to my criticism of the common view of free-will which sees our moral freedom as being exercised by an agent which can then direct us. But who directs this free-will? Is it coincidence that free-will has been glorified in a modern age where it can be claimed that human styles of thinking and feeling and acting are schizophrenic? Against this sort of a fundamentally schizophrenic understanding of moral freedom, I would suggest that we have the real but limited moral freedom of organisms thinking and feeling and acting in specific contexts.

We respond to what lies inside of us and outside of us by trying to create a narrative of our own lives and, usually, at least an implicit narrative that corresponds to what I call a 'world', an entity which—in my highly abstract way of thought—is unified,

coherent, and complete. It is the universe, or some part of it, brought to moral order.

If the process of creating these narratives fails? It would certainly be plausible to get the sort of confusion and disturbance we read about in the *Iliad* or in the analyses of the American separation from reality we find in the writings of Tocqueville, Hawthorne, Melville, Henry James, Sr., and more recently Flannery O'Connor, Ray Bradbury, and Graham Greene (in at least the one novel—*The Quiet American*). But it seems to be a regularly recurring element, if often in the background, of serious American fiction or serious fiction containing American characters. It's a primary element of my novels.

All of my books, novels and nonfiction, have something to say about the disorder found in the modern human being as he struggles to make sense of a world which has been revealed as far more complex than we are currently able to deal with. See Chapter ?? , *Other Writings by Loyd Fueston* for a listing of these books and instructions on how to obtain them—most are freely downloadable.

We are rather confused barbarian children, without a civilization. To my mind, this is pretty much equivalent to saying we have no understanding of Creation which allows us to see purpose, to produce serious art and literature, to properly set goals for use of our technological and economic and political efforts. We are a people with many policies and programs and not a clue what to do with them. This might be why we have so many individual human beings and a good number of human communities who are lost in the cosmos, as the novelist Walker Percy used to say.



## 295 The Embodied but Constructed Self

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1595>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/04/18.]

This article, *The Invisible Hand Illusion* at <http://phenomena.nationalgeographic.com/2013/04/14/the-invisible-hand-illusion/>, deals with a laboratory testing trick by which psychologists can make people feel as if they have an invisible hand. Ed Yong writes:

Hold your hand up in front of your face. It is patently obvious that the five-fingered thing in front of you is your hand, and the empty space next to it is not. But this ability to recognize your own body is more complicated than it first appears, and can be fooled through a surprisingly simple trick.

...

[A psychological ‘trick’ which had become a popular party trick] suggested to [Henrik Ehrsson from the Karolinska Institute] that even though we have a lifetime’s experience of owning our bodies, this seemingly ingrained feeling is actually very fragile. Our brain constructs it all the time using information from our senses.

And so it is that clever psychologists can make you think you have an invisible hand.

It’s odd to those who feel a need to think of a human being, their own self or another, as having some sort of well-formed existence given at conception or maturity or whatever. This is the mistake of thinking of an

empirical creature, a human being, as metaphysically grounded, a complete being thought of as perhaps a ‘person’. I might describe this as ‘backdoor’ Platonism, a replacement of an ultimately erroneous but plausible and rationally stated understanding of being by mere assumptions, prejudices of a sort guaranteed to decay into superstitions if held too firmly and too consistently.

We are embodied but our individual ‘selves’ are constructed by our interactions with our own bodies and with a lot of surrounding entities, some of them abstract and not embodied, at least not in a direct way. (Embodiment can be a misleading description of, say, a community but it is a valid description if properly qualified by references, for example, to past and future generations or even the me of last year and the you of ten years from now.)

We are, in some reductionistic but legitimate sense, mappings in our brains, mappings which include both our individual and communal selves. In one of my books, *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53], I wrote:

In the December, 2007 edition of *Brain in the News* published by *Dana Foundation* (see <http://www.dana.org/>), there was a reprint of an article *I Feel Your Pain* originally published at <http://Salon.com/>. It seems that specific brain-cells have been found which respond to distress on the part of a nearby creature. True pain can be felt when we see others suffering.

Why not? The destruction by fire of cells on the tips of our fingers doesn’t magically lead to pain felt in our brains or in parts of the nervous system between finger and brain. There is no magical, nor metaphysical, foundation to the processes of pain in our bodies. It’s a result of biological selection processes which favored nervous systems which registered damage in such ways as to force the organism to react strongly. There is something real about pain but that reality is mediated by way of nervous system interactions more the result of tinkering than of design of the sort possible to modern engineers.

It seems quite reasonable that we would be made so that those brain-cells registering pain might well react to the pain of others, especially others who might be members of our communities. It’s this simple: if we build drones or other robotic

devices to monitor forests for fires, then any reaction tied to direct detection of a fire can also be activated if the robot sees another robot acting as if it detected a fire. In a human being, or another social animal, we can merely add a mapping ‘module’ in the brain to put ourselves in the place of another and that reaction is experienced as something akin to the pain we would feel if we were actually in that situation ourselves.

Tentatively, we can say that empathy is the response of certain brain-cells to certain sorts of stimuli. That stimuli can be directly provided by the surrounding environment or it can be provided by signaling of various sorts.

Is that really empathy? Is that what ties us together during times of distress and trouble? Is that what motivates some to take in orphans and others to go off to serve in regions just hit by natural disasters? Is that what leads Joe to feel sorry for a man who just lost his beloved wife even when he’s the jerk who cheated Joe out of a promotion? We seem to have a need for some sort of higher explanation, something that would raise our emotions—loves and hates—into a realm more pure than our world of flesh and blood, dirt and rocks. There’s no reason to expect such an explanation exists. Though the entities of this concrete realm be shaped from more abstract stuff, neither concrete entities of this world nor their complex aspects are to be found in some realm of ethereal being and beings.

This world seems to contain various sorts of two-edged swords. It’s hardly surprising that we come into existence as, shall we say, tentative individual persons and communal persons by way of processes which also leave us vulnerable to magician’s tricks and maybe to manipulation by various sorts of human predators.



## 296 I Have Stuff and I Am a Story

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1610>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/05/07.]

In April of 2013, Ed Yong posted an analysis of the current state of research in the study of the human brain: *Neuroscience Can't Do It Cap'n, It Doesn't Have the Power* found at <http://phenomena.nationalgeographic.com/2013/04/10/neuroscience-cannae-do-it-capn-it-doesnt-have-the-power/>. It is statistical power that is missing. For reasons discussed clearly by Yong, results in neuroscience are often false or exaggerated. A study indicating that an anti-psychotic drug has a strong and good effect on schizophrenic patients might produce strong signals that it does have such an effect; follow-up studies might show only a weak effect or none at all. Think of it in terms of the underlying genes. If there is a gene which has a significant but small effect on the development of schizophrenia, then it might well be the case that ten research projects can look at that gene, eight failing to find an effect and disappearing without a ripple, one finding a weak effect and getting only modest attention, and one finding a strong effect and generating headlines. Overall, the statistics are true to the underlying significant but weak effect but the one research project which receives a lot of attention is the one which exaggerates the effect.

We should be careful when we read of results in the biological sciences in general and Yong tells us that this problem of statistical lack of power, playing hide-and-seek with an effect, occurs in medical studies in general, including “basic studies in cancer, heart disease and other conditions” and also psychology in general. He also states that geneticists are developing

methods using large amount of data (more possible in that field than in some others) which avoid low-powered statistics.

Another major reason, in my opinion, to be careful about many studies of the brain, to be very careful in designing new studies, is that a properly developed human brain is integrated with a human mind itself shaped by responses to other parts of that human body, to other individual and communal human beings, and to physical reality in general; maybe even to God. To indicate what I'm getting at, a human being who has developed schizophrenia or bipolar disease will have a brain which is malfunctioning in some ways and also relationships which are askew. Even in cases of extreme damage to the brain, cases where serious problems will develop even in a human being maturing in very good circumstances, what lies outside will have an effect on the details of the mental disturbances because that brain-mind complex which is disturbed has been shaped largely by responses to what lies outside. In fact, emotional or cognitive trauma can result in personality disorders in otherwise healthy human beings and those disorders might partially mimic a 'true' psychiatric disorder such as schizophrenia.

Our minds are encapsulations of our total context and our minds in this sense are shaped from our natural brain activities and also feed back to our brains. In their fundamental physical manifestations, our minds, including our sense of self—our stories, are representational maps within the brain rather than simple actions of brain-cells pre-programmed to form a human mind, and certainly are not brain-cells pre-programmed to cooperate with an immaterial soul or mind. A sound-byte: our minds are more outside of us than inside. Our minds are more than could be strictly predicted from a full knowledge of our brains but are such that, after formation, those minds can be understood so that we see they are shaped from relationships and narratives made possible by the evolution of the human brain at a species level over all the years of life on earth and by the development of communal human being over the thousands of years of human cultural development.

The human mind isn't the same thing it once was. A mind shaped in response to computers and electronic communications isn't the same as one shaped to letters written by quill pens and carried by couriers on horseback. A mind shaped to the theory of evolution and quantum theory, to Broadway musicals and personal libraries of recordings of all of Beethoven's known compositions, isn't the same as a mind shaped to Aristotelian or Christian-animistic understandings of Creation, to Sunday hymn-sings and performances by occasional traveling minstrels.

An understanding the human mind is something which itself moves with the effort to understand all that exists and is within the attention of our personal or communal selves, where communal selves in the modern world have elements from the entire world and many past ages of human life. There is much about the mind which can be understood at various levels of detail and specificity, but any true understanding has to be expanded to include the mind in context and mind as a story.

One of my books which is available for download deals with human being, individual and communal: *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53]. The five parts of the book, intended to give an framework for understanding human being from a viewpoint which is respectful of both Christian teachings and empirical knowledge, are:

1. Making Peace with Empirical Reality.
2. The Human Mind as a Re-creation of God's Creation.
3. The Mystery of Human Feeling.
4. Human Acts as Participating in the Story Which is Our World.
5. Communal Men and the Body of Christ.



## 297 Could Government be in Our Genes and Our Environments?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1624>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/06/06.]

In this short essay, *Classical Liberalism versus Anarchism* at <http://www.libertylawsite.org/2013/06/04/classical-liberalism-versus-anarchism>, Mike Rappaport tries to shift the focus in a debate about anarchism vs. classical liberalism. He quotes Robert Higgs, an advocate of anarchism:

My difficulty arises not so much from a dissatisfaction with government's being charged with protecting the citizens from force and fraud, but from a growing conviction that government (as we know it) does not, on balance, actually carry out these tasks and, worse, that it does not even try to carry them out except in a desultory and insincere way—indeed, as a ruse.

Truth be told, government as we know it never did and never will confine itself to protecting citizens from force and fraud. In fact, such government is itself the worst violator of people's just rights to life, liberty, and property. For every murder or assault the government prevents, it commits a hundred. For every private property right it protects, it violates a thousand. Although it purports to suppress and punish fraud, the government itself is a fraud writ large—an enormous engine of plunder, abuse, and mayhem, all sanctified by its own “laws” that redefine its crimes as mere government activities—a racket protected from true justice by its own judges and its legions of hired killers and thugs.

Rappaport, a legal scholar and supporter—in a manner of speaking—of the idea that the Founding Fathers of the United States did give us a Constitution which can be the foundation of a workable and morally acceptable government, concludes:

Even though I believe actual governments regularly take harmful actions—and this includes governments in the freest and most prosperous countries—I also believe it is very likely that the absence of government would be worse. Whether I am right or wrong, however, to me that is the question.

Rappaport is right to deny the anarchist position but he's a little off on the reason, or at least he misses the bluntest and most undeniable reason to accept the existence of government: they appear and develop and fall and disappear and then re-appear in history. They are a fact of human communal life.

To deny the roles, good and bad, which governments have played in history strikes me as one form of what Melville described as a moral insanity, a basic part of the American moral character: we're in rebellion against a Creator who didn't do work which was quite good enough for us. Melville said that Ralph Waldo Emerson (an ardent individualist) had some good things to say but he struck Melville as believing he could have had some good advice for the Almighty if he'd been present at the moment of Creation. Nowadays, we even have trans-humanists, who think to re-shape our race to higher standards, and computer geeks expecting the *Technological Singularity* (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technological\\_singularity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technological_singularity)) when the computers develop intelligence so superior they simply replace us or maybe we merge with them. Anarchists seem a bit more sane largely because their rougher edges have been worn off a bit by decades of public debate.

But anarchy, as a political un-organization, is no more sane than any other doctrine which tries to design a new human being or a new form of human community, each being in conflict with what has emerged from the complex processes of evolutionary and development processes. We can do better and we should be moving forward but the denial of some fundamental behavior which has emerged again and again, always and everywhere, is a denial of the genetic and other inherited stuff which forms, to play off an insight of E.O. Wilson, both the theorists of economics and politics and

morality and also the communal relationships which they analyze or deny. This is not to be fatalistic, to accept as inevitable governments such as those Americans seem prone to form, though we might have to accept some monstrosities during the processes of evolutionary selection and development of what is selected. Think of the Bush and Obama administrations as being some sort of equivalent to the upside down creatures whose remains were found in the Burgess Shale or perhaps some horrible parasite that eats other creatures from the inside out.

The metaphysics underlying this form of moral insanity, the attempt to impose metaphysics upon the empirical realm rather than drawing metaphysics from concrete being or using this concrete realm to test our metaphysical beliefs, strikes me as strange. For years, I've been presenting in various ways and at various stages of development, a worldview in which empirical knowledge is structured according to Christian beliefs: a 'Christian anarchist', if such be truly possible, could only reject God's Creation while pretending to accept God. Metaphysical principles emerge as what's necessary to hold empirical reality together as God's story and governments, the organizing institutions of political communities, are part of our empirical reality, not some ephemeral mistake we can simply eliminate without harming our communal beings.

We men of the modern West tend to view the world is our enemy to the extent it doesn't behave according to one or another human scheme. Against this, I've tried to update a Thomistic insight, consistent with modern knowledge of the human being, including the mind which forms—so to speak—through the brain but rests upon the entire human being. To a Christian thinker of my sort, it is truly insane to try to beat the thoughts God manifested in Creation into a shape where they fit into our minds formed to human schemes which have ghostly origin. To be sane, to have a properly formed mind, indeed a proper formed human being both individual and communal, is to encapsulate some coherent understanding of God's Creation, of the thoughts He manifested in this realm of concrete being and in all the realms of abstract being from which our universe is shaped.

We human beings seem defective in multiple ways in our individual and communal beings, but we have to work with what we are and be careful not to turn legitimate critiques, such as those directed against governments, into a pretense that we improve ourselves by trying to become something different from what we've been shaped to be, from what is buried in our genes and our soma and what is found in our relationships with our envi-

ronments, including our social environments which are really our communal beings.

# 298 Slow Evolution of Traits But—Sometimes—Rapidly Changing Use of Those Traits

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1627>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/06/10.]

The anthropologist John Hawks has published a short discussion, *Crazy evolution movies* at <http://johnhawks.net/weblog/topics/humor/evolution-wrongness-io9-2013.html>, which is really about wrongful understandings of evolutionary processes. He states:

To be fair, this scenario [of the evolution of intelligent apes in *Planet of the Apes* within 2 or 3 millenia] is quite consistent with some people's models of human evolution, in which human language and symbolic thinking arise suddenly in a single evolutionary spasm. Of course, those people are just wrong.

While this is true, there are phenomena which appear as all-at-once changes even though they are the result of underlying changes which come slowly and gradually or changes which serve one purpose and then suddenly are found useful in another way, sometimes in response to environmental changes. Human cultural evolution, tied to biological evolution in strange and complex ways—the time scales are dramatically different, involves aspects of human being, mostly communal, which can include rapid transitions after many generations of gradual changes. In fact, I'd think that after the evolution of general language capabilities, our use of language has sometimes gone through rapid transitions, as happened in the early Greek philosophers and more recently with scientists, especially mathematicians.

See my very short discussion of an insight of John Polkinghorne, theoretical physicist and then Anglican clergyman: Chapter 90, *Shaping Our Minds to Reality*. After talking about the experience of teaching new mathematical truths and attitudes (What is a vector? “‘But what is it *really*?’ they say.”) to young scientists, he speaks also of the difficulty physicists have in thinking in terms of quantum phenomena: “Perhaps we are in the midst of a similar, if much longer drawn out, process of education about the nature of quantum mechanical reality.” Perhaps a “drawn out” process, but likely to be almost instant in terms of evolutionary time.

Even the physical world shows us such phase changes in which, for example, our universe showed itself as a different entity after a large drop in temperature as our universe emerged from a strange state (in current human terms) to one of thing-like being. The current state of our universe indicates that there was no slow transition, perhaps region by region, but rather an all-at-once transition from a radiation-dominated to a matter-dominated universe. The size of our universe and the finite speed of light give us tight constraints on possible scenarios if we wish to preserve cause and effect.

An example from a very specific realm of our thing-like universe, and which is easier to grasp, comes from an issue which puzzled Darwin himself. Darwin noticed that some hunting dogs had seemingly developed ‘gun-instincts’ in a spontaneous manner. Apparently, hunters with guns had started using dogs as retrievers only during Darwin’s lifetime and he noticed some of those dogs seemed to ‘naturally’ go into search patterns when a gun was fired nearby. There is no way for this sort of change to have occurred so rapidly by evolutionary processes of selection; some behavioral tendencies of these dogs were suddenly used for a new purpose, in response to an environmental change. This is strange but roughly understandable to someone who has observed dogs well enough to see the complex ‘scripts’ of behavior which they have as a result of their evolution as sophisticated social animals. Those scripts can be used for new purposes or maybe even mixed with other scripts or otherwise rebuilt. As a past dog-owner and trainer of those dogs, I’ve found it is surprisingly easy to accidentally teach dogs strange behaviors or strange versions of desired behavior.

Human beings and chimpanzees and perhaps some other species have some basic mental skills which allow them to keep in mind objects not physically present and to manipulate those objects in a way that can be seen as the solution to a problem. For example, a stick with a branch which

is currently out of sight but was recently seen by the human or chimp thinker can be imagined as a way of reaching something placed a few feet out of reach by hand. Human beings engage in such thinking on a regular basis while chimpanzees do it in some situations in the wild but can be stimulated to do it in sophisticated ways in lab settings. This mental skill is considered by neuroscientists to be one of the foundational skills, perhaps the primary such skill, for more abstract forms of reasoning.

Human beings have much higher levels than chimpanzees of abstract reasoning skills of various sorts and we have some such skills not yet found in other creatures and not likely to be found. (Some animals and some birds and apparently some lower species have serious levels of number awareness but that's far from the skills necessary to do double-entry accounting or number theory, though the very low-level brain structures might be similar.) Some such skills certainly existed before the appearance of 'modern' human beings, by which I mean to include some near cousins such as the Neandertals so well-defended by Hawks. There was tool design which at some points was probably partially conscious and deliberate but was likely first elicited by environmental clues, perhaps the handling of rocks already in useful shapes. There was painting and some sort of religious practice and burials. There was co-evolution of domestic animals along with our human family-lines, which probably involved some conscious decisions by the human partners at least at the later stages of this co-evolution. This all occurred along with an ongoing slow evolution of a brain complex enough to support a human mind of the sort shown by Plato or Einstein, minds capable of seeing larger scale meanings. Some such evolutionary processes are ongoing though it's not possible to predict where we're headed.

As I've claimed, in line with St. Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century and neuroscientists such as Walter J. Freeman in recent decades, our mind-like attributes result from our active responses to what lies in our own bodies and also outside of ourselves. This assumes an evolved brain of great power. It's not clear to me how to talk about nature accidentally producing the possibility of an Einstein, but the result was that: a brain capable of forming minds which can, in principle, expand out to encapsulate all of the universe and all of the abstract being from which it was shaped. That brain existed in, again so to speak, a proto-Einsteinian form for some tens or hundreds of thousands of years, but a powerful mind such as that of Shakespeare which helped to shape a civilization can only develop when there is a complex enough human situation, technology and literature and

religious beliefs and so on, to which such a mind can respond, bootstrapping itself to some extent. Civilizations formed when the pieces existed and some minds became consciously aware of the situation and the need to find a greater meaning in which that civilization could be placed. In a strong sense, our total minds, individual and communal, can be no better than our environments would allow. In Christian terms, we can think no thoughts not found in Creation, though perhaps not realized in our concrete universe. See Chapter 127, *Intelligence vs. Intellect*, for a discussion of intellect as the “communal and capitalized form of live intelligence” in the words of Jacques Barzun.

Excuse the complexity of my language, but I’m saying something complex because I’m speaking in a world where nearly everyone, explicitly dualistic or not, thinks of mind or at least truth as coming from ethereal realms. If I could simply develop ideas from the basic insight that our minds develop as we respond to our environments, counting our own bodies as environments, then I could, in principle, develop a solid and clean understanding of human being, individual and communal. Download a book I recently published, *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53], to read my most complete effort to date to do exactly this.

Unfortunately, I’m writing in a civilization which has a less exact and quite inadequate understanding of mind as something we have and of knowledge as something to be put in the pre-existing slots of that mind. Truths come to us from undescribed regions and also have to fit into pre-existing slots.

I’m assuming many of my readers have inherited these wrongful ideas of mind and knowledge and even truths; I’m trying to explain why it is that I would claim a modern sort of mind, one similar to that of Richard Feynman or that of Serge Rachmaninoff, first showed itself around the sixth century before Christ when we see signs of what I’d call meta-reasoning or abstract reasoning in the assembly of ancient and more recent writings into a coherent whole as the books of Moses and other writings, the creation of Hindu theology by the Sanskrit speaking peoples, similar efforts in China, and the beginnings of systematic thinking about the world in the form of primitive natural philosophy and sophisticated forms of poetry in the region of Greece and Asia Minor. This happened because higher-level abstractions were necessary to the understanding of new forms of human relationships including those connecting human beings and physical reality.

In historical terms, and most certainly in evolutionary terms, complex

civilizations came together very quickly, however long the underlying evolutionary and developmental processes took. The temperature of water drops slowly but ice can appear all of a sudden. Most phenomena in evolutionary biology don't involve such dramatic all-at-once phase transitions, but I'm claiming that civilization and civilized minds appeared all-at-once in terms of the time-scales of evolutionary biology. In fact, most evolutionary biologists seem to support the idea that the behavioral and cultural traits of animals can go through rapid transitions though the underlying biological traits have to already exist and would have developed slowly by processes of selection. The human skills allowing symbolic thinking, the construction of complex narratives, the use of rhythmic language, and so forth evolved slowly and likely were in use by unknown geniuses many generations before Homer wrote the *Iliad* but there were truly revolutionary changes in the usage of these raw skills from those archaic geniuses to Homer to Virgil to Shakespeare to T.S. Eliot. The transition to Homer was very important and we may be going through another such transition as we try to understand an unbelievably complex human civilization and Einsteinian/Darwinian universe. We don't have a clue how far these developments of evolved skills can go though I've speculated the basic human ability to encapsulate concrete reality in our own minds allows us, in principle, to encapsulate all that concrete, thing-like being is shaped from.

Moreover, I've claimed in other writings that we are now in the process of making a transition to far more complex forms of human communities and we're going through a painfully rapid transition similar to what resulted in the dramatic appearance of a 'civilized mind' around the sixth century before Christ; it was at this time that complex communities became aware of their communal human being, first in the individual and communal self-awareness of a small number of geniuses.

As a simple pointer to what's involved, I've claimed that our moral language is inadequate because it's only as complex as earlier, premodern, stages of human communal life. For example, we've used Euclidean reasoning to form concepts and analogical ways of speaking about our moral lives. We think in terms of linear paths through a Euclidean sort of space. I'm speculating that the sheer mass of humanity and of the relationships most of us have to handle, personally or through others, distorts our moral spaces in a way analogous to that of mass distorting spacetime in our Einsteinian universe.



# 299 Sex and Categorical Reasoning in a World of Evolution and Development

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1648>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/07/11.]

Let me recount some of the ways in which we modern Christians are confused:

1. We are still trying to apply categorical reasoning to creatures and relationships in a world of evolutionary and developmental processes.
2. We have no way, even in principle, of saying which of our ancestors was the first creature to fall into the category of 'human being'.
3. We have males and females being formed by way of events in the womb and the early years of life in which males, for example, are masculinized in some ways and de-feminized in other ways and there's good reason to believe that much can happen which doesn't produce a categorical male or female or perhaps does produce a human being who can seemingly be categorized in that simple way but is attracted to members of his or her own sex.
4. Sometimes, perhaps most of the time, sexual attraction to members of the same sex might be at least partly voluntary, but we just don't know. Ignorance is a poor justification for continuing our old ways as a whole and a worse justification for throwing out all our ways. We don't want to throw out the baby but we do want to throw out the dirty water.

5. Americans who claim to be traditionalists have come out strongly against same-sex marriage but haven't been protesting much against women in near-combat roles and aren't now protesting against women being assigned directly to combat units. Apparently, traditional men in the United States don't mind being protected against foreign soldiers by women carrying guns but feel their traditional manhood threatened if two women are allowed to form a legal relationship as spouses.
6. We also have Western Christian traditions of sacramental marriage which **don't** depend upon any 'official' recognition of the marriage because, as the teachings of the Catholic Church go, the sacrament of marriage involves only a man, a woman, and God; Christian ministers are witnesses and not participants in the Sacrament of marriage; the Church and State provide at most a recording service and a way of helping to handle disagreements about responsibilities to children and disagreements about matters of property or finances. The canon law of the Catholic Church is a strange read on this topic, descending through various ceremonies and relationships, starting with a marriage ceremony in a Mass and ending with a suggestion of sorts that, if no other witness can be found, not even an anthropologist from Mars, then the man and the woman should marry themselves, but only with a bishop's permission. That, minus the bishop's permission, was actually the tradition in much of Christian Europe prior to the Reformation and Counter-Reformation—move in together, form a union of man and woman in economic and social dependency upon each other, start a family, and get the marriage blessed when the first baby is baptized.
7. The Church of Rome (as a diocese) has, from ancient times, followed Roman traditions in which the patriarch had to approve and 'enact' the marriage and, to protect women and children as men became more mobile in the late Medieval Age, Roman ways were extended to all Catholics by the Fathers of the Council of Trent and various Popes.
8. Modern Deistic and atheistic thinkers tried to convert human relations from sacramental bases (yes, all human relations are sacramental, even when evil and exploitive and even when there is no corresponding Sacrament to be celebrated in a liturgy or at least recognized

in catechisms) to a contractual foundation more consistent with the Enlightenment's positivistic and radically individualistic theories of human nature; indeed the men of the Enlightenment thought of all forms of being, including any which might be divine, in terms consistent with their understanding of human nature. (See Chapter 156, *Einstein and Bohr's debate on the meaning of reality*, for a very short discussion of Einstein's version of this way of thinking about being in which entities are well-formed and independent; relationships are fully external to the entities and don't cause fundamental changes to them.)

9. Catholics and others who try to defend at least some part of their traditions in the 21st century have reached a point where they live according to rather incoherently diffuse understandings of modern empirical knowledge of concrete realms of being and then claim to hold moral and theological beliefs supported by pre-modern understandings of those same realms of being. Adam and Eve were special creations in the Garden of Eden except when we are being treated for cancer or waiting for a transplant of an organ from a pig.
10. Having failed to develop new understandings of created being, including human being, even with the vast piles of modern empirical knowledge; that is, having failed to respond creatively and honestly and energetically to the Creator and the ideas He manifested in Creation; modern Christians are starting to respond instead to the initiatives of those who propose programs and understandings of human being which can't possibly be seen as consistent with any possible Christian views.
11. Those who are part of the intellectual establishment of Christianity, though having failed to respond to God's Creation, seem blind to the need to nurture or find thinkers who can respond properly. "We're the experts and we're determined to remain in control even if we do nothing useful during this time of crisis."

In recent months, I've noticed that conservative Christian thinkers are increasingly prone to negotiate away their traditional positions on marriage and other sexual issues. They have shown no such willingness to consider the possibility that the world is proving to be richer and more complex

than those traditional positions would allow. In other words, believing their traditions hold God's ordained truths, they are willing to negotiate away the manifestation of those truths in our laws and social customs but they aren't willing to consider the possibility that their understanding of God's world might need to be updated to consider a mountain of inconvenient empirical facts or perhaps they simply have not the personal characteristics to respond in a creative manner to our problems and opportunities.

We have no right to voluntarily adopt human customs at odds with the truths God manifested in Creation but we do have a right and a strong obligation to honestly and courageously explore that Creation and to try to come to an understanding true to it, an understanding which sees Creation as unified and coherent and complete.

I've found myself to be increasingly unable to defend understandings of human morality which depend upon inherited mistakes such as the use of categorical reasoning in a world of evolutionary and developmental processes. Like it or not, we live in Darwin's world and not Plato's world, though we should remember the great amount of wisdom contained in the thoughts of that courageous Athenian. I've also decided it to be unwise and even hubristic to think I can come to any firm conclusions at this time about issues such as sexual relationships involving men who feel like men but are attracted to other men or men who feel like women or women of similar sorts. There are confusions inside at least some of these human beings, confusions of a genetic or developmental nature. There is much work to be done in trying to make sense of our own human beings and our world and it will be hard to do this work since we are still being flooded by new empirical facts, some of it at least partly digested to the state of knowledge. It's understandable but not justifiable that we Christians protect our selves rather than trying to properly understand and channel this flood of new knowledge or sometimes false knowledge.

We modern human beings can reasonably anticipate some medical miracles from—perhaps—infusions of 'good' genetic matter, such as perhaps in Huntington's disease (which destroys regions of the brain) or other disorders caused by relatively well-defined genetic problems. Why are we not willing to wonder if the complex genetic factors and developmental processes of sexual identity and preference might not play an important role? We can learn from *Huntington's disease* at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Huntington's\\_disease](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Huntington's_disease) that "Expansion of a CAG triplet repeat stretch within the *Huntingtin* gene results in a different (mutant) form of the pro-

tein, which gradually damages cells in the brain, through mechanisms that are not fully understood.” Do we tell victims of this disease they should overcome their problems by way of freely willed efforts?

A recent study of brain development processes, *Unique Epigenomic Code Identified During Human Brain Development* at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/07/130705102037.htm>, speaks of the complexity of these processes, in the context of mental disorders, but similar comments apply to a multitude of variations which occur during the development of a human being:

“The human brain has been called the most complex system that we know of in the universe,” says Ryan Lister, co-corresponding author on the new paper, previously a postdoctoral fellow in Ecker’s laboratory at Salk and now a group leader at The University of Western Australia. “So perhaps we shouldn’t be so surprised that this complexity extends to the level of the brain epigenome. These unique features of DNA methylation that emerge during critical phases of brain development suggest the presence of previously unrecognized regulatory processes that may be critically involved in normal brain function and brain disorders.”

At present, there is consensus among neuroscientists that many mental disorders have a neurodevelopmental origin and arise from an interaction between genetic predisposition and environmental influences (for example, early-life stress or drug abuse), the outcome of which is altered activity of brain networks. The building and shaping of these brain networks requires a long maturation process in which central nervous system cell types (neurons and glia) need to fine-tune the way they express their genetic code.

[See the article, *Epigenomics*, at <https://www.genome.gov/27532724> for an explanation of the epigenome which is, for my current purposes, a further complication of the ways in which our genes work, but note that this page explains that the workings of genes can be altered by a variety of outside factors, such as the chemicals we’re exposed to in our daily lives or, as I’ve noted in past discussions of research in this area, the eating habits

of our grandmothers—see Chapter 267, *Our Grandchildren Are What We Eat.*]

The masculinization or feminization of the brain involve complex brain development processes as well as complex development processes in glands and other parts of the body.

The point of all of this, and also the point of the pre-modern Christian understandings of human sexuality, is that our bodily stuff, brain and muscles and glands, define our possibilities including the ones we realize in becoming ‘me’, but modern empirical knowledge tells us our pre-modern understandings were overly simplistic and sometimes just plain wrong. We are being forced, by knowledge of God’s Creation, toward a richer and more complex, though not yet coherently organized, understanding of our bodily stuff and also of our relationships to other human beings and to the rest of Creation and to our Creator.

I’m not willing to reconsider any serious issue on the basis of current misunderstandings of God’s Creation, misunderstandings of human being both individual and communal, misunderstandings of the relationship between abstract and concrete forms of created being. I’m willing to respond honestly and courageously to God’s Creation, in full faith that whatever might be true, for example, of apparent confusions in human sexual nature and sexual attractions, it will prove to be consistent with God’s story in which the Body of Christ is developing, a Body in which God’s friends will retain their individuality but will also be fully that complete (communal) man, the perfect Christ, in St. Paul’s terms.

In other words: I’m willing to consider the possibility that we Christians have gotten some important ideas about Creation wrong but I refuse to believe, or to act as if, our views about Creation are true to God’s thoughts but we have a right to compromise on issues of moral truths for political and other reasons which are apparently more important than presumed moral truths.

# 300 Empathy and the Evolution of Human Communal Being

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1659>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/08/02.]

Eric Michael Johnson posted an essay on empathy, *We Contain Multitudes: Walt Whitman, Charles Darwin, and the Song of Empathy* at <http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/primate-diaries/2013/07/19/the-song-of-empathy/>. In this essay, he notes the confusion which followed the publication of *On the Origin of Species* when “critics claimed that Darwin’s theory divided moral sentiments from divinity and pitted science against humanity,” but the poet Walt Whitman claimed “the world of erudition, both moral and physical, cannot but be eventually better and broaden in its speculations.” From this, Johnson notes that “Whitman’s vision of empathy was one that embraced a Darwinian nature.”

I would endorse claims that Darwinian insights on evolution (both what Darwin got right and the open questions to which he directed our attention) brings us closer to the truth; this is almost a tautological statement since those Darwinian insights are drawn directly from empirical observations. Whatever is true at the larger scale or in the more abstract realms of created being, it has to agree with concrete reality. The entire truth is greater than what we can know from empirical observations unmediated by the proper speculations, but it can’t be different. The traditional Christian way of expressing the underlying truth about being which corresponds to knowledge is: grace completes and perfects nature, grace doesn’t destroy or replace nature. Metaphysicians and theologians, as well as historians and educators, need to accept the truths of this concrete realm before going on

to realms of moral purpose or realms of abstract being from which I claim our concrete world is shaped.

Accordingly, I'd strongly endorse claims that our understanding of empathy has to be grounded in concrete reality so that it can be coherently discussed and explained in the complex narrative of life on earth.

My problem with many discussions of empathy is of another sort. (Mr Johnson's discussion in his essay is a pointer of sorts to a talk he was to give and was not presented as a complete discussion of his speculations on the nature of empathy and I'm not criticizing him for the necessary blank spots in his expressed thoughts.)

Evolutionary researchers, in the North Dakota badlands and in the quiet study in Cambridge, have developed serious skills in seeing how important traits or bodily structures can arise for one purpose and 'suddenly' be used for another purpose as well—in fact, this sometimes has to be a matter of speculation in the face of, for example, specialized organs or brain regions which would have been useless for their 'ultimate' purpose until fully shaped by evolution. It seems to me that empathy is likely to be a problem which can be dealt with in such a way, developing a coherent narrative understanding if not a cause-and-effect relationship which would be satisfying to a dedicated physical determinist.

How do we feel pain? How do we feel happiness, in our hearts or in our feet? How do we feel ourselves to be a certain 'me'? How do we feel the oneness with a surgical scalpel or with a scroll saw or with a cast-iron frying pan?

Modern brain-scientists have discovered the rather remarkable fact that we don't inhabit our bodies directly. We inhabit our bodies by way of maps built up in our brains. Human beings, chimpanzees to a lesser extent, have a far more sophisticated map in their brains than any other known animals. Our maps, and those of our chimp cousins, can generate at least something of a sense of 'me'. Some human beings seem to barely have a sense of 'me' and others seem to live full and rich lives, even to indulge the most selfish of pleasures, without being aware of being a 'self' with a history and a future—I don't know if chimps have a sense of a future self and many human beings seem to be bereft of that trait or at least a bit thin.

We also know that barbarians, especially during particularly harsh times, were notably bereft of empathy—at least most of the time—but also notably indifferent to their own sufferings. Do our 'parts' tend strongly to become harsh in unison? As we become hardened by acceptance of suffer-

ing during famine and wars, do we also grow hard toward the suffering of others? This is hardly a new suggestion nor an implausible one.

It would seem likely to me that empathy is some sort of new-use of the feelings we have for our own bodies and for tools or prosthetics which become as part of our own bodies. It would be a weaker mapping, less intense than the mappings resulting from various signals of nerve irritation, destruction of flesh, disruption of sexual or other relationships tied so strongly to our various glands. It would be a virtual pain, arising in the brain based upon visual or auditory nerve signals.

I published an essay on empathy in April of 2013, *The Embodied but Constructed Self*, which is included as Chapter 295. In that chapter, I claimed, “We are, in some reductionistic but legitimate sense, mappings in our brains, mappings which include both our individual and communal selves.” I referred to my book, *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53], where I wrote:

In the December, 2007 edition of *Brain in the News* published by Dana Foundation (see <http://www.dana.org/>), there was a reprint of an article, *I Feel Your Pain* which was published at *Salon*’s website, <http://Salon.com/>. It seems that specific brain-cells have been found which respond to distress on the part of a nearby creature. True pain can be felt when we see others suffering.

Why not? The destruction by fire of cells on the tips of our fingers doesn’t magically lead to pain felt in our brains or in parts of the nervous system between finger and brain. There is no magical, nor metaphysical, foundation to the processes of pain in our bodies. It’s a result of biological selection processes which favored nervous systems which registered damage in such ways as to force the organism to react strongly. There is something real about pain but that reality is mediated by way of nervous system interactions more the result of tinkering than of design of the sort possible to modern engineers.

It seems quite reasonable that we would be made so that those brain-cells registering pain might well react to the pain of others, especially others who might be members of our communities. It’s this simple: if we build drones or other robotic devices to monitor forests for fires, then any reaction tied to

direct detection of a fire can also be activated if the robot sees another robot acting as if it detected a fire. In a human being, or another social animal, we can merely add a mapping ‘module’ in the brain to put ourselves in the place of another and that reaction is experienced as something akin to the pain we would feel if we were actually in that situation ourselves.

Tentatively, we can say that empathy is the response of certain brain-cells to certain sorts of stimuli. That stimuli can be directly provided by the surrounding environment or it can be provided by signaling of various sorts.

Is that really empathy? Is that what ties us together during times of distress and trouble? Is that what motivates some to take in orphans and others to go off to serve in regions just hit by natural disasters? Is that what leads Joe to feel sorry for a man who just lost his beloved wife even when he’s the jerk who cheated Joe out of a promotion? We seem to have a need for some sort of higher explanation, something that would raise our emotions—loves and hates—into a realm more pure than our world of flesh and blood, dirt and rocks. There’s no reason to expect such an explanation exists. Though the entities of this concrete realm be shaped from more abstract stuff, neither concrete entities of this world nor their complex aspects are to be found in some realm of ethereal being and beings.

That leads to the question: What selective advantage is there in empathy? After all, empathy can be disturbing and sometimes in such a way that any plausible response, other than hardening ourselves or fleeing out of the sight or sound of someone embarrassed or in great pain, might endanger our own survival or that of some in our family-line.

Empathy might simply be associated with community formation and strengthening of human bonds in general. If so, it might be possible to test for strength of an empathetic feeling or tendency to act in response to another’s distress and relate it to various sorts of proxies for nearness of genetic relationship, such as being raised in the same household/village or physical resemblance or similarity to an infant. Some sort of empathy would likely come from even baby eyes, present in so many mammal young.

If I’m right in speculating that empathy is an offshoot, of sorts, of our sense of personal and individual self, then we could see empathy as an

important part of communal being of the sort hinted at in the Biblical concepts of the People of Israel and the Body of Christ. By way of such mappings of the individual beings of others, especially those in our tighter-knit communities, we might even come to some understanding of how it is that we can shape each other by way of love of a true Christian sort and by acts of corporal charity and prayer.



# 301 If Monogamy is (or isn't) the Answer, Niels Bohr Knew the Question

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1662>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/08/07.]

I've often referred readers to Chapter 156, *A Christian View of Einstein's and Bohr's Debate on Reality*, for a very short discussion of Bohr's insights into the primacy of relationships over stuff—in fact, it's not clear to me that Bohr fully realized the implications of his stance but that's true of many a pioneer thinker.

Evolutionary selection isn't for some sort of freestanding entity which meets some sort of abstract standards of good quality, but rather for entities which can properly fill certain roles in evolving and developing relationships with other members of its own species, with members of other species, with the dirt and rocks and air of the earth. Over time, these capabilities to form these proper relationships are manifested in our genes and our flesh-and-blood. And then, the world changes and most dinosaurs aren't able to form proper relationships; the smaller feathered dinosaurs along with primitive rat-like mammals and reptiles and others take over.

The above stated view isn't a matter of new knowledge so much as it is a restatement of old knowledge, a restatement which likely will make more sense of the world and allow us to move forward in a better way as we explore and try to understand the entirety of Creation. This is a return to more traditional ways of understanding Creation and also a denial of the autonomous individuality which underlies so much of the political and economic and other thought of the past few centuries or so.

There are a great variety of human relationships; I would even claim that our individual characters don't have such a great variety and rich personhood is a possibility for human beings only within the context of these various relationships, such as those a farmer can form with his family and neighbors, with his animals, and with the soils and trees of his property. A man might love and well serve his wife and children and feel close to the other doctors in his clinic including even the ones he doesn't like; he might be devoted to his patients, even the most obnoxious. A woman might be devoted to the various personalities and cities and even technology of her major area of study—perhaps the city-state of Florence in the 15th century; she might also love her husband and children though her 14 year-old daughter is in trouble at school at least once a week.

How did the human race develop its tendencies toward certain forms of relationships, such as monogamy? There have been and are human societies which encourage or at least allow polygamous relationships, but they are not, over the long-term, the most successful of societies. Some of those polygamous societies simply adopted legal polygamy as a way of taking care of the needs of widows or of dealing with a surplus of women. The latter problem seems to have occurred in the Near East and Middle East during the Biblical ages and during some ages since then. It's easy to understand how a surplus of relatively young women could develop during violent ages, even when women had high rates of death during childbirth; it's also easy to understand the adoption of the only obvious solution but polygamy has remained an option for powerful males in some societies in the Southwestern regions of Asia and in the closely related regions in North Africa.

On the whole, monogamy has been the norm for most of the human race in recent millenia. We can adjust to polygamy when necessary or when it's to the advantage of powerful males in a rigidly hierarchical society, but monogamy—with cheating—seems so predominant that it's likely found in our inherited genome and phenome as well as nearly all of our inherited cultural traditions.

How did it become the norm?

From the article *Evolution of Monogamy in Humans the Result of Infanticide Risk, New Study Suggests* at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/07/130729161558.htm>, we learn:

Until now, a number of hypotheses have been proposed to

explain the evolution of monogamy among mammals. These include:

- [(1)] Paternal care, when the cost of raising offspring is high
- [(2)] Guarding solitary females from rival males
- [(3)] Infanticide risk, where males can provide protection against rival males

In that same article we can also read that the third option seems to be the winner, though the first option might reinforce monogamous tendencies:

The threat of infants being killed by unrelated males is the key driver of monogamy in humans and other primates, a new study suggests.

From another recent article, *Monogamy Evolved as a Mating Strategy: New Research Indicates That Social Monogamy Evolved as a Result of Competition* at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/07/130729172244.htm>, we learn that the second option is definitely the explanation for the development of monogamous tendencies found in many mammal species:

Social monogamy, where one breeding female and one breeding male are closely associated with each other over several breeding seasons, appears to have evolved as a mating strategy, new research reveals. It was previously suspected that social monogamy resulted from a need for extra parental care by the father.

What gives?

First of all, we must always be cautious when we read articles that are summarized descriptions of projects complex in both the ways in which information was gathered and also the ways in which that information was analyzed. The article might be too highly summarized or it might be inaccurately summarized. In this case, the problem seems to be partly that different groups of species are being studied. The research summarized in the first article looks at a variety of **primate** species. The second article looks at **mammals** where females occupy territories and males move into the territories of one or more of those females.

The issue of infanticide, so important to the study summarized in the first article needs some elaboration. A male who is newly dominant or newly the 'owner' of a group of breeding females will gain some advantage by killing the youngest offspring of the females if those females will then become fertile and receptive. I've read this is certainly true of chimpanzees and of lions. Apparently, it tends to be true of primates though I don't know how true it is of human beings.

I don't know enough to generalize to, for example, herbivores which form large herds. So, I won't generalize though I will say I've never read of bison or elks or other herbivores using infanticide to gain a breeding advantages.

My main point is: the world is more a story than a collection of stuff interacting in ways which can be understood piece by piece but don't form a greater whole. It is a tangle of relationships extending over space and over time—modern insights into the nature of spacetime remain valid but under most conditions, pre-modern forms of analysis remain proper as is true for most realms of physics in which 18th century physics is still assumed and used. So it is likely we will be able to understand much by understanding stuff as if it were freestanding entities entering relationships which don't change those entities in a fundamental way. Yet we should be very careful about thinking as if stuff is primary over relationships as it is likely that the human race has reached levels of number and complexity of relationships such that new forms of, say, political behavior are coming into view. Moreover, this is likely tied to knowledge of being in its deeper aspects so that we need new ways to understand such complex entities as family-lines which have evolved over the millenia.

In such a world as this seems to be, all the smaller-scale stories take place within a larger series of events which seem to be a coherent narrative, within networks of relationships extending over large regions of space and long durations of time.

Let me make my point by way of analogy to a narrative on a smaller scale. The life of Albert Schweitzer, a very complex and very noble man of great accomplishment in a variety of fields, seems impressive enough as it would typically be presented in a popular biography. Yet, once we start to develop a deeper understanding of reality, we realize there is so much that seems almost arbitrary in such a life. If we move on, we can find that Schweitzer was a true man of Western Civilization, if one born in the twilight of at least a major era of that civilization. He wasn't just a smart and talented man who chose by way of some autonomous free-

will to become an organist specializing in Bach, a Lutheran theologian who struggled toward an intelligent (if I think wrong) understanding of Jesus which differed from the secularist and traditional Christian understandings alike, a physician-missionary to Gabon, and—partly to tie it all together—a philosopher who preached a reverence for life. Though I think he went off-track in some of his thoughts, he was a man who was truly a giant of the West. In order to understand Schweitzer, we have to take the West seriously: Western music as well as the struggle to understand Jesus of Nazareth and the various claims about Him, Western medicine as well as the Western efforts to bring corporeal goods to other regions along with or sometimes apart from the Gospel, the efforts of so many Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thinkers to ‘save’ the moral teachings and cultural accomplishments of Christianity while easing back on or even eliminating what were seen as theological embarrassments, and the tendency of all of this to go bad and even lead to exploitation of the simple Christians in the West as well as native peoples outside of the West.

Even Schweitzer had lost sight of the purpose of the West: to explore God’s Creation, make sense of it, and to bring that sense of it to fruition in one’s own land and also in the lands of others. In other words, Schweitzer’s very life and work, when seen in light of a robust understanding of the Christian civilization of the West, were proof that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God come to offer a share of life with God, though Schweitzer’s life was particularly defective because of his refusal to see that his house was built on the truth of the Gospel or on sand. His house was built on that truth of the Gospel that Schweitzer himself had so much trouble accepting and it was so built because Schweitzer was a man of the West who was born into that particular house.

The science which grew up in the Christian West has shown too much about the contingency not only of the existence of this universe but also of the contingency of spacetime, of matter, of other fundamental aspects of concrete being as it exists in our universe. We now know that God was a true Creator and not a pagan god working within a given structure or with given stuff. An overall understanding of Creation is necessary to make sense of the various levels of understanding of life on earth, of this expansionary phase of our universe, of the universe seen as a purposeful narrative, of the various levels of abstract being up to the most abstract level which is the manifested truths from which all else is shaped.

In other words, those who tried to de-Christianize the West have suc-

ceeded and we are starting to learn that there is no meaning to all this marvelous knowledge we're gaining of so many parts of this concrete realm of being. The theoretical physicist Eugene Wigner (Nobel Prize in Physics in 1963) referred to the "unreasonable effectiveness of mathematics" in solving the problems of physics. The more difficult the problem, the more remarkable and more "unreasonable" the effectiveness.

We have no way of speaking of mathematical groups as being and thus we have to consider the remarkable and unreasonable effectiveness of group theory in solving problems in quantum theory. Abstractions such as groups just come from nowhere, ghostly tools to work upon our knowledge of the wood and rock of this world though having nothing inherently in common with that wood and rock. As just one example of the corrosive effects of the post-Enlightenment and willfully non-Christian thought which has seemingly taken over the West, those trying to make most sense of the groundedness of human being, including the human mind, in stuff are forced to pretend there is, after all, a Platonic realm of abstractions which we flesh-and-blood creatures can magically access to acquire particular abstractions that we might use them in understanding the stuff of flesh-and-blood. This is even worse than assuming we can use Anglo-American thought to readily understand all cultures and political systems around the globe.

The most hardheaded of empirical thinkers becomes a dualist of the most unconscious sort and also a dualist who possesses a truth independent of concrete being, a truth which can't be verified or denied by empirical knowledge.

Against this, I'll argue that Bohr's insights into the fundamental importance of relationships, even with subatomic particles, should guide our efforts to understand, for example, relationships between a breeding male and a breeding female, even if they happen to be human beings. Darwinists often give me the impression of being perhaps even more confused than Wigner, who was—we must remember—a great physicist and a man who made a serious and respectable effort to understand why the abstractions of mathematics are so effective in solving problems in this concrete realm. But Wigner could only call that effectiveness "unreasonable" in the end in the same way that evolutionary theorists are so good at finding stories and other forms of explanation, species by species and even at higher or lower groupings but deny there are deeper reasons for the evolution of, say, monogamy. For now, my point isn't even such a deep reason as the existence of the God of Jesus Christ. Go with Einstein's somewhat pantheistic

faith in reason: it all makes sense because it's all part of a coherent reality, and then try to figure out how our abstract reasoning processes, including group theory but also various literary theories, are connected to concrete forms of being.

Is my claim perhaps true: created being is created being is created being? Is it true that if we know it, even if it includes the 'impossible' imaginary square root of negative one, then it's manifested in some realm of created being and, if it seems useful in this concrete realm, then perhaps concrete forms of created being are somehow shaped from those imaginary numbers and those principles of group theory and even from the truths which are manifested so obscurely in our greatest novels and poems?



# 302 Wise Blood, Wise Genes, Wise Immune System

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1666>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/08/09.]

Good news from genetic research. At least it's good news for those of us who believe in the value, and truth, of moral purposefulness. An article from July of 2013, *Be Happy: Your Genes May Thank You for It* at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/07/130729192548.htm>, tells us:

People who have high levels of what is known as eudaimonic well-being—the kind of happiness that comes from having a deep sense of purpose and meaning in life (think Mother Teresa)—showed very favorable gene-expression profiles in their immune cells. They had low levels of inflammatory gene expression and strong expression of antiviral and antibody genes.

As for those who had what some, simplistically to the point of wrongly, would label as 'materialistic' values? Well, they don't do so well:

[P]eople who had relatively high levels of hedonic well-being—the type of happiness that comes from consummatory self-gratification (think most celebrities)—actually showed just the opposite. They had an adverse expression profile involving high inflammation and low antiviral and antibody gene expression.

The right sort of values and the right sort of happiness seems to have a very good effect on our immune system and its responses. At the same time:

And while those with eudaimonic well-being showed favorable gene-expression profiles in their immune cells and those with hedonic well-being showed an adverse gene-expression profile, “people with high levels of hedonic well-being didn’t feel any worse than those with high levels of eudaimonic well-being,” Cole said. “Both seemed to have the same high levels of positive emotion. However, their genomes were responding very differently even though their emotional states were similarly positive.”

So, those people with “high levels of hedonic well-being” were as happy as those with high levels of “eudaimonic well-being,” but their immune systems were not well-balanced.

“What this study tells us is that doing good and feeling good have very different effects on the human genome, even though they generate similar levels of positive emotion,” he said. “Apparently, the human genome is much more sensitive to different ways of achieving happiness than are conscious minds.”

We can be bereft of well-ordered purpose but still happy but our genes and the immune system responses they control won’t be so ‘happy’. This is a little different from what I would have expected, but in the same ballpark. After all, a major thrust of my work is to restore an understanding of the reality of purpose at the level of Creation as well as a need for purpose in ordering our lives, most certainly in ordering of a sort as complex as a civilization. Purpose, a focused narrative understanding of what it all means and why we are here, is a civilization in a real sense. With the loss of belief in a Christian understanding, a Christian purpose for our lives and for the very existence of Creation, Western Civilization is unraveling. But apparently, as individuals, we can be happy even while we have selfish values but our bodies won’t be so happy. Our bodies, or perhaps our blood—as Flannery O’Connor would have stated matters, can we wiser than us, even when it comes to moral issues. (See Miss O’Connor’s novel *Wise Blood* for a tongue-in-cheek exploration of the idea.)

This is, in fact, the meeting point of the most brutally honest forms of evolutionary theory and traditional Christian, certainly Thomistic, understandings of morality and human being in general. To be sure, a Christian would suggest some corrections to rigidly genocentric attitudes but those

corrections are strongly implied by the discovery that our way of being happy affects the expression of those genes—is it not expressed genes which are directly subject to evolutionary selection process? As the prominent sociobiologist E.O. Wilson told us in *Sociobiology, The Abridged Edition* [151]:

Camus said that the only serious philosophical question is suicide. That is wrong even in the strict sense intended. The biologist, who is concerned with questions of physiology and evolutionary history, realizes that self-knowledge is constrained and shaped by the emotional control centers in the hypothalamus and limbic system of the brain. These centers flood our consciousness with all the emotions—hate, love, guilt, fear, and others—that are consulted by ethical philosophers who wish to intuit the standards of good and evil. What, we are then compelled to ask, made the hypothalamus and limbic system? They evolved by natural selection. That simple biological statement must be pursued to explain ethics and ethical philosophers, if not epistemology and epistemologists, at all depths. [page 3]

In that same book, Professor Wilson also wrote:

Self-existence, or the suicide that terminates it, is not the central question of philosophy. The hypothalamus-limbic complex automatically denies such logical reduction by countering it with feelings of guilt and altruism. In this one way the philosopher's own emotional centers are wiser than his solipsist consciousness, "knowing" that in evolutionary time the individual organism counts for almost nothing. In a Darwinist sense, the organism does not live for itself. Its primary function is not even to reproduce other organisms; it reproduces genes, and it serves as their temporary carrier. [page 3]

The suggested Christian correction here is that the organism can change the expression of its genes and that organism lives not for genes alone but rather for the family-line, genes and communities. But, again, the main line of narrative of sociobiology is correct.

Self-centeredness, whether it leads to hedonic values or the dark and wrongheaded forms of existentialism, leads to erroneous conclusions and

also to unbalanced expressions of genes controlling the immune system. Those who hold to greater purposes, to the purposes of their genetic family-lines in the true if incomplete terms of sociobiology can be as happy as the self-centered pleasure-seekers and also can have healthier immune systems.

See Chapter 281, *Social and Biological: Being Honest About the Basics of Human Nature*, for a discussion of the sociobiological insights set in a greater, strongly Christian, context. For a take on human being in its entirety, you can download *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53].

## 303 Communal Being and Communal Sin

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1690>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/09/09.]

My understanding of communal being is more exact and more explicit than the traditional understandings of our social natures. This is to say that traditionalists are vague enough about their understanding of our communal ties that they sometimes speak as if not so far from various sorts of radical individualists. No matter how committed to communities as far more than just voluntary gatherings of individuals, they have little in the way of concepts and words to talk about communities as being real. All it takes is to acknowledge each of us has communal being and we're on a different plane of understanding.

How can this be? Is there some magical and invisible stuff which ties us into true communities?

We are entities created by relationships, starting with God's love for us. We are entities shaped by relationships, including very importantly the love our mother bears for us when we are in her arms and we suck at her breast. Our beings are altered by these relationships, as I've claimed in various writings. See two of my freely downloadable books for reasonably complete views of my understanding of our human nature: *Human Rights: An Evolutionary and Christian Perspective* [47] and *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53].

Human being is both individual and communal.

We sin as individuals. We sin as members of communities and are tied into even the sinful communal acts we disapprove of and maybe fight against.

We inherit some share in the sins of our fathers and the sins of our neighbors and those of our leaders. More than that, those sins lie upon our communal beings as our individual sins lie upon our individual beings.

If we tolerate or even prefer leaders who lie or wage criminal wars, those sins are absorbed that much more deeply into the deepest regions of our beings. If we nurture jingoistic rage or ecstasies in our individual selves and our communal selves, if we ignore or downplay the damage we do in the rampages generated by those rages and elations, we commit mortal sins and willingly take on evil characteristics. How many cheered or at least felt good as they watched us pulverize Baghdad and then went to church the next Sunday, feeling so good and holy and not even realizing that Catholic and Protestant traditions both teach that such a direct attack on a civilian target is a major sin?

Being a member of a community is to be part of multiple organs or cancerous organs or parasites of the Body of Christ as it develops in this mortal realm. You are shaped as members of communities and, if some of your communities do evil—certainly if they celebrate the evil they do, you are being shaped as a member of a community which is evil. There are few, if any, morally pure communities, but we who are adults in 2013 have lived through a period when we have, unless willfully blind and ignorant, learned that Lord Acton was right in warning about the dangers of power. In Chapter 445, *Are Serious Historians Conspiracy Nuts?*, I wrote:

Lord Acton had said, “Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely,” and also had noted that powerful and centralized governments tend to attract men with the moral characters of gangsters.

It’s hard to separate ourselves from most of our human institutions and sometimes worse than staying and trying to protect your own self and those around you as much as possible. We have to morally muddle along at times and even to fly blind at times.

There is a small example of our moral decay which says much about this issue. Students in religious education no longer memorize Bible verses. Students in public and other schools no longer memorize important speeches or parts of the *Declaration of Independence* or the *Constitution* of the United States. Instead, they go home to fill their empty memories with biographical knowledge of disordered cretins in the entertainment industries; they

fill their hearts with the lyrics of songs about sexual violence and recreational drugs and disordered teenaged anger; they shape their habits to their own immediate desires rather than learning the habits and customs of their traditions.

As for me, I make a deliberate effort to read good historical books and also biographies of great political and military leaders even when I grow weary of the subjects of government and economics and warfare. They had clay feet and a normal, but usually not excessive, share of moral failings. I pray the Psalter (by way of the traditional liturgy of hours), go through periods of reading the Bible and the writings of holy men and women. I try to fill my head with what is good and noble, to shape my habits and other acts to what would make my better ancestors proud.

When modern men and women fill their own beings with trashy thoughts and feelings, when they allow their children to be also filled with trashy thoughts and feelings, they show they are truly brothers and sisters, voluntarily share the communal being, of the political and military and business leaders who have committed so many crimes and other sins in recent generations. Too many modern men and women shape their own selves to desire what is morally unhealthy and then claim they're good men and good women and on their way to Heaven, so long as they sit and cheer for war-crimes and violent sports rather than committing crimes with their own bodies.

They are members of the modern herd which moves to the rhythms and words of a great civilization sunk into moral degeneracy.



## 304 What Makes a Male, Genes or Developmental Accidents?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1698>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/09/30.]

What is a male? Is any human being with XY genes a male—the ‘Y’ chromosome being the carrier of genes which mostly lead to male development and the maintenance of male characteristics? (There is a recent discovery that the ‘X’ female chromosome actually can play a role in the development of males; this might greatly complicate the issue.) So, what is necessary for one who is fully and obviously male? Do environmental factors influence male-ness? Maybe we should consider epigenetic processes? (See the *National Institutes of Health* web-page on *Epigenomics* at <https://www.genome.gov/27532724> for some background on this important complication which is neither quite ‘nature’ nor quite ‘nurture’ as those terms are conventionally used.)

I discussed this and related issues in a Christian context in Chapter 299, *Sex and Categorical Reasoning in a World of Evolution and Development*, but I wanted to give notice to an article published by Ed Yong in early September, *The Tenuous Beginnings of Men* at <http://phenomena.nationalgeographic.com/2013/09/02/the-tenuous-beginnings-of-men/>. This article discusses an interesting and disturbing phenomenon in which a genetic male carrying a particular mutation in a specific gene which is a “master switch” for the masculinization processes might or might not develop into a fertile male; if not, the embryo will develop into an infertile and partially developed female. Yong has this to say about the somewhat disturbing news (which was actually known before but some scientists have now provided a good explanation of

the workings of this defective switch):

Daughters inherit many things from their fathers, but a select few get something unusual—a Y chromosome. Women typically have two X chromosomes while men have an X and a Y, but some XY people are born with female genitals and a uterus. They’re almost always raised as girls from birth, and their hidden Y chromosome only becomes obvious during puberty. That’s because they don’t develop working ovaries, and without these organs providing a flood of hormones, they don’t menstruate, grow body hair, or develop larger breasts on their own. They’re also sterile.

This condition, known as Swyer syndrome, is often caused by changes to SRY, a gene on the Y chromosome that acts as a master switch for maleness. Human embryos develop into females by default, but SRY diverts them from this course. It switches on many genes that transform an embryonic ridge into testes instead of ovaries. But SRY can pick up mutations that interfere with this role, and prevents it from launching its male-making programme. As a result, embryos develop into baby girls despite their Y chromosome.

But sometimes, fathers and daughters carry identical copies of SRY. He develops into a typical fertile male. She grows up as a sterile female. How can this be?

The interested reader can follow the link to the article for the easy-to-follow scientific explanation. I’m trying to understand why God would have created a world, why He would be telling a story, in which such disturbing strangeness can occur. Didn’t He create them male and female? Does He create some of us as male only to let them fail to develop as males?; being genetic males though having a specific genetic problem, those XY human beings also fail to develop into females: “[T]hey don’t menstruate, grow body hair, or develop larger breasts on their own. They’re also sterile.”

This most certainly doesn’t argue conclusively against traditional sexual morality and may not argue against it at all in the end—my personal belief at this point, but it does demand of us a different, more complex story of human being, a story more consistent with empirical reality, a more “exact”

story truer to reality. (There is also an issue of humane understandings of the sexual development problems or non-conventional sexual attractions.)

My use of “exact” comes from this quote:

Modernity is not simply a historically-datable cultural phenomenon; in reality it requires a new focus, a more exact understanding of the nature of man. [Pope Benedict XVI, in a speech given on 2008/06/07 to participants in the sixth European Symposium of University Professors, which was held in Rome from 2008/06/04 to 2008/06/07 on the theme: “Broadening the Horizons of Reason. Prospects for Philosophy”.]

We need to pay closer attention to God’s story, out of respect for our Creator and out of respect for our individual and communal selves. (Those seemingly different forms of respect actually overlap a lot given our creaturely natures.)

We can only write our currently best version of God’s story, that is—come to a plausible understanding of God’s Creation, if we accept empirical reality and tell the story so that this world is within that reality and Creation as a whole contains this concrete realm of being. This story must be plausible in terms of current knowledge of empirical reality rather than plausible in terms of ancient or Medieval knowledge of empirical reality. We will be able to write this story only as we begin to understand modern empirical knowledge in light of our very small stock of Christian truths. If we do it well, that story will be the foundation of a new Christian civilization or, equivalently, form the basic thoughts and understandings of the citizens of that civilization.



# 305 An Enriched Moral World Makes for Enriched Human Beings

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1735>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/12/03.]

I begin by reminding myself and my readers that all of my thoughts, even those of a moral nature, are based upon my particular understanding of created being and Creation as a whole, an understanding I have described as an updated Thomism or a relation-centered existentialism. In a sense, I view reality through the eyes of:

- a St Thomas Aquinas who anticipated modern scientific understandings of human nature and the human mind—see Chapter 83, *Is Christian Morality a Natural Morality?* and succeeding chapters in Part III, *The Human Mind as a Re-creation of God's Creation* and
- St John the Apostle's who taught us that relationships (ultimately love) are primary over stuff and did so centuries before the radical quantum theorists taught us that same principle though mostly dealing with physical objects—see Chapter , *A Christian View of Einstein's and Bohr's Debate on Reality* and other chapters in Part IV, *Love and Stuff*.

In Chapter 468, *Christian Traditionalism: Moving With God's Story*, I claimed that Christian thought can be brought into line with Creation, a manifestation of certain thoughts chosen by God and expressed in narrative form, a place of evolution and development and then once

again quoted the historian Carroll Quigley—see [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Carroll\\_Quigley](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Carroll_Quigley) for background information:

The truth unfolds in time through a communal process.

Right now, the truth is emerging in a communal process from which the Church and the ruling elites of the West and many other communities are staying aloof. Over recent centuries, we've seen great advancement in understanding various realms of Creation. Physicists and chemists, biologists and sociologists, novelists and poets, painters and architects, and many others, have explored reality and experimented more than a little. Not all of it has been successful, even in the hard sciences where verification and replication can eliminate a lot of spurious or fraudulent results. Theologians and many philosophers, clergymen and teachers, politicians and managers have tried to cover up any evidence that their ways of thinking and feeling and acting are inadequate to our world as we now know it and as we inhabit it.

As we understand more deeply and more broadly, the human mind will change rapidly because it is an encapsulation of our successful responses to our world and the abstract realms from which this world was shaped. As mankind learns more, the individual intelligences of men and the intellects of human communities reshape themselves in response—not to the new knowledge as such but to reality as mediated by that knowledge.

I've been making efforts to provide a deeper understanding of created being, including human being in its moral aspects. This loosely defined project seems to be maturing in some sense though it might take a year to produce a book representing even the first overview of a new understanding of human morality, itself pointing to the moral purposes of God in His freely chosen role as Creator of this particular Creation.

Human thought can be enriched by new knowledge. The world as understood by human beings changes and we change as a consequence. Yet, we can also change the world in objective ways. Our power to so change the world is far less than that of the Creator but it is a significant power in a local way, at least under some definition of 'local'. Human beings both widen their responses to created being in this thing-like world and also begin to respond to other realms of created being, such as that of abstract mathematics or that of the possible forms of substantial being which lie on

the other side of the event labeled the ‘Big Bang’. In the process we change ourselves, other creatures around us, and the world we inhabit.

This new knowledge can be new empirical knowledge, in which I include much of mathematics. It can also be new speculations, which may lead to a new understanding of old knowledge or an integration of new knowledge; that knowledge reworked, in a manner of speaking, by speculation might include revelations from the Bible or by way of the Christian Church—however understood.

The world changes, becomes a new place.

We shouldn’t underestimate the effects of these changes on human nature, our individual natures and the nature of the Body of Christ. We are born raw stuff and become more particular human animals, and maybe even human persons, by proper responses to what lies inside of us and around us. As our understanding changes—of our own selves, individual and communal, and of what lies around us—we change in an objective way. We aren’t better revealed in the way of a magician revealing a card—we are responding to Creation in a different way, richer and more complex, than before learning more about Creation. We can learn more about the viewpoints of those in other cultures or times; we can learn more about politics or history or literature; we can learn more about technology or mathematics or space sciences; or we can learn more by acquiring skills of playing the piano or painting landscapes or making furniture and thus learning more about our bodies and about the stuff around us.

During the times of rapid change in human accomplishments of all sorts, the more creative among us come to the fore—or maybe are prevented from doing so in societies refusing to change, choosing death over new forms of being. During these times of change, established knowledge and traditional forms of understanding have been overrun by what is newer and not yet fully made a part of our understanding. One of the major problems with modern Christianity is that neither the leaders of Christianity nor the ordinary believers have much respect for truly creative thinkers. As we pass through a period of dealing with knowledge about a richly complex Creation, those leaders and believers are seeking simple explanations; in this they are no different from most human beings confronting a world they don’t understand. I read recently that Zbigniew Brzezinski noted that American Exceptionalism can be seen as a response to the American entry into an international sphere which we don’t understand. I’d add that we don’t try very hard to understand and just go for the simple explanation: all these

problems can be solved in simple ways if only everyone would listen to us Americans. Since they don't listen to us, we'll go over there and rebuild their countries and any resistance will show they're evil, that they hate the simple goodness that is the Land of the Free and the Brave.

Facing up to the complexities of reality seems a much better option and a more pious response since the Creator is the one who works with quantum events and the bending of spacetime; it is the Creator who tells our story in part by way of evolution, so nasty and bloody at times. We should not think our inherited understandings are inherently better than what can be developed from proper speculation upon modern empirical knowledge. After all, the best of those traditional understandings come from human beings such as Isaiah and Jeremiah (great political analysts) and Plato and Aristotle and Augustine and so forth. They are the results of magnificent human speculative efforts working on available understandings of the Bible and also available understandings of the empirical world. Even our understanding of God's revelation that He is Father and Son and Holy Spirit in one God is colored by the thoughts of not only Paul the Apostle but also Athanasius and the Cappadocians and Augustine and so on.

How many the agents who bring us these new understandings: poets and prophets, theologians and philosophers, physicists and novelists, biologists and historians, and so on. Architects and painters and furniture-makers and road-builders at least strengthen ongoing trends and may well be responsible for moving into new territories—for good and bad as is true of all creative efforts, conscious or unconscious.

In past generations, these changes often happened as if by magic; we can call it the magic of the Invisible Hand. In fact, that will ever be the ultimate situation in this mortal realm and perhaps even in Heaven: as we act, the results will be unforeseeable but often have been more richly interconnected human communities, cultures and civilizations gaining some proper or hubristic control over nature by way of first disciplining our individual and communal selves to some sort of higher and better moral order. We must act according to the best standards of our age. We must act in unison with our feelings and our thoughts; we must move forward as unified individuals forming relationships which give us also the stuff of unified communities. The Body of Christ is the ultimate community, the one we should always keep in mind and heart and even hands.

Let's see if we can figure out some better and more exact ways to talk about our current situation and what we can do about it.

## 306 Enriching Our Moral World: Maybe Size Does Count?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1749>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/12/18.]

The reliable science-writer, Ed Yong, published an article in November of 2013, *Bigger groups mean complex cultures* found at <http://www.nature.com/news/bigger-groups-mean-complex-cultures-1.14158>, which leads off with the insightful paragraphs:

Humanity's success depends on the ability of humans to copy, and build on, the works of their predecessors. Over time, human society has accumulated technologies, skills and knowledge beyond the scope of any single individual.

Now, two teams of scientists have independently shown that the strength of this cumulative culture depends on the size and interconnectedness of social groups. Through laboratory experiments, they showed that complex cultural traditions—from making fishing nets to tying knots—last longer and improve faster at the hands of larger, more sociable groups. This helps to explain why some groups, such as Tasmanian aboriginals, lost many valuable skills and technologies as their populations shrank.

“For producing fancy tools and complexity, it’s better to be social than smart,” says psychologist Joe Henrich of the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada, the lead author of one of the two studies, published today in *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*. “And things that make us social are going to make us seem smarter.”

In this study, ‘group knowledge’ was better passed on when there was a greater number of instructors and a consequent greater variety of ways and levels of competence in models of how to do things. I think that, more generally, we’re looking at a better group memory when we have a richer body of instructors or, probably, a richer body of accessible knowledge in various forms. Another way to state matters is that individual intelligences might remain the same when men gather in groups, large or small, but the intellect of a larger group will be greater, all else being equal. For an explanation of individual intelligence and intellect, see Chapter 127, *Intelligence vs. Intellect*, which was a response to Jacques Barzun’s *The House of Intellect* [7], a book which deserves to be republished.

In Chapter 638, *We Need to Act in the Spirit of St Benedict, Not Just to Mindlessly Repeat His Acts*, I discussed this issue in terms of a Benedictine response, viewed as at least a partial retreat from an increasingly disordered West. I consider the Benedictine response to the collapse of moral order in Rome to be first of all a spiritual response putting God first and doing what was needed to advance this story God is telling: the growth and maturing of the Body of Christ so much as that can happen in this mortal realm. While retreats from a greater society might sometimes be necessary, there is always a very big price to be paid. In addition, it occurs to me how strange it is for Christians to be retreating from a Civilization built by Christians for Christian purposes; maybe we Christians should have worked harder to maintain and advance Western Civilization so that it might have remained ours.

# 307 Modern Ideologies as Misunderstandings of Human Communities

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1785>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/03/09.]

In Chapter 141, *A Brain Shaped to Geometric Thought?*, I responded to evidence that the brain does abstract from physical distance to derive, for example, an idea of emotional distance. This isn't a matter fully understood, though the scientists seem to believe, as do I, that human beings have learned to unconsciously and consciously use the physical skills of their brains to abstract from distance in such a way as to make it a powerful source of metaphors and I'd even say a source of metaphysical insight. I'd say that this process works because distance is a concrete manifestation of abstract forms of mathematical being which are also part of Creation. Those abstract forms can be made a little more concrete as emotional distances or the distance between the states of being of a complex system including those such as human communities which are far from fully quantifiable.

Our use of distance in the abstract, distance between points or regions of abstract spaces, is a very deep matter indeed and one which has proved to be of great use and also fruitful in truths. We are able to design machinery, regulate oil refinery production to supply and demand involving complex groups of possible products, carry out certain analyses at the highest levels of theoretical physics and chemistry, conduct with a lot of qualifications some good analyses in politics and other social sciences, and so on. From there, we have learned general skills of abstraction, abstract skills of generalizing.

So it is that I set out, with my tongue lightly in cheek, to first ask: What is patriotism and what is jingoism? This is a specialized form of the question: what is a good and disciplined way to describe and analyze the processes by which individual human beings come together to form communities?

The sociobiologists, such as E O Wilson, present solid arguments that our tendencies toward moral behavior are part of our physical makeup, selected over the years to improve the chances of successful reproduction of the genes of our <b>family lines</b>, not of our individual selves. Whether or not we feel close to our families, we tend to act in their ‘Darwinian’ interests because we are made to endure even great suffering to help bring children into the world and to help raise them so they can bring more children into the world. And so on. We act in favor of our family-lines (far more accurate than speaking of genes which are only part of our makeup) largely because of intermediary factors, such as sexual desire. When we speak of family-lines instead of genes, this is very similar to the view in the Old Testament. I discuss these issues in a little more detail, from a Christian viewpoint, in Chapter 286, *The Body of Christ: A Christian Sociobiology*, and Chapter 289, *Sex, Traditions, and the Modern Scientific Materialist*.

True morality rests upon that physical foundation, genetic and somatic and relational, but has been subjected to various selective processes at the social level. Great thinkers and saints can present new possibilities but these are then subjected to those various selective processes of God’s world, selective processes which—after all—produced the likes of Isaiah and Jeremiah and the Buddha and Socrates even before the Son of God became incarnate as a man. Aristotle was a noble gentleman of the ancient Greek sort and gave true nuggets of wisdom to mankind as well as a system which is worth studying but is not true by Christian standards. (See the writings of Alasdair MacIntyre for the gory scholarly details.) Taken naively, the current trends of history would indicate that Christian teachings are also fading in importance; certainly, Christian civilization seems to be close to flatlining. This is but one sign of the failure of Christian intellectuals and Christian leaders in general to deal properly with the questions of the modern age; we live in a world described by Darwin and Einstein and their successors, we Christians profess belief in a system of thought in which the Creedal truths have been combined with a largely early modern view, in part ancient and Medieval views, of God’s work as a Creator. With a few notable exceptions, such as Joseph Ratzinger, few Christian religious thinkers or

teachers take science seriously outside of liking those shows about the so-called Big Bang—which they often misinterpret as a creation event rather than a phase change. Spiritual books and homilies give the impression we are descended from a couple who were part of a special creation rather than being descended from an ancestor common to men and chimpanzees. Those two stories imply radically different understandings of sin and other aspects of human nature.

In any case, we are bound primarily to those in our family lines and bound with decreasing strength to those who share our genes to a lesser extent. Sort of. This is to say that genetic relationship can be coherently argued, as Wilson and others have done, as the primary factor in the binding of living creatures into various sorts of favorable activities toward one another right up to the behavior of social creatures which can be labeled as ‘moral’.

We don’t have the ability to detect genetic relationships directly though there have been research claims that, as one example, human beings detect (by smell?) enough about each other’s immune systems to bias them toward mating choices which might be more likely to produce children who survive diseases and parasites. Yet, I’d say it seems most likely for now that we ‘detect’ close genetic relationships by way of observing facial and other external features and by way of being familiar with other persons at a young age, but too great a familiarity activates an instinct against incest—not an all-powerful instinct, at least not at a conscious level, since Abraham and some Pharaohs married half-sisters or sisters and many in history, including Charles Darwin, have married first cousins.

On the whole, this issue of the evolution of moral nature is a problem for idealists. Moral nature and abstract thoughts, if not the moral creature and abstract thinker, will remain—if only implicitly—in the domain of non-being or special creation long after other forms of dualism die. I recommend we take seriously the idea of a self-contained Creation, a realm of created being which we can’t escape. In particular, I claim with no qualification that created being lies upon a spectrum of abstract to concrete, with concrete forms of being coming into existence largely as the result of ‘abstract’ relationships. Human communal being is real—the Body of Christ is real—even if a bit more abstract and somewhat invisible to creatures yet in this mortal realm; yet, we can conceive with our minds what our eyes can’t quite perceive if we but acknowledge the reality of what lies in front of us.

Much of what happens to bind us to others and into complex communities doesn't involve signs of any sort of direct kinship but rather is the result of proxies. The oversized and soft eyes found in mammal babies draw us toward human babies in our own communities and also toward puppies and bunnies and even calves. Some evolutionary biologists have argued that romantic love between mates, found in various species but most explicitly in humans, is the result of a transfer of that love of one's offspring to one's mate. If this were true, it would be plausible human females with such crippling gestations and giving birth to such slowly developing babies might be selected to have many of the characteristic of youngsters, large and soft eyes as well as soft skin. This would tie males to them more strongly. The (quite defective) monogamous nature of human beings, even males who would seem to have better reproductive strategies if we watched most other species, is itself an evolved human behavior which is not the result of morality but rather leads to moral rules reinforcing successful reproductive behavior. That there might be a divine purpose taught to us by Jesus Christ and taught since then by the Christian churches doesn't undo the path behind us as I tried to warn my fellow-Christians in Chapter 643, *Repeat After Me: The Church Has Accepted Evolution and Our Ancestors Were Sex-Crazed, Killer Apes*.

This is deep stuff, not simply the rearranging of the deck chairs which most Christian thinkers engage in when dealing with moral and social and political and theological issues. It requires a lot of study of modern empirical knowledge, a lot of contemplation, and a sustained effort to develop complex and long lines of thought.

For now, let me leave this part of the puzzle of community-formation by claiming we are drawn to form communities with others by a force which is actually our desires and is stronger as genetic relationship (by way of various proxies) grows closer though the distance measurement is likely complex and the basic metric of the state space might make the metrics of the two theories of relativity look quite simple in comparison. (In fact, I'm beginning to wonder if the concepts of state-space and metric might need generalizing, though not sure what that might mean.)

We are looking at a situation where evolution has produced tight bonds between human beings closely related. This isn't a situation entirely promising from the Christian viewpoint. Secularists in the post-Enlightenment world are in the same boat—partly because modern secularized views are little more than diluted or deformed versions of Christian teachings, though

sometimes becoming photographic negatives of a sort. How do we move toward an inclusive Body of Christ if we have strong desires to, for example, protect and nurture our own children even at the expense of the children of human beings relatively far away in physical distance and distances of other sorts? It doesn't work to do what Christian leaders and charitable groups are inclined to do—throw together human beings from a variety of cultures and ethnic groups and pray that brotherly love develops—see Chapter 275, *We Prefer to Cooperate With Those Like Ourselves*, and Chapter 218, *Networks of Public Spaces Rather Than One Square* for discussions of some sobering facts about multicultural neighborhoods as discovered by Robert Putnam, a Harvard professor and collectivist liberal who was very upset with his own research results.

We shouldn't even think of despairing because there are various ways in which the various bonds of human communities can be extended in sometimes modest ways which can be powerful over a long enough time. Yet, we should respect nature, moving forward slowly and carefully; history tells us of many occasions when groups seemed to have assimilated to a common culture but genocidal rampages or lower-level violence interrupted those movements toward multicultural Heaven on Earth.

In analogy to modern theories of gravity and consistent with what I said above about the metrics of state-spaces, I'm proposing that our deepest inclinations, those treated by sociobiologists and brain-scientists, cause our social state-space to bend, causing us to slide toward great masses; if we passively allow ourselves to slide close to that great mass or if we fail to successively struggle against the slide, then we add to that mass and help to further bend our social spacetime. As we merge into that mass, we perhaps will even change what had been deeply held moral beliefs. The attraction between human beings is inside of us and likely doesn't produce anything physically detectable, like an electromagnetic field or a spacetime bent near a black-hole, but that attraction is real and so are the communities which result if we respond properly to our attractions to other human beings. Again, abstract being is real including invisible sorts of attraction between human beings.

A theory should be as abstract as necessary but no more abstract and it has to abstract from a realistic understanding of concrete being as we know it—of course, we can also build upon existing abstractions which we accept as at least plausible. Download *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53] for a summary of my understanding of human being

in the concrete and the abstract. This understanding is the foundation of my ongoing efforts. In particular, I discuss both individual and communal human being.

What is the difference between legitimate patriotism and the illegitimate form of patriotism which we can call 'jingoism'? I think the problem is somewhat similar to that of sexual love and sexual lust and greatly similar to the common failure for communities to distinguish between truly dangerous aliens and aliens who could be accepted as trusted friends or neighbors.

Patriotism is dominated by processes of inclusion, of bonding, of concrete attachments, though the alien can't be admitted if he endangers what it is that the patriot loves—that alien must be loved as a Christian brother, or at least a fellow human being, at a distance. Jingoism is dominated by processes of attraction toward oddly abstract ideas or entities, ideas and entities which often have a doubtful reality—some abstractions are delusions rather than real abstract being. On the human level, jingoism is dominated by process of exclusion, of refusal to bond beyond a certain population of human beings and institutions accepted as friendly and trustworthy and worthy of something akin to love. I suspect that ethnic forms of jingoism develop largely because groups are pulled together and begin to push against or hate the other when there are too many differences in culture or appearance—as noted in the essays about unwise forms of multiculturalism I referred to above.

So let's move forward and try to find a way of thinking and speaking of patriotism and jingoism, that we may test my claim that modern ideologies, including some of the "good ones", are based upon misunderstandings of human communities, typically the denial of the reality of human communal being.

In Chapter 418, *As Go the Immune System and Neurological System*, I discussed the speculations by evolutionary biologists that the immune system spun off the neurological system. After all, "that primitive immune system was largely a set of cells which tried to distinguish between 'self' and 'non-self', between what was supposed to be inside that particular organism and what was an invader. Somehow, that effort to distinguish between 'self' and 'non-self' led to a central nervous system, ultimately thought, as well as to defenses against diseases." I went on to discuss how government might well be something like an immune system in human communities and to ask "[a]s we mature towards the Body of Christ, is our government going to split into a policing (immunological) system which operates with some

independence but under conditions where it has only as many resources as it needs for the task at hand and a planning and thinking (neurological) system which plays a role in the ongoing functions of the parts of the Body but also plays a central role in understanding the environment of that Body and planning for the future?"

Here's where I see a problem in radical forms of liberalism, including libertarianism: it denies the reality of communal human being. Thus it sees no cultural ties or heritage which are beyond voluntary acceptance or rejection, not even that of families. Some might think that the more modern collectivist liberals have adopted a belief, a poorly formed belief perhaps, in communal human being, but this would be wrong. Collectivist liberals try to force individuals into tight relationships controlled by central powers, but the forms—if not always the reality—of those relationships are contractual and voluntary, deformations of the relationships accepted by classical liberals but essentially the same. Modern collectivist liberals and the citizens of societies they control travel as herds but those herds don't honestly respond to objective reality, in terms of immediate experiences or in terms of disciplined traditional knowledge or modern empirical knowledge. Those herds change direction, change relationships between the members of the herd, mostly according to changes in opportunities to feel good about themselves. The classical liberals, including libertarians emphasize the individual's feelings of self-goodness while the collectivist liberals, including modern warmongering 'neo-conservatives', emphasize some sort of shared but not truly communal feeling of self-goodness and recently this has decayed into outright jingoism.

Yet, I think even those who fail to recognize the reality of communities desire to belong to some community or communities which might exist only in their dreams or in something they read, perhaps in the books of Isaiah or Matthew. I maintain that this desire comes from the most basic level of what we are as human animals, before we're even able to consciously evaluate the goodness or badness or mediocrity of communities—probably some are never able to do this in an intelligent manner.

I'll end by pointing out that my understanding of human being as individual and communal, both real and not just ways of speaking, slowly emerged after meditating upon the insight of the philosopher Kurt Hubner that the real debate between Einstein and Bohr over the nature of reality was: "Einstein was claiming that reality consists of substances which remain unaltered by their relationships with other substances while Bohr was

claiming that it is the relationships which are primary and those relationships bring substances into existence.”

See my short discussion of this issue in a chapter coming from one of my first internet writings: Chapter 156, *A Christian View of Einstein's and Bohr's Debate on Reality*. I point out the similarity of Bohr's 'radical' position to the teachings of the school of St John the Evangelist in a chapter based upon another early essay: Chapter 157, *Quantum Mechanics and Moral Formation*.

# 308 Unreliable Memories, Minds Like Silly Putty

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1795>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/03/28.]

In Chapter 502, *We Need All Sorts of Mavericks in This Dynamic Creation*, I argued the need for certain sorts of flexible and creative thinkers to respond to new opportunities and to deal with problems which have developed in our understanding of Creation or any significant part of it, such as the understanding of human origins and the reasons we are as we are. In this essay, I'll be dealing with the need for certain types of what might be called reliable thinking on the part of all morally responsible citizens of this world. The meaning of 'reliable thinking' will be developed in the rest of the essay.

It takes a healthy mind to make serious sense of the world about us, however provisional and ephemeral that sense might be. Reality is what it is, what the Good Lord created it to be, modified by His acts and ours and those of other creatures to the extent of freedom exercised by various creatures, from the limited freedom of a bacteria to the moral freedom of social mammals such as wolves and gorillas right up to the self-aware and self-critical moral freedom allowed to human beings. The world, even insofar as we contribute to its being, dictates to us. We don't impose our ideas upon the world which is a story being told by God. This doesn't mean we are powerless; it does mean we, so to speak, must play the game by its rules, by rules laid down by God, by rules which must be read out of the game as it is going on.

Without memories which correspond to reality—though not necessarily memories accurate in the way of computers or of scientific recordings—and

without minds which can make some sense of what goes on around us in terms of that same correspondence to reality as we know it up to that time and as we update it based upon the experiences of that time, we are confused puppies in a world grown awesomely complex in terms of huge and varied human communities and in terms of a physical universe we now are forced to deal with on terms of modern science and technology. Simple world? We have houses filled with devices designed allowing for quantum mechanical effects, hospitals with diagnostic equipment which also considers relativistic effects. We are starting to diagnose disease, and very tentatively to treat disease, by use of genetics. I'll mention only one community problem: the American democracy, and most others, are farces in that so much is decided and perhaps has to be decided by political machines well before the voters march into the booths to choose between Tweedle-dee and Tweedle-dum. The reality of our political situations in the modern West is a bit different than what we pretend.

Some of those mavericks I discussed in Chapter 502, *We Need All Sorts of Mavericks in This Dynamic Creation*, need to get to work on these problems, but there are some steps we could take in the context of our current mess to at least minimize the damage we do to our own individual selves, to our communal selves, to our children, and to the rest of the world. Taking these steps will require more awareness of reality as well as more moral courage than men and women of the West have shown in the past couple of centuries.

I speak of 'practical' steps we can take, but choosing the path we step along will require abstract thinking as well as practical thinking and the application of proper habits. I'll speak a little to the nature of abstract thinking before moving on.

The adoption of abstract modes of reasoning, which I think to have developed in a recognizable and self-sustaining form in the fifth or sixth century before Christ, has not gone so well. In fact, with the modern return to barbarism as described by Jose Ortega y Gasset (*The Revolt of the Masses* [60]) and others, we have perhaps regressed more than a little over the past two centuries. See Chapter 260, *Much of Our Knowledge, Much of Our Thinking, Much of Our Moral Structure Lies Outside of Us*, where I wrote:

I'm not really pessimistic—in the long term. In *The Revolt of the Masses* [60], Jose Ortega Y Gasset told us the growth

in prosperity and changes in attitude freed men from parochial lives but only tainted good had come of that release from restrictively local lives. The leaders of the West failed to even try hard at fulfilling their duties to teach the wisdom of the West to these masses or to help them to mature into morally well-ordered adults in this radically new historical situation. Few, if any, leaders rose from the masses themselves to try to develop the sorts of moral characters and minds which could bring about moral order in the new communities which were growing up willy-nilly.

God's story moves forward. The Body of Christ is forming slowly by painful processes. Some legitimate organs, such as the American government, have decayed into cancers or parasitic organisms preying upon the greater body. The human race which is the mortal stuff of that Body is only reluctantly, and under great pressure, accepting the need to mature and to grow into something not yet seen. We will move forward along with God's story. What choice have we?

Early in the 1800s, Jefferson was claiming that the hardheaded skepticism of illiterate peasants in Europe had become in most Americans an invincible ignorance based upon "a perverse form of literacy." The still bigger problem was the loss of any desire to work to reach higher levels of reading skills or reasoning skills or storytelling skills or general understanding of Creation or any substantial part of it. Apparently, a people who came suddenly into a prosperous state in the midst of a civilization which once existed largely in the Cathedral cities and some courts didn't understand what a civilization is. They knew nothing of the sheer human effort of building and maintaining that civilization—most of that work occurring in the true foundation of a civilization, the minds of its citizens. The technology necessary for the physical infrastructure of a civilization can be grasped by such a people as Americans, but the moral and political infrastructure is transparent to that people. Morality, especially when it was still in its strong and traditional form, seemed as much a part of nature as the desires and needs it helps to bring into a proper order for practical as well as spiritual purposes. One particular aspect of this problem I've explored in depth is the need for an understanding of the world, of all of Creation for Christians. A true civilization is an attempt to live out a story

corresponding to a people's understanding of their own role in some great scheme of things.

To be sure, those who came from parochial and uneducated populations have acquired skills and understanding sufficient to read advertising copy or fill out most forms even to doing the arithmetic of tax forms; they have developed some interestingly dangerous skills to manipulate virtual objects on a screen and to drive cars or airplanes. They have not learned to evaluate the quality and reliability of information; they have not learned how to browse the shelves of a library to find at least good background books (even biased books often fill that role in a more than adequate way); they have not learned how to think in historical terms, that is, in terms of reality. The universities graduate a small number of dedicated and highly skilled historians and physicists and chemical engineers each year; the majority of graduates don't seem capable of finding their way to good information once they are no longer guided by professors or teaching assistants. Some of those in my family from my grandparents' generation left school at 6th grade but were capable of reading serious books, thinking through difficult lines of thought about this country's actions or the relationship between capital and labor, and had a healthy skepticism—not cynicism.

Modern inhabitants of what was once the great Christian civilization of the West have no abilities to look into the activities of their own minds, including memory formation. We have minds and memories ready made for manipulation by marketers of the latest and greatest in junk food and gadgets and even excessive versions of useful technology. In general, modern minds are somewhat like silly putty and there is some testimony from American thinkers over the past two centuries that we proudly led the way and I'd claim we still do so. We Americans are proud of our minds of silly putty. Push the mind of an American against a cartoon image and it picks it up, colors and all. The minds of men from other regions of the modern West seem little better in this year of 2014, though Jefferson had claimed to have seen that healthy skepticism in the French peasantry when he was resident in that country. According to Jacques Barzun, the French peasants who were literate in past centuries, apparently a higher percentage than we or Jefferson have imagined, could read books beyond the skills of modern day college professors.

This is a problem, an important problem. An alarmist might look at what has been done to the American mind and other minds since at least World War I when the fathers of corporate marketing joined with Wilson

to remove from the American mind the simple inclination to mind our own business. There are other strands to this story, the failure of Americans to live up to the promise of this country while pretending we have done so, but I'll only mention in passing the issues of education and desire for financial security. There are still other problems with the American mind and the underlying American moral character; I've discussed some of them in the past. In any case, the world was to be ours to improve as if it were a car engine to be tinkered with and made more efficient.

Serious thinkers, such as Tocqueville and Hawthorne and Melville, had already raised questions by the 1850s about the seemingly weak attachment that Americans had to any part of reality they didn't wish to recognize. Melville had considered it to be a rebellion against God, on the part of those brave and honest (Captain Ahab) as well as those cowardly and false-faced (Emerson and Thoreau and most Americans).

I'm going to respond to a couple of recent articles about how easy it is for experimental psychologists to manipulate the formation of memories or even the recall of true memories. These experiments are, to be sure, carried out in laboratories, that is—under somewhat artificial conditions, but there is a lot of substance to this work even when it involves a bit of showmanship worthy of Harry Houdini whose tricks were, in turn, as sophisticated as these of experimental psychologists. So far as I can tell, these experiments correspond closely to the real world, however stylized and (falsely) neat those experiments are.

Ed Yong lets us in on some truly weird science in an article, *Out-Of-Body Experiences Make It Harder To Encode Memories* found at <http://phenomena.nationalgeographic.com/2014/03/11/out-of-body-experiences-make-it-harder-to-encode-memories/>, about the effect of out-of-body illusions:

When Henrik Ehrsson tells me that his latest study is “weird”, I pay attention. This is a man, after all, who once convinced me I was the size of a doll, persuaded me that I had three arms, and ripped me out of my own body before stabbing me in the chest. Guy knows weird.

Ehrsson's team at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm specialises in studying our sense of self, by creating simple yet spectacular illusions that subvert our everyday experiences. For example, it seems almost trite to suggest that all of us experience

our lives from within our own bodies. But with just a few rods, a virtual reality headset, and a camera, Ehrsson can give people an out-of-body experience or convince them that they've swapped bodies with a mannequin or another person.

These illusions tell us that our sense of self isn't the fixed, stable, hard-wired sensation that it seems. Instead, our brain uses the information from our senses to continuously construct the feeling that we own our own bodies. Feed the senses with the wrong information, and you can make the brain believe all manner of impossible things.

I've dealt with these sorts of interesting and disturbing experiences, some occurring because of stress or near-death experiences and some induced by experimental psychologists. The interested reader can check out Chapter 8, *Staking Your Faith on Gaps in Empirical Knowledge*; Chapter 250, *Preliminary Thoughts on the Evolution of the Human Mind*; Chapter 106, *So What if the Human Mind is a Product of Evolution?*; and Chapter 111, *So What if the Human Being's Mind is a Product of Development?*

In those essays, I claim that these sorts of odd events shouldn't be disturbing or shocking in a creature who develops his sense of self by various mapping processes occurring in the brain.

In the article, *Your Memory May Be Edited* found at <http://www.scientificamerican.com/podcast/episode/edited-memories/>, we learn:

Our memories are inaccurate, more than we'd like to believe. And now a study demonstrates one reason: we apparently add current experiences onto memories.

An author, in particular, would certainly not be surprised to learn about this mixing of past and current experiences in our memories. In fact, I'm dealing with this in a novel I'm finishing up and will be putting on my website for free download—perhaps in a month or so.

The article ends with words which might indicate real problems with human beings finding the truth about anything substantial or at least real problems in remembering the truth the next day:

The researchers note that recent and easily retrievable information “can overwrite what was there to begin with.” Consider that next time you hear eyewitness testimony.

All of this is interesting and very important and likely to be well-founded—Ed Yong is very reliable and *Scientific American* editors are generally reliable in vetting scientific work to ensure it was properly peer-reviewed and that the authors have taken adequate measures for others to reproduce the results. These revelations about the unreliability of our *individual* memories are truly weird. More objectively—they indicate to me that we don’t form objective memories so much as we write our own story and the stories of our communities and even a story of our entire world and are constantly revising those stories to reflect something which impressed itself upon our memories.

But. . .

What is to be done?

To a certain extent: nothing different from what we’re already doing. Scientists have known for centuries our direct observations of nature cannot be taken for truth. Various disciplinary ‘tricks’ are used even for casual observations and measurements and instruments along with elaborate statistical analyses are more typically used. Medical clinicians and novelists and musicians and machinists have been adjusting their efforts for centuries to compensate for wrongful perceptions of various sorts. Over the centuries historians have especially made various successful and unsuccessful efforts to adjust for a variety of biases, including those prior assumptions that blind a researcher or theorist to even obvious facts or lead them to exaggerate the importance of other facts—which may, in fact, be illusions or delusions. In ways sometimes similar to those of novelists and poets and musicians and sometimes similar to those of scientists and technologists, some philosophers and theologians have also tried to adjust for temporal and spatial and cultural distortions, generally for the weaknesses and imperfections of communal perceptions as well as for those of individual organs—eyes and ears and brain.

What’s remarkable is our ability to be aware of our weaknesses and incompletenesses, our errors of omission and commission. This comes about when we are properly objective, that is, when we look for truths outside of us rather than imagining we have some entity, call it mind or soul, with a magical ability to directly find or know truths.

In the past, I've pointed out two important facts to keep in mind when trying to understand our human selves in light of these sorts of glitches in our perceptions and our thinking but also in light of our historically demonstrated ability to move toward significant truths. As I stated at the very beginning of this essay: "In Chapter 502, *We Need All Sorts of Mavericks in This Dynamic Creation*, I argued the need for certain sorts of flexible and creative thinkers to respond to new opportunities and to deal with problems which have developed in our understanding of Creation or any significant part of it, such as the understanding of human origins and the reasons we are as we are." At the same time, I had also claimed—if not quite so strongly—that we need properly dynamic communities. There is also the need for stability in the thinking and feeling and acting of those communities.

For the individual, the strongest advice for avoiding the misshaping of your mind by external or internal factors is simply to be aware of what is going into your mind and how it settles in, to respond to reality honestly and bravely, and to make honest self-evaluations every so often. There is probably more advice to be given but I don't think there is anyone who yet possesses the knowledge to give authoritative advice. We need to get to work understanding how our minds are shaped and how they can be better shaped. My exploration of this general issue is generating a number of essays and plans for books over the next three to four years or more, on top of the books and essays available on my websites or described there. These issues are discussed in various chapters, including:

1. Chapter 403, *Differential Geometry and Moral Narratives* and
2. Chapter 125, *The Mind and Reality: William James and Me*.

# 309 Bad Ideas Also Have Consequences

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1806>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/04/24.]

Larry Cahill, a distinguished brain-scientist, recently published an article in which he discusses the need for recognizing the differences between male and female brains by first discussing some bad medical results due to the assumption that there are no such differences and, thus, medicines will affect both the male and female brain in the same way and to the same extent. The article, *Equal ≠ The Same: Sex Differences in the Human Brain* found at <http://www.dana.org/Cerebrum/#sthash.G1drT73T.dpuf>, begins with a comment by the editors of *Cerebrum*, a magazine of *The Dana Foundation*:

Editor’s Note: While advances in brain imaging confirm that men and women think in their own way and that their brains are different, the biomedical community mainly uses male animals as testing subjects with the assumption that sex differences in the brain hardly matter. This month’s *Cerebrum* highlights some of the thinking and research that invalidates that assumption.

The article begins with an example of women being harmed by the assumption that there is no difference between male and female brains:

Early in 2013, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) ordered the makers of the well-known sleep aid Ambien (zolpidem) to cut their recommended dose in half—but only for women. In

essence, the FDA was acknowledging that despite extensive testing prior to the drug's release on the market, millions of women had been overdosing on Ambien for 20 years.

Cahill concludes “the biomedical community has long operated on what is increasingly being viewed as a false assumption: that biological sex matters little, if at all.” As the tale goes, this began largely as a result of simplifying assumptions that only the regions of the brain involved in regulating reproduction were inherently masculine or feminine. I would imagine that those who regarded women as less cognitively capable thought of them as having weaker brains of the same sort as men rather than different brains than men. According to the author, and agreeing with my own readings, the opposite problem arose in modern academia:

[S]tudying sex differences in the brain was for a long time distasteful to large swaths of academia. Regarding sex differences research, Gloria Steinem once said that it's “ anti-American, crazy thinking to do this kind of research.” Indeed, in about the year 2000, senior colleagues strongly advised me against studying sex differences because it would “ kill” my career.

In other words, science—even crucial medical research—is subject to deformation by ideologies. It's all seems needless because the world is moving toward a more open view of possible male-female roles. Why not just let matters develop by treating each other, male or female, with proper tolerance and openness? Well, neither men nor women do well—in the short-term—at the task of responding honestly and courageously to reality, as I will discuss later. In any case, men and women alike were having trouble accepting that there were, and are, many women with both talent and ambition for science or engineering or business management or politics or carpentry or dentistry. Being radical individualists and fearing the human cultures which do use both greater and lesser differences between men and women to shape them to roles, modern feminists could only go from one extreme, women who had to work hard and 24 hours a day at being child-bearers and child-raisers and homemakers and women who seem to have been trophy wives of prosperous middle-class and upper-class men, to another extreme, every man and woman for themselves as equal competitors or victims in the marketplaces which have become the true (but false) homes of modern human beings.

Human cultures use all human traits to shape a human being to roles. This can be a cruel process as it is in American education. The American school system uses the social instincts of young children to homogenize them, gathering them in herds and going over the heads of some and dragging others down in the apparent belief that a mediocre mind along with enthusiasm for mass-culture is what's needed for boys and girls to mature into good men and good women. If we've tended to place too much emphasis on sports, we at least display some common sense when we see sports as something good for all but also the special domain of the talented athletes, that is, those with a work-ethic which complements raw talent.

We modern Americans remain descendants of the New England puritans. We don't conceive ourselves to be embodied creatures but rather do we misconceive ourselves to be something like 'personalities' accidentally attached to bodies and most certainly only accidentally embedded in particular cultures or particular environments of this planet. We float free, not constrained by our particular traits or circumstances.

Against this view, I hold that the Body of Christ itself comes to exist as men and women push themselves to limits so surprisingly far out as to seem we are constantly re-inventing our very selves, but when we do it right we are still shaping ourselves by responses to a Creation, including our own human being, which is ever revealed as far richer and more complex than we could have ever imagined. God's imagination is far greater than even the sum of human imaginations over the ages.

We err greatly in thinking to understand our world by way of schematic knowledge, though schemas can be a necessary aid to a creature struggling to know and understand. I discussed some of the problems of schematic knowledge in Chapter 299, *Sex and Categorical Reasoning in a World of Evolution and Development*.

Still, we modern men and women know much, by human standards, about the thoughts of God as He created and shaped this world and all of Creation, before and alongside and within this world. We can, in principle, share **all** of the thoughts of God specific to His acts as Creator. This is part of what it means to share His life after our resurrections—to share His thoughts, as well as His feelings and His acts.

Some of God's thoughts are built into the basic operations of our brain by way of natural selection and all the other processes of the evolution of life. Others we can learn by paying attention to both our 'instincts', to evaluate for rejection or further nurturing, and to our individual and

communal 'rational' or conscious thoughts. Much of what we instinctively know about men and women as different varieties of human being is true but still conditioned by the context of human life in a particular time and place. Because public life, including the arts and the sciences, were once dominated almost completely by men, we have a record of the arising of abstract thought and of a variety of artistic skills over the time of human civilization, as that arising occurred among men.

The male mind has expanded greatly from crafts and agriculture and warrior-centered poetry to now encompass much that would be far beyond the most vague understanding of a Homer or Aristotle or any of the craftsmen or scholars of ancient China. I would imagine the female mind is making a similar expansion, a little delayed because of the need, not to be denied, for women to play a different role than men in reproduction. So it is that women, who are now playing a more active role in that expansion of the human communal mind at the same time they develop their own minds, are starting from slightly different regions than men and will likely move over different but largely parallel paths to those of the male minds. The communal mind, ultimately the mind of the Body of Christ, will include all of this diversity and richness. Read deeply into these speculations and try to imagine the complexity of such processes and the little likelihood that male and female minds are, in general, the same though there is sure to be a lot of overlap.

In any case, there is no way to anticipate the movements of such complex processes in which facts emerge as strongly as do patterns, but even most of the patterns can be seen only in the rearview mirror. We can only pay attention to living men and women and try to respond to them as individuals while also remembering that there are both differences and similarities. Either differences or similarities between men and women could be seen to dominate the processes by which the human mind is expanding to encapsulate ever greater regions of Creation; we shouldn't allow ourselves to be blinded by initial impressions or impressions at particular points in the processes by which individual men and women develop, such as the great differences during adolescence, and the processes by which individual and communal minds are expanding in that effort to better and more completely encapsulate Creation. We most certainly would be unwise to think we can anticipate much of the development of the communal mind of mankind, that which is ultimately the mind of the Body of Christ.

When we pay insufficient attention to Creation, most especially to hu-

man being, we rebel against God, filling in the gaps of our knowledge with ideological distortions or superstitions or simply random nonsense. We can harm our fellow-humans in this rebellion, forcing some of them into roles which are uncomfortable or demeaning or which simply don't allow the development of certain classes of individuals. At the same time, categorical knowledge, including knowledge of the differences between the ways of thought of an American man and a Chinese man or a Japanese man and a Japanese women, can be an efficient conveyor of past knowledge or of past needs. We should be careful to preserve, if possible, what is true and good and beautiful in our various human traditions.

Let me return to the article for a short discussion of neuroscientists straying away from empirical investigation and making assumptions, perhaps necessarily so to start their research:

Despite the fact that most neuroscientists still overwhelmingly use only males in their studies, other neuroscientists have generated considerable data demonstrating sex influences on brain function at all levels, including the molecular level and ion-channel level. Very often these sex influences are completely unanticipated by investigators. Crucially, animal research clearly demonstrates that mammalian brains in particular are filled with sex influences that cannot be explained by human culture. Thus animal research proves that the human mammalian brain must contain all manner of biologically based sex influences—from small to large—that cannot be explained simply by human culture (even though there are certainly cultural contributions in many cases). Animal research has torpedoed the “it's all human culture” ship that ruled the academic seas since the 1970s when it came to sex differences.

It might have been necessary to make simplifying assumptions when first starting to explore the workings of the human brain, but assumptions have a way of turning into accepted dogmas. In this case, the assumptions had not had time to show as mistakes before the entire subject of differences in the male and female brains, and the minds made by those brains, had become “distasteful to large swaths of academia.” Moreover, the scientific enterprise has been changing, not always for the best but probably sometimes, or even most of the time, for the better. For example, the male dominance

in mathematical physics while probably being partly a matter of fewer opportunities for women has to be set in a greater context—the men doing high-level work in mathematical physics and related fields of more abstract mathematics worked as loners relative to the modern situation where even theoreticians seem to be pulled onto teams and to be attending conferences regularly. It might be that men could dominate in that past situation and won't in the current situation, though the current understandings of differences in the male and female brains suggest men will always dominate in the particular fields of abstract mathematical sciences. What's seems even more clear to me is: the future will be far more complex than, far different from, what we could imagine. Academics, especially in the social sciences, seem to be much like generals in always fighting the previous war.

We cannot deny and should celebrate that we are intelligent and intellectual creatures in a Creation which, as I noted in Chapter 502, *We Need All Sorts of Mavericks in This Dynamic Creation*, is dynamic in two ways:

1. it is dynamic in itself, and
2. it seems still more dynamic because of the various ways in which our knowledge of this dynamic Creation has grown and deepened and become more sophisticated—at a very rapid pace in recent centuries.

When we pay inadequate attention to empirical reality, when we override what seems true for ideological or other reasons, when we rebel against the Creator, we harm others and ourselves as well as damaging the growing and maturing Body of Christ. The problem seems to be that few human beings, whether due to nature or nurture, seem capable of flexibly and intelligently responding to God's Creation, on the various levels of concrete or abstract created being; most human beings need scripts or recipes to function. This shouldn't be a problem because we have different roles in life and those with the calling to be pioneers will give the settlers new land and new materials to work with; the real problem is that those who don't have the talents for gaining deeper and truer understandings of Creation have been encouraged from the time of the Industrial Revolution to believe they have some sort of right to understand Creation in their own way. That "their own way" might be a very bad way of understanding God's acts and thoughts as Creator is seemingly irrelevant. It seems vaguely undemocratic and unfair, un-American to those in the United States, to so much as suggest they

can't vote intelligently for modern leaders of the American Empire when they can't even locate on a map the countries we've invaded and occupied and devastated in recent decades. See Chapter 308, *Unreliable Memories, Minds Like Silly Putty* for a rather sharp discussion of this issue including my take on Ortega Y Gasset's insights into the failure of Western leaders to properly integrate the bulk of Western men following their release from parochial and limited lives during the Industrial Revolution.

This is sanity in its entirety, mind and heart and hands: to be in synch with reality as it can be best understood in our time and culture. See Chapter 127, *Intelligence vs Intellect* and Chapter 282, *Do We Need Heart and Hands as Well as Mind to Understand Reality?* for background on my use of these terms. Better still, download the book. *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53]. It is also a part of sanity to recognize when the best human understandings available to us need to be enriched or enlarged and to be open to the efforts of those who are trying to do so.

This is reality: over many generations, many human societies have developed very useful and largely true stereotypes about men and women. This is also reality: we are individual beings as well as being members in all senses of greater communities. In both our individuality and our communal roles, we all differ from stereotypes, even those women who long from their youth to be wives and mothers and homemakers and take on jobs only when necessary for special needs or when the children are grown. In general, we should act toward men or women as they present themselves, so long as they present themselves as morally well-ordered and this remains true even if some part of their lives are morally disordered by traditional standards. Sometimes, we might even play a role in nurturing the development of their human being or offering to nurture different and perhaps richer developments of their human being. If they present themselves in a morally disordered way, we can only be charitable while properly protecting ourselves and others near to us. We should also leave other valid possibilities open in some ways which cannot be predetermined nor can I currently describe them in explicit, non-narrative terms.

I started by discussing the article, *Equal ≠ The Same: Sex Differences in the Human Brain* found at <http://www.dana.org/Cerebrum/#sthash.GldrT73T.dpuf>. I give my overview of the situation: In the latter third of the 20th century, (many, though not all) feminists engaged in an intense effort to replace stereotypes containing substantial amounts of truth by stereotypes largely devoid of truth. We should be able to throw off any

wrongful categorical and stereotypical understandings of male and female roles—again, see Chapter 299, *Sex and Categorical Reasoning in a World of Evolution and Development*—without falling into new understandings which are even worse than most modern human schemes to understand human being have proven to be.

## 310 Socioeconomic Inequality and Achievement

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1828>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/06/11.]

Kimberly Noble, MD and PhD, pediatrician and neuroscientist, has written the article, *Rich Man, Poor Man: Socioeconomic Adversity and Brain Development* at [http://www.dana.org/Cerebrum/2014/Rich\\_Man,\\_Poor\\_Man\\_\\_Socioeconomic\\_Adversity\\_and\\_Brain\\_Development/](http://www.dana.org/Cerebrum/2014/Rich_Man,_Poor_Man__Socioeconomic_Adversity_and_Brain_Development/), which is posted at the website, <http://www.dana.org>, of *The Dana Foundation*, a foundation run by neuroscientists. There is good stuff in the article which has a properly optimistic tone as it explores the idea that we can help people from impoverished backgrounds by providing some sort of enrichment for the environments in which their children develop. I would even add that I think brain plasticity indicates some possibility of helping the likes of adults in the early stages of dementia or those recovering from some sort of brain injury or those who have given themselves an impoverished life-style (couch-potato or failure to develop job-skills or whatever).

But the article is confusing because there's no clear understanding proposed for human nature, even a conventional theory of nature and nurture isn't put forth. The article is written as if we can significantly raise the achievement level of children living in perhaps barren cultural conditions even as they remain in cultures which, for example, have little or no respect for books or learning. This is not to say that illiterate parents can't nurture a respect for learning in their children. I've read that a number of Chinese immigrants to the United States in the 20th century were themselves illiterate but taught their children respect for learning and would even keep the

children's chores light so they could study or read or practice music. The article also doesn't even mention genes or epigenetic effects. Like it or not, families of adults with talents for abstract thinking tend to produce children with similar talents. There has also been some strong evidence that a child's metabolism is shaped partly by the habits, good or bad, of not only mothers but even maternal grandmothers. Wildlife biologists have even speculated that grizzly bear mothers, responding to their own situation, send signals to their sons in particular causing them to grow big, even by grizzly standards, if the species is dominant and the males will be able to eat plentifully of meat or to stay relatively small if there is a dangerous competitor such as white men—the native Americans of the Rockies and California weren't much of a challenge for big, predatory bears. Is it possible that children, especially boys, have slightly different personality characteristics depending upon their mother's environment—big and aggressive in a violent setting or perhaps smaller and more sociable in a peaceful setting?

Dr Noble doesn't say anything unreasonable. Some might wish to leave out hard truths to encourage optimism, but reality tends to bite, if only eventually, especially when true reforms require hardheaded perseverance over a lifetime or even over multiple generations—a situation likely to prevail when we deal with the characteristics of truly civilized human beings whose achievements are dependent upon at least some abstract reasoning skills as well as a large body of knowledge and customs.

The short *Editor's Note*, or introduction, of the article, *Rich Man, Poor Man: Socioeconomic Adversity and Brain Development* at [http://www.dana.org/Cerebrum/2014/Rich\\_Man,\\_Poor\\_Man,\\_Socioeconomic\\_Adversity\\_and\\_Brain\\_Development/](http://www.dana.org/Cerebrum/2014/Rich_Man,_Poor_Man,_Socioeconomic_Adversity_and_Brain_Development/), is:

Here's a disturbing statistic that made headlines this past January: The richest 85 people in the world now hold as much wealth as the poorest half. Keeping in mind the goal of closing the ever-widening gap between the haves and the have-nots, our author examines new research that ties family income level and other factors to brain development. While socioeconomic adversity may not solely determine a child's success later in life, its significant role in helping children develop language, memory, and life skills can no longer be ignored.

Children can't learn well, if at all, if they are hungry and cold, but they

are also not likely to learn well if they don't wish to do so, if they don't have the ambition to read books or at least to satisfy parents or other relatives or community leaders who value learning. Are there also children who haven't the ability to read well or to think abstractly, even with dedicated teachers who have good resources at their disposal? Are those children likely to come from family lines of human beings with similar lack of ability? A difficult question which is silently avoided in this article and perhaps to good purpose, but part of my mission is to reach a better understanding of human being and I can't ignore the entire bundle of often inconvenient questions connected to developing that understanding.

There are certainly some skills necessary to success in education which can be nurtured to at least some extent. Modern men, and their corporations and governments have acted as if determined to destroy one particular ability before it shows as a developed skill. This is one which has been discussed often. Our entertainment systems, general life-styles, and even some of our educational programs act to retard or even destroy the ability to concentrate beginning with the simple self-discipline to sit still while learning. This is a tricky matter because, as one complicating example, I knew plenty of young men who, as teenagers, had trouble sitting still in the classroom or concentrating on history or biology but could work intensely for hours figuring out how a car engine worked or how to make a proper joint on a piece of furniture.

There is little evidence that Americans in general are much interested in high achievement outside of sports or the acquisition of wealth and most have retreated to the couch in front of the television by their 20s, out of shape and reconciled to a very modest prosperity.

What does this mean? Can we blame the residents of for-ever impoverished regions of the earth for lack of moral order or for not delaying satisfaction or something of the sort? The sad fact that so many middle-class Americans of all ethnic groups seem to willingly travel a downward spiral into inner-city culture or the like certainly tells us that we have the freedom to damage our moral character. Until recently, it looked as if Americans would remain prosperous indefinitely. Somehow, we've created a society in which the children from those modestly prosperous households, having attended school systems rich in physical resources, are looking at relatively bleak futures. At best, we seem to be a people whose prosperity, however modest, is dependent upon some corporation or high-achieving individual giving us a chance in life; we don't seem to have the inner resources to

make it on our own. That's a bad way to express matters and the actual situation is quite complex but I'll discuss some of the issues contributing to the complexity.

Do we, as individuals or even as members of 'nuclear families' have much freedom to move from disordered environments toward a state of greater moral order which, in the modern West, has usually brought greater material prosperity as well? It's easier to travel to the 'larger' regions of disorder in most state-spaces which are likely to correspond to human social systems, which is to say that it takes a number of generations to build a civilization or a culture but only a small number of years to destroy it.

The article. *Rich Man, Poor Man: Socioeconomic Adversity and Brain Development* at [http://www.dana.org/Cerebrum/2014/Rich\\_Man,\\_Poor\\_Man\\_\\_Socioeconomic\\_Adversity\\_and\\_Brain\\_Development/](http://www.dana.org/Cerebrum/2014/Rich_Man,_Poor_Man__Socioeconomic_Adversity_and_Brain_Development/), speaks truths in a way that can be misleading as it deals with human beings as if mostly freestanding individuals though there is recognition of the mother-child relationship, but that has been accepted by nearly all exponents of radical individualism—it's apparently something we can outgrow to become healthy freestanding individuals. It would also seem, from the presentation and perhaps from the assumptions shaping the research protocols, that inheritance plays little or no role in shaping the mental development and consequently mature capabilities of a human being. It is comforting to modern men to take each child as a fresh start of sorts and often dispiriting to realize that child is a member of specific human communities including a (genetic) family-line.

Biology, narrowly conceived, isn't the only problem. Some cultures don't value human development as Greeks did, as Jews and Chinese do, and as, once upon a time, modern European men did. Some cultures and family-lines might well be made up of human beings with limited capacity for higher learning. Still, all human cultures are rich and complex in some significant sense and all human beings have something to offer their human communities. It's probably best that educators and the researchers and others who support them be optimistic but perhaps intense disappointment should be avoided by prudent constraints on the hopes that a child can be 'raised' from the low achievements of her parents and other adults in her culture—we should at least be aware that any noticeable improvements (of a lasting sort) might occur only after a few generations of effort. We modern men aren't good with this business of gradual change. As the economist Thomas Sowell, himself a high-achieving African-American, has noted: it's

not just coincidence that Jews recover so quickly after periods of the most intense adversity—Jews, as a people, have been literate for thousands of years. Yet, we modern Americans expect rapid improvements within a year or two of the adoption of a new fad in educational technology. And some have managed to find statistics indicating such improvements were occurring even as the situations of inner-city African-Americans, and other groups, have gone from bad to catastrophically bad.

Dr Noble points to one factor, experience with language, which is surely important, but it should be seen in the complete setting I've recommended, the setting few have: an understanding of being and of human being, communal and individual. That includes all that pessimistic stuff about the genetic limitations of all human beings, limitations acceptable when I can't run fast enough to make the Olympics or sing well enough to ever be the soloist in even a small church community but not so acceptable when some children can't learn mathematics, others can't read complex novels or history books, others can't acquire the practical skills necessary for business success, and some can't seem to learn much of anything in particular.

Dr Noble's article speaks of experience with language in these terms:

In a recent study in our lab, we examined brain volumes in a group of 60 socioeconomically diverse children ranging from 5 to 17 years of age. We found that, as children get older, higher SES children tend to dedicate relatively more neural real estate to areas of the brain that support language development, in comparison to their lower SES peers. This suggested to us that something about the experience of growing up in a higher SES environment likely leads to a greater investment in language-related regions of the brain.

Indeed, this something is almost certainly experience with language itself. It is well established that children from disadvantaged homes tend to hear fewer words—an estimated 30 million fewer words by age three than their higher-SES counterparts, to be precise. Lower-SES mothers are also more likely to speak to their children in a directive rather than conversational manner, and to use less complex speech patterns and fewer gestures. It is likely that differences in maternal speech input result in a cascade of effects that are directly relevant for the development of a child's language-supporting cortex dur-

ing infancy. Much as greater exposure to music may increase an individual's perception of speech years later, greater social engagement with interactive adults may lead children to have improved abilities to perceive and discriminate among speech sounds. Thus, one mechanistic pathway would suggest that socioeconomic disparities result in large differences in quality and quantity of linguistic exposure, which in turn lead to differences in the development of language-supporting brain regions—and, finally, to the often-reported SES disparities in children's language skills. [See original article for footnotes.]

This is good to know, but is consistent with all of my criticisms above. Some language impoverishment problems might be due to genetic issues, including epigenetic effects which can only be dealt with over generations. If so, the children having less ability to use language in rich and complex ways won't have lasting benefit from being placed in an environment in which others use language in such ways. In fact, the result might be frustration and resentment.

Some language impoverishment problems might be due to cultural impoverishment which also can only be dealt with over generations. Thomas Sowell, the economist mentioned above, didn't explicitly justify his cautious optimism (at least in any of his books I've read) that great improvements are possible for the development of minds in African-Americans but seems to feel it's at least quite possible that the current impoverished state of the 'African-American mind' is due to some problems of an epigenetic and cultural nature, but he knows well that African-Americans, even under optimistic assumptions of long-range potential, aren't about to catch up anytime soon to Jewish-Americans or Chinese-Americans in fields such as physics or philosophy or medical research.

Do we modern Americans or other modern men have the stamina to stay the course and help children of low-achievement and from low-achievement cultures to advance at least somewhat? Do we have the truer love and tolerance to accept it when some children and some cultures don't prove able to reach the achievements of, say, the Americans of Ashkenazi Jewish descent? Are we capable of building societies which offer rich and dignified lives to all?

# 311 We Human Beings Are a Particular Type of Organism, an Organism Sometimes a Student

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1835>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/06/20.]

I've written before of the modern tendency to use glossy pictures and even fast-moving images to teach, even to teach subjects requiring some concentration and some use of abstract reasoning. This is absurd. It's been known since at least the work of the English psychologist Richard Gregory, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard\\_Gregory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Gregory), that the human brain—like the brains of monkeys even more than apes—places a priority on colors and movement as a means of detecting food, dangers, and sex opportunities. (The latter might be less important for humans since color doesn't indicate fertility for human females as it does for chimpanzees and other close relatives.)

I don't really have a good handle on the history of the efforts to understand the nature of human acts of perception and cognition and how they interact. I know a little bit about the modern effort and I know how St Thomas Aquinas anticipated much of the general findings—see *How Brains Make Up Their Mind* [35] by the neuroscientist and philosopher Walter J Freeman for an excellent overview of the Thomistic understanding. In any case, I do know that Richard Gregory played an important role in the modern re-discovery of the active nature of human perception and how it interacts with thinking.

The main thrust of Gregory's work was the nature of perception, which he saw as an act like unto cognition rather than a passive reception of images

or other stimuli. Since there are only finite resources in the human brain, which is already an energy hog, the aggressive stimulation of the visual regions will come at the expense of other regions, such as those with which we reason in abstract ways. One might think that many subjects would be better taught with textbooks and other materials not being distracting to the higher-reasoning regions of the human brain, but nowadays those glossy pictures are found even in high school math books. Much is taught through videos or through rapidly changing images on the computer monitor. This isn't to say that electronic technology, even fast-moving videos, are never good in education, but it is to say that it is often no good and we should have educators who understand enough to be able to make plausible judgments in specific cases.

This is the problem. Education, though a little more solid when I was in elementary school in the 1960s, was the domain of faddish thinking by way of ungrounded speculation for the entirety of my career as a student. Some of the fads were plausible answers to the wrong questions, such as the phase of short readings with each student working through the file of readings at his own pace. That seemed plausible to deal with the problem of varying levels of skills and talents in the typical classroom but it was really, in my opinion, a gutless dance around the problems of the ideologically driven age-cohort school system: The children advance at different rates, some eventually catching up and some never catching up, but we modern men of the West wish to socialize them as a herd so we sacrifice better education for all but the middling students who move at a rate acceptable to education college theorists.

Now, some researchers have spotted another possible problem, though it's not a settled issue. In the article, *What's Lost as Handwriting Fades* at <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/03/science/whats-lost-as-handwriting-fades.html>, Maria Konnikova begins:

Does handwriting matter?

Not very much, according to many educators. The Common Core standards, which have been adopted in most states, call for teaching legible writing, but only in kindergarten and first grade. After that, the emphasis quickly shifts to proficiency on the keyboard.

But psychologists and neuroscientists say it is far too soon to declare handwriting a relic of the past. New evidence suggests

that the links between handwriting and broader educational development run deep.

Children not only learn to read more quickly when they first learn to write by hand, but they also remain better able to generate ideas and retain information. In other words, it's not just what we write that matters—but how.

The article speaks of some respected researchers who think it will not turn out to be true that handwriting is nearly this important in the educational process. We'll see, but we should be asking how major standards were promulgated on the basis of untested speculations that handwriting is unimportant in the education of children. I know that my best learning experiences have occurred when I used lots of pencil lead and lots of sheets of paper to do problems in mathematics or science or when I took notes during lectures on any subject—even when I never used those notes to study.

This is a general problem in the West. We think to be a 'scientific people' by which we are claiming to think in line with sciences dealing with the observable and, often, also quantifiable aspects of reality. In reality, we have been partially freed from traditional ways of thought and feeling and acting, some of which ways carry true knowledge and wisdom, some of those ways point to truth but need to be adjusted to reflect more recently discovered knowledge about reality, and some of those ways reflect knowledge best discarded but for those scholars needing to study the history of human thought.

We are a people with a strange mixture of scientific, magical, ideological, and other beliefs of a good and not so good sort. This comes out in our educational system, one in which people who feel awfully good about themselves and greatly overrate their understanding and intelligence have conducted experiments upon the youth of the United States and many other regions of the West as well. The experiments, on the whole, are failures. The peoples with old-fashioned ideas about learning—immerse yourself in the material, dig in, work till you're drenched with sweat—out-perform those who have been softened in brains and often bodies to the standards of the modern American middle-class. Those more successful peoples include the ethnic Chinese and Japanese, traditional Jews, some eastern Europeans, and some immigrants from impoverished regions, though I've heard expressions of concern that more recent generations of even Chinese-Americans

might be moving toward the trashy attitudes of the American middle-class of European descent.

The loss of respect for the activity of handwriting follows upon a similar loss of respect for such activities as memorizing addition or multiplication tables. To be sure, that was an activity useless to me since I could already handle addition and multiplication of all those relatively small numbers well before I had to endure hours of useless practice each week, but that points back to the problems with age-cohort education. We prioritize socializing, and I would even call it brainwashing, and that is perhaps the original sin of American educators. By high school, I wasn't in the same classes as the fellows I would join for pick-up baseball games or card games in after-school hours—the only effect of age-cohort education for me was the slowing down of my mental development and perhaps of my emotional development.

In any case, though I was lucky enough to be ahead of the sheer stupidities of New Math, I can remember the upset and the complaints of some parents who had at least vague intuitions this New Math stuff wouldn't help their children to so much as balance their checkbooks. And I wish to say that memorizing addition and multiplications tables was good in itself though I didn't need it at the time I had to endure it. In any case, though few know this, the New Math programs back in the 1970s were adopted over the protests of various societies of mathematicians and most likely the protests of a lot of individual mathematicians and scientists and engineers and maybe some humanists possessing at least a broad understanding of mathematics.

Human beings are the result of specific processes of evolution. Those processes have somehow produced a very complex brain which allows us to shape minds, abstract relationships between us and other entities as well as 'global' regions of Creation; we shape those minds by active responses to reality. Yet the shaping process itself is a somewhat ad-hoc process as we would expect from the most basic understanding of natural selection and other evolutionary processes.

Those who claim to have knowledge of some sort of education science overrule those who have knowledge of the specific fields of knowledge and ignore those specific fields which tell us much about the human being, an animal capable of transcending in some ways that animal status by way of processes we only partly understand, an animal capable of acquiring high levels of skill in passing on and gaining abstract knowledge of the bookish sort. He is a very particular sort of animal not 'designed' to be an animal

literate in well-defined ways with well-defined additional cognitive skills in logic and mathematics and higher-level music, but rather an upright primate with skills and aptitudes selected for survival and reproduction yet capable of abstract reasoning and able to develop sounds and alphabets to communicate the number of enemy warriors approaching and also the concept of rational number. The Pythagoreans were even capable of reacting in disgust and fear against the possibility of an irrational number.

But all of this came about by development processes, some linked undoubtedly to ongoing evolutionary processes. These were development processes which occur as the human being responds to the world around himself as well as to his own body. They are also processes which themselves are the results of specific events in biological evolution.

The mathematical truths which are part of Creation shape the mind of the mathematician or even the minds of those who make instrumental use of mathematics; the mind of the student, the potential mathematician or physicist or accountant or carpenter, doesn't access realms of abstract truths apart from this mortal realm. He accesses realms of abstract truths through this mortal realm and by way of specific events in this mortal realm. He doesn't impose order upon chaos but rather draws principles of order from that (seeming) chaos and uses it understand that chaos—a fascinating process of often unstable iterations occurring over generations. He has the brain suited for such a world and for such activities within the world; that brain “makes up a mind” as Professor Freeman has it. Without understanding that brain, how it operates and how it interacts with the world outside of itself and how it interacts with the realms of truths it posits with increasing certainty, we can't understand how to educate children or even how to further educate our own selves.



# 312 Human Communal Being and the Shaping of Human Individual Being

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1846>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/07/14.]

Human being is complex, as is true of most interesting entities. Even God's simplicity, touted rightly by ancient and Medieval theologians and their not-so-worthy successors in modern times, is only a way of speaking against very specific types of errors. Mostly, they were concerned in ages which saw change lead eventually to decay that God not be seen as a being moving, however slowly, towards decay and death.

More generally, interesting and rich entities seem to be highly organized systems of sub-systems, some of which are simple and some of which are complex. These sub-systems interact to produce various sorts of—speaking anthropomorphically—simple and complex communities.

I've written a little about the real nature of simplicity of complex entities, human beings or human societies or other organisms or parts of Creation—see Chapter 641, *Enriching Our Moral World: Simple Is Digested Complexity*.

Responding to a *New York Times* overview of some recent literature discussing and, sometimes, advocating one or another position on how to raise morally well-ordered children, Razib Khan wrote an short essay in April of 2014, *It Takes a Village More Than Parents* at <http://www.unz.com/gnpx/it-takes-a-village-more-than-parents/>, which provides some well-grounded cautions:

Two insights from behavior genetics can shed light here. First, shared-environmental effects are often the smallest portion of the variation in behavior. This is the part which is due to the family home and the parental influence. Second, the proportion of variance explained by shared-environment tends to go down as people get older. So parental influence tends to diminish.

Obviously part of the reason you behave as you do can be put down to genes. Or more precisely genetic dispositions which express themselves. And another portion can be chalked up to what your parents teach you. But a large proportion, in fact in many cases the largest proportion, is accounted for by factors which we don't have a good grasp of. We don't know, and term this "non-shared environment."<sup>1</sup> In *The Nurture Assumption* Judith Rich Harris posited that much of non-shared environment was one's peer group. This is still a speculative hypothesis, but I do think it is part of a broader set of models which emphasize culture and society, and how it shapes your mores and behaviors, as opposed to the nuclear family.

Khan was responding to a *New York Times* article by Adam Grant: *Raising a Moral Child* at <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/12/opinion/sunday/raising-a-moral-child.html>. One claim that struck me regarded the difference between shame and guilt:

Praise in response to good behavior may be half the battle, but our responses to bad behavior have consequences, too. When children cause harm, they typically feel one of two moral emotions: shame or guilt. Despite the common belief that these emotions are interchangeable, research led by the psychologist June Price Tangney reveals that they have very different causes and consequences.

Shame is the feeling that I am a bad person, whereas guilt is the feeling that I have done a bad thing. Shame is a negative judgment about the core self, which is devastating: Shame makes children feel small and worthless, and they respond either

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<sup>1</sup>This might actually be genetic or more broadly biological; epigenetics, epistasis, and developmental stochasticity. [From original article.]

by lashing out at the target or escaping the situation altogether. In contrast, guilt is a negative judgment about an action, which can be repaired by good behavior. When children feel guilt, they tend to experience remorse and regret, empathize with the person they have harmed, and aim to make it right.

The author, Adam Grant, quite plausibly concluded: “If we want our children to care about others, we need to teach them to feel guilt rather than shame when they misbehave.” Discipline is needed but the right sort, the sort which makes it clear the child can become a better person.

One part of Grant’s discussion of this issue struck home for me in a rather personal way: “The ashamed toddlers were avoiders; the guilty toddlers were amenders.” That’s me, an avoider, and even now I have trouble facing up to my own weaknesses and figuring out how to amend; I also have trouble confessing to even non-moral failings, such as lack of knowledge of some matter that I feel I should know about or simple errors of judgment or mistakes in carrying out a task. This is a common American trait, in my experience, and Grant’s discussion raises obvious questions about the possible prevalence in this country of parents who raise their children to feel shame rather than guilt.

Another result from these particular experiments and studies discussed by Grant is the evidence that children learned generosity better when they saw adults being generous **without** preaching generosity. Preaching the moral lesson would decrease the effect of seeing generosity in action, though some effect remained.

On the other hand, as a modern thinker appreciative of the mind and its importance to some extent in many individual lives and its great importance in our communal lives, I think that preaching is distinct from the types of conversations—not to be forced—which can lead to understanding and to the type of mind which can respond more flexibly to the world. Stories might be even more effective in reinforcing lessons taught by action.

From here, I’ll be making a general critique which applies to nearly all human thought, including modern human thought, on the nature of human being in its various aspects. And ‘critique’ is the right term—I’ll propose no answers and don’t think anyone can yet properly phrase questions which might lead to plausible answers. I’m working on those questions and hope to generate a framework for proper discussion of human nature, individual

and communal, so that I can fill in the rough outline in my book: *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53].

Much modern thought assumes a sort of reductionism, but one allowing a privileged position to being as organized in human individual being although there is no evidence from empirical science and even surprisingly little from the Bible or serious literature and history that such privilege is justified. Under bad circumstances, which might be due to genetic or environmental traits, we are deeply fragmented creatures though always—so far as I know—striving to pull ourselves together or at least justifying our fragmentation in terms that salvage something of an ‘I’. There is the literature on the so-called split-brain. (See the article *Split-brain* at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Split-brain>.) There are also creative works, such as *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*—where the fundamental fragmentation was caused by a poorly formed conscience but Stevenson added an factor of a drug. I’ve also written a book *A Man for Every Purpose* [37] in which there was a fundamental cultural division—Mom was a Norwegian Lutheran and Dad was a Jamaican of Pentecostal practice—and an added factor of a terribly painful, mind-twisting disease.

But my goal is not so much to cast doubt on the reality of human individual being as it is to open up human minds to the possibility—as a Christian, I’d say certainty—of the reality of human communal being.

Most reductionists (see the article, *Reductionism*, at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reductionism> and probably most Nominalists (see *Nominalism* at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nominalism>) would deny on principle the reality of human communal being. “Sure,” they might say, “there are ways in which groups of people act as if they form a true entity, but this is just a way of speaking ‘as if’, for convenience, for shorthand.” But most reductionists and nominalists accord an unwarranted privileged position to individual human being, to the ‘I’ they feel to be.

To me, it seems the reality of a community is no more, and no less, puzzling than the reality of a fragmented man of biological pieces yet being a true, unified entity—if far from perfectly so. For both an individual human being and a communal human being, empirical reality seems to push upon us the necessity of treating as a real entity what acts as a real entity.

As a Christian, I believe in the reality of human communal being because the Body of Christ is the ultimate human community where each member remains an individual and yet is entirely the Body, that is, entirely Christ. That Body of Christ can’t come into existence unless it be possible for

human beings to form true communities of a lesser sort in this mortal realm.

This is background to informally justify my claim that our human communal being is real, yet, I think there to be a difference: I think human communal being is still more of a potential at our birth than is our human individual being. We human beings have communal being in us when born, but some can be forced into a life largely lived as a loner perhaps because of some disaster or a psychological disability. The possibilities for human community, though constrained are great if not necessarily infinite. We can live in a tribe of shared thoughts never questioned or as a more cosmopolitan person with at least the possibility of both a well-developed individuality and also a rich and complex communal life. Even when we speak of a type of life, tribal or cosmopolitan, there are uncounted ways of actually manifesting those sorts of lives.

This is the point I'm driving at: we can't analyze the development of the total human being as if there is some sort of preset 'configuration' of a human being with a contribution of, say, 40% from individual factors and 60% from communal factors. My feeling is that not only do those percentages change in different sorts of communal life but also the very structure of the total human being.

The reader should consider my understanding of created being as levels or realms beginning with that which God first created: the raw stuff of created being, the truths He chose for Creation. From this raw stuff, He shaped successively more concrete layers of being culminating in this concrete, thing-like world of narratives, even of moral order and disorder.

This forces, or should force, a different understanding of not only being but of also knowledge of created being—see *Four Kinds of Knowledge* [43] for my understanding of the actual unity of knowledge of created being and the practical need for specialized fields of knowledge. This situation leads to both problems and opportunities for those wishing to explore God's Creation, whether as physical explorers on the ocean blue or scientists probing the elementary constituents of matter or philosophers exploring various realms of created being from speculative versions of various viewpoints. I deny the modern—often implicit—viewpoint that the divisions between metaphysics and particle physics and farming are true and absolute: when one field of knowledge advances ahead of others, those other fields of knowledge can borrow true insight at an appropriate level of abstraction and travel down the road of concretization toward their own subject matter.

This is my general suggestion for developing a Christian understanding

of Creation which respects both Christian revelation and modern empirical knowledge: let's borrow from those fields of empirical science which have advanced far more rapidly than Christian thought in recent centuries.

I'm the early stages of studying and contemplating relevant fields of mathematics and also reading works of history and literature which might lead to inspiration and insight as I try to understand on its own terms a Creation which can now be seen as far more rich and complex than prior generations of men could have imagined. I'm groping my way in what is, for now, a foggy region.

## 313 The Interior Richness Which Lies in a Civilized Man

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1875>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/09/01.]

Peter Frost, dissident anthropologist, wrote about some issues in the matter I've considered in earlier chapters—the formation of complex societies. See Chapter 509, *Mathematical Models of Human History: Are They Plausible?*, and Chapter 510, *A Different Model of the Growth of Centralized States in History*.

Frost's article, *The Agricultural Revolution That Wasn't* at <http://www.unz.com/pfrost/the-agricultural-revolution-that-wasnt/>, looks at the broader issue of how large groups of people form from bands of hunter-gatherers.

Frost has this to say about the general conditions of human life as complex, large-scale human communities (civilizations or proto-civilizations) were developing:

About 10,000 years ago, the pace of human genetic evolution rose a hundred-fold [see original article for reference]. Our ancestors were no longer adapting to slowly changing physical environments. They were adapting to rapidly evolving cultural environments.

What, exactly, caused this speed-up? The usual answer is the shift from hunting and gathering to farming, which in turn caused other changes. People were becoming sedentary and living in ever larger communities: villages, towns, and finally cities. Farming also produced a food surplus to be stored for future

use, thereby providing powerful men with the means to bankroll a growing number of servants, soldiers, and other hangers-on. Thus began the formation of early states. And thus ended the primitive equality of hunter-gatherers.

But is that the whole story? Was farming the trigger for this chain of events? Or did something earlier get things going? More and more anthropologists are taking a closer look at what happened just before the advent of farming, a period called the “Broad Spectrum Revolution”[.]

If you haven’t been keeping up with at least the general discoveries in the overlapping fields of genetics and paleontology, you might wish to reread the above quote and think about it, especially the discovery that the older claim that we are stone-age ape-men in civilized drag is only a highly qualified truth. In the above quotation, Frost makes it sound as if natural selection continues to work as it always did but now the selective processes are relative to the ability to survive and reproduce in a complex human community in which individuals are sheltered from predators and some natural disasters. In fact, this is clearly true, but the power of selection seems diluted by the survival beyond the age of reproduction in a civilization of many not adapted to civilized life. Charity, the need for large amounts of labor who might work more effectively if they aren’t ‘cultured’, and perhaps other factors allow the reproduction of many who simply don’t get this business of civilization.

With my limited knowledge of the workings of genes, I have to believe that keeping so many alive at least long enough to reproduce, diluting the effects of bad luck as well as lack of fit to civilized life, has to increase the variety in the human gene pool.

Frost also tells us:

Farming thus came on the heels of a broader cultural, behavioral, and even psychological revolution. It is this broader change, rather than farming alone, that probably caused many supposedly farming-related events, such as the rapid spread of certain agricultural peoples into territories that formerly belonged to hunter-gatherers.

Frost tells us that some hunter-gatherers were, and are, willing to retreat rather than become part of this new-fangled way of living:

One of my professors, Bernard Arcand, would talk to us about the hunter-gatherers of Upper Amazonia and their indifference to farming. They saw it as something akin to slavery and couldn't understand why anyone would want to stay put in one place and toil in the fields all day. Attempts to teach them the benefits of farming typically failed. Benefits? What benefits?

There has to be a change in mental makeup before farming becomes possible. People must become willing to exchange short-term pain for long-term gain. They must accept monotony and sedentary living. They must live in larger communities with people who are not necessarily close kin. And they must get used to bland, nutrient-poor food.

Some of those who don't like civilization live down the street. Some are in our armies or in our more dangerous occupations and may well more than pull their weight, yet, on the whole, we've got a real problem in the modern world. This "change in mental makeup" is rather extensive and has to take place deep within us and also in our more superficial aspects before civilization takes and we settle down as men and women capable of behaving properly and amusing ourselves properly—to put it in a grossly oversimplified way. We have to learn how to gain some richness in life by way of active participation in various arts or religious rites or storytelling or . . . If there are some who have mental makeups not suited to life in a complex civilization, then they might simply be passive creatures who watch the spectacles around them or on their video screens or they might engage in various activities such as crime on one scale or another to gain the goods and at least qualified prestige they can't gain by making music or art or producing artisan-quality furniture or supervising a complex industrial process or taking proper risks in new business ventures or . . . People not capable (for whatever reason) of actively amusing themselves, in substantial solitary or communal activities, might be ready for such exciting activities as wars; they might participate in riots—perhaps starting as demonstrations for a good cause; they might engage in sex for excitement (see Chapter 617, *Raising the Ante on Passion: Nabokov and Gibson*); they might use drugs to escape life in a community unsuited to their needs or desires; and so forth. Some of these activities are self-destructive and some do serious damage to

individual others or to communities; some may even be parts of sociopathic behavior.

We don't seem to be a happy people. We flock toward entertainment of a juvenile sort, often enough a perverse sort. We glorify those who refuse to grow up and become morally responsible civilized men. We are half-assed citizens of complex states requiring far better than that and then we have the nerve to get upset when our governments fill up with self-serving scoundrels. We Americans and some other men of the West perhaps show our worst sides, at least over the past 60 or 70 years, in the behavior we put up with, and often cheer, in our leaders when they operate in the international realm. We react self-righteously to imagined or wrongly attributed acts against us and then don't even feel bad about the thousands or hundreds of thousands who are killed, the communities left without fresh water or power systems, and so on. We drink another beer and just remember they "hate us for our freedoms" and feel to be a righteously exceptional people—see Chapter 465, *Dumber Every Day, With Beer in Hand and War on TV*. We common folk send our pennies and dollars over to help Haitians or Indonesians after some natural disaster or to help others to build schools and hospitals and churches even as we remain blind to our politicians' and bankers' theft of the wealth of entire countries.

It could be argued, even by those so suspicious of the central-planning mentality as I am, that we need some conscious awareness, if vague, of what is wrong and of where we can head and how we can better form our children and our own selves to take proper advantage of the complex and multi-sided benefits of civilization. In fact, in saying this I speak not of central planning but rather of numerous individuals and communities engaging in well thought-out experiments in living and in making our livings.

I'm going to end with a suggestion I'll pursue in my next essay, which I'm writing in response to some good analysis and speculation in another essay by Frost, *Does Natural Law Exist?* at <http://www.unz.com/pfrost/does-natural-law-exist/>, just published on Ron Unz's website today (2014/09/01). My suggestion is that participation in more complex communities, of which civilization is the most complex we know, actually requires a greater and richer development of the individual, including a richer sort of self-directedness which is tied to higher level thinking skills capable of dealing with messy situations which can't be handled by simple rules-based thinking. This isn't a plea for any sort of radical individualism, for sure. I know quite well a lot of human beings can't do the research and inde-

pendent thinking necessary to understand the complex problems of modern human life, but those who can't should have rich enough, complex enough, thoughts to be able to recognize those who have bothered to learn about these issues and can maybe generate some ideas, if they be no more than an interesting creative movie or a piece of folk music that speaks of the experiences of an American soldier or Marine in Afghanistan. By now, a lot of smart men and women who aren't scholars or creative artists or theologians should realize those in authority in the institutions of our age are not up to the job of dealing with our problems.



## 314 Natural Law or Natural Suggestions or Natural Illusions?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1879>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/09/08.]

Peter Frost has published a good essay in which he deals with human moral nature. The essay, *Does Natural Law Exist?*, can be found at <http://www.unz.com/pfrost/does-natural-law-exist/>". I vaguely anticipated this discussion in Chapter 313, *The Interior Richness Which Lies in a Civilized Man*.

Frost defines natural law as teaching:

All people are born with a natural sense of right and wrong, and it is only later, through vice or degeneration, that some can no longer correctly tell the two apart.

There are both pagan and Christian justifications for such beliefs and, as Frost notes with obvious respect, they were once quite plausible. Despite my belief in absolute truths, I claim that natural law instincts are the result of human evolution, that is, the shaping of our ancestors in response to their environments. Any particular manifestation of natural law is the result of human being responding to our world in philosophical and theological and political and pedagogical ways. These responses are necessarily limited by the current understandings of our world and—at least to a Christian—of all of Creation. This creates the likelihood of “fighting the previous moral equivalent of war” each time that something changes drastically or each time we reach a point where small changes have built up without proper responses. We love security and stability and only start changing when forced to do so, not when change first seems plausible and desirable. This is

not to deny that the understandings produced in certain ages were insightful and powerful, maybe even the best understandings possible to those ages.

In that spirit Aquinas is acknowledged by Frost as having provided:

a compromise that divided Natural Law into general precepts and secondary precepts. The former are known to all men but can be hindered “on account of concupiscence or some other passion.” The latter “can be blotted out from the human heart, either by evil persuasions [...] or by vicious customs and corrupt habits, as among some men, theft, and even unnatural vices, as the Apostle states (Rom. i), were not esteemed sinful.” [See Frost’s article for reference to quote from Thomas Aquinas.]

I’ll continue developing this theme but Frost seems to reason as if the enhancements made up to now to human understandings of our own moral natures and to the rules which might govern those natures—if such rules exist—were the only ones possible and, if they fail, will force us to deny that there is a possible understanding of absolute moral truths and a possible manifestation in our own natures.

Since I began thinking seriously about these issues, perhaps 25 years ago, I’ve had a problem with the status of natural law though I accord it the respect that Frost also accords; in addition, I think natural law reasoning—properly implemented—is the proper way to understand the ‘best’ which human beings can achieve. We simply have to recognize that our understanding of human moral nature and of moral truths are tentative in the same way as the physicist’s understanding of physical reality.

Frost points out, consistent with the complaints of many social conservatives, that Christian moral thought and moral action has decayed from its prior glory into a rather weak-kneed effort to avoid insulting others. After speaking of anthropologists who wish to avoid being judgmental about such behaviors as cannibalism, Frost tells us:

The noble savage is still alive and well. Strangely enough, this kind of thinking has seeped even into the missionary mindset, as I discovered during my last few years at the United Church of Canada. I was surprised to learn just how little our mission work involved teaching of Christian morality:

“Do you talk to these people about the Christian faith?”

“Not unless they specifically request it.”

“Do you at least have Christian literature on display?”

“No, we’re not allowed to do that.”

Things aren’t much better in the fundamentalist churches. I remember attending a Pentecostal presentation on “the cause of Third World Poverty.” I thought the talk would focus on cultural values. Instead, we were told that the cause is . . . lack of infrastructure. The Third World is poor because it doesn’t have enough roads, bridges, and buildings.

Much of the problem with modern Christians didn’t start as a loss of faith but rather, in my usual terms, as a refusal to make peace with empirical reality. As such thinkers as Melville and Hawthorne noted, this is essentially a rebellion against the Creator. This was my theme as I began to think through these issues in a more organized way 25 years ago, but I myself was having trouble making peace with metaphysics, more generally—with abstract thought. Peter Frost seems to me to have a greater respect for past accomplishments of abstract thinkers than I had but he seems to think that the recent failure to make better sense of the world after Darwin and Einstein means that it’s not possible to do again what Aristotle and Augustine and Aquinas did for their ages. Yet, he sees much with great clarity:

Christianity has been killed by its success. It has so thoroughly imposed its norms of behavior that we now assume them to be human nature. If some people act contrary to those norms, it’s because they’re “sick” or “deprived.” Or perhaps something is misleading us and they’re really acting just like everyone else.

In terms suited to my analysis, Frost’s insight becomes:

Christians had inherited an understanding of reality, a world-view, which was well-tuned to reality—as it was known and understood around 1700 or perhaps 1800. In recent centuries, knowledge of empirical reality increased rapidly and Christian leaders, intellectual and spiritual, utterly failed to produce an updated Christian understanding of Creation. What we have

is a patchwork of dissonant beliefs, the revealed truths of the Bible expressed in words whose meanings have changed over time and especially under the pressure of the modern enrichment and complexification of our knowledge of Creation along with that knowledge itself. Some of the Medieval Scholastics, including Aquinas, claimed quite plausibly that most of what we know of God comes to us through His effects in Creation or, as I prefer to state it: most of what we know of God comes through our proper sharing in the thoughts He manifested in created being.

Done properly, as Augustine and Aquinas did in their historical contexts, recovering a good understanding of Creation is a more complex process than imposing our thoughts upon Creation and more complex than simply taking our more or less direct knowledge and understandings of empirical reality as being normative or as being dismissive of the very possibility of absolute moral truths. We need to make better use of that empirical knowledge by seeing in it better knowledge of the abstract being from which the concrete is shaped. We need to see more clearly, as one example, that realm of abstract being we can sort of see in the equations of quantum mechanics and can with, far greater uncertainty, conjecture from the relationships in general relativity and in evolutionary biology and also history.

See my freely downloadable book, *Four Kinds of Knowledge* [43], for my understanding of the actual unity of knowledge of created being and the practical need for specialized fields of knowledge; it is that practical need which leads us to specialize as physicists or anthropologists or philosophers or retailers or plumbers. Frost is open to the goodness and truth in ways of thought outside of his field of anthropology and the closely related fields of evolutionary biology and genetics, but he has to rely upon specialists in fields such as metaphysics who have not done a good enough job of making sense of the whole ball of wax in light of the discoveries in recent centuries of biology and mathematics and so on. Those who think of themselves as modern, scientific-minded men and women don't see that any effort to understand this universe without having a good understanding of what Christians call created being—that greater understanding being of Creation as a whole, is much like the effort of physicists and other physical scientists to understand the things of our world one by one without having an understanding of the nature of this world in its more or less purely

physical aspects. It was Einstein who gave us a universe with his general theory of relativity and allowed the development of more unified and more consistent and more complete understandings of the concrete realms of Creation. It was Einstein's work including his work, and the work of Bohr and Schrodinger and so on, in quantum mechanics which pointed to realms of more abstract being from which concrete being is shaped. We should never forget that Plato and others anticipated some of this but we should also never forget that this deeper understanding of thing-like being gave us the possibilities of more exact understandings, more convincing understandings of both concrete and abstract being.

Christian theologians and philosophers have failed to make peace with empirical reality, that is—with God's Creation, starting with this concrete realm of thing-like being and that failure has led to utter cluelessness in any efforts to restate Christian truths and to reformulate Christian speculations so that they are consistent with what we now know of the Creator's actual work. As a result, Christian thinkers including philosophers and theologians have turned their fields into the studies of past creative efforts and have failed to deal with our new knowledge of the thoughts which God manifested in this concrete realm of Creation, have also failed to move on to dealing with more abstract realms of Creation. Metaphysics and the higher level forms of theology which are founded upon metaphysics are effectively discounted as important parts of Christian thought.

It might seem funny to accuse theologians and philosophers of the mistake of undervaluing metaphysical thought, abstract thought in general. They seem quite comfortable with Plato and Aristotle, Plotinus and Augustine, Aquinas and maybe a good selection of modern philosophers. The problem is that Aquinas was right when he told us that the first science (metaphysics) uses the positive sciences (physics, biology, and so on). Modern empirical knowledge indicates rather strongly that, for example, matter is far richer and far more complex than the Greeks or the Medieval Scholastics or Kant and other Enlightenment philosophers thought it to be. For now, our best understanding of matter is given to us by way of quantum physics and related specialized fields. This means that even the Christian understandings of the Sacraments, in which matter play a central role, are nothing more than fairy tales, once plausible understandings kept alive by the barbarian and semi-pagan descendants of Augustine and Anselm and Aquinas and Galileo—I agree with Stanley Jaki, the Benedictine priest and polymath, who claimed Galileo to be a better Christian theologian than the

Churchmen who opposed him. In any case, how can a sacramental Christian speak rationally about the Real Presence upon the altar if he doesn't really understand what bread and wine are and has not a clue about their relationships to the ever more abstract realms of being which culminate in the truths God manifested as the raw stuff of all created being?

To me, on a quite conceptual level, moral philosophy and theology is a bit like mathematical physics or similar sorts of sciences; this is to say that moral thinking should include a respect for empirical reality but also analyses and speculations which try to draw out the abstract being from which our messy world of things was shaped. (See Chapter 53, *How a Christian Finds Metaphysical Truths in Empirical Reality* for another effort to explain my thoughts on this and related issues.)

And there's the rub. Metaphysics does matter. If you've tried to make sense of concrete, thing-like being entirely on its own terms, you've missed much of what it is. Remember that protons and electron and neutrinos and so forth are manifestations of some strange, abstract sort of being which we can't perceive but we can think about it using the equations of quantum mechanics and by trying to form concepts based upon those equations. In other words, we have to move to a realm at least one step more abstract than those equations to find a realm of created being in which the qualitative and quantitative are one. In Chapter 90, *Shaping Our Minds to Reality*, I responded to some comments made by John Polkinghorne, Anglican priest and respected physicist, on the problems modern physicists have in understanding the fundamental nature of 'quantum levels of reality', a problem basically caused by our difficulties in shaping our thoughts to reality. We try instead to force our pre-existing schemes of thought even upon strange, new facts from empirical reality.

I'm certainly not saying that moral rules can be derived by contemplation of metaphysical realms—that is one major mistake made by even some great thinkers over the centuries. It's also a mistake to take empirical reality as being normative or anti-normative. Much of my work has turned into an effort to show the possibility of an answer which makes sense of this concrete realm as a part of a greater Creation. Human nature is embodied but our very bodies were shaped from all that concrete created being shaped in turn from abstract forms of being which we can sort of see, almost against our wills, in quantum mechanics and the general theory of relativity and in the evolutionary and developmental narratives given to us by modern biology and other sciences. I use the historically proper definition of science as

a disciplined field of study and so the prior statement refers also to history and the study of the human arts and even such ‘practical’ fields as politics and business management.

Metaphysics can guide us, even in understanding empirical reality because the concrete created being of empirical reality is shaped from more abstract forms of created being and those more abstract forms of being can be reached and somewhat understood by way of abstract reasoning, metaphysical and mathematical and logical. At the same time, we aren’t born with minds which can magically receive metaphysical or mathematical or logical truths. Because of very complex brains and bodies suited to those brains, we can shape minds by way of responses to reality. We can shape powerful and insightful minds by way of honest and courageous responses. The same can be said of moral natures.

Though human minds develop by way of responses to a messy world, they do reach truths, even truths so extraordinary as “There are infinities larger than the ordinary infinity of 1,2,3,4, . . . .” Human minds have not drawn these truths out of some Platonic realm we can magically access through mind-stuff, nor have they drawn these truths out of concrete, thing-like being in a direct way. They have worked slowly, over the centuries, in response to hints of the abstract being from which rocks and rattlesnakes are shaped. They have worked recursively, applying their speculative ideas on abstract being to concrete being and starting to adjust their speculations when necessary.

As we shape our own individual and communal human beings, we create richer and more complex forms of created being. There is something new under the sun, not only with the potential of each individual human being as he develops through his life but also with the potential of each human community. We can certainly see great good which was shaped in ancient Athens, a different great good which was shaped in ancient Jerusalem, and still something different again—great and good—which was shaped in ancient Rome.

Our moral natures develop in a similar way to the parts of our minds which search for mathematical truths. Our moral natures are shaped as we respond, actively respond, to a messy world but we, through our minds and moral natures, also can reach truths which seem extraordinary to those still capable of wonder. It’s a process quite different from simply applying a pre-existing schema about proper forms of, say, sexual relationships. We are particular creatures with particular sexual natures, particular forms

of care for our young, and this makes our sexual natures a bit, shall we say, empirical rather than ethereal. But, my general worldview leads me to propose our empirical sexual natures are shaped from more abstract created being, itself shaped from still more abstract created being and going right back to the truths God manifested as the raw stuff of Creation. It's only possible to see those truths with a mind of the sort which forms by way of good training in the context of a sufficiently rich and complex human community, ideally, a civilization. Even then, things can go horribly wrong.

Some truths can be deployed as lines in a formal proof leading inevitably to a set conclusion, but the greater part of truths in this Creation, so far as I can tell, are of the sort to be shaped into rich and complex forms of complex being. An example? How about the abstract forms of being we know only through the formalisms of quantum mechanics. From such abstract forms of being are shaped the components of matter and energy. As Aquinas said, to the annoyance of many: "Things are true." They aren't true in the sense of being the conclusions to arguments or of being necessary or absolute. They are true in being shaped from successively more abstract realms of created being, culminating in the truths God manifested as the raw stuff of Creation.

Here are links to four chapters in this book in which I've dealt with realms of abstract being as part of the goal of understanding human being:

- Chapter 53, *How a Christian Finds Metaphysical Truths in Empirical Reality*,
- Chapter 305, *An Enriched Moral World Makes for Enriched Human Beings*,
- Chapter 475, *Physics, Politics, and Metaphysics*, and
- Chapter 468, *Christian Traditionalism: Moving With God's Story*..

## 315 Do We Need Conflict to “Drive the Rise of Ultrasociality”?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1889>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/09/19.]

Please accept my apologies for any confusion or incoherence. This is a line of thought in the early stages of development.

Razib Khan, a geneticist, published an article in his blog which I’ve discussed before—see Chapter 509, *Mathematical Models of Human History: Are They Plausible?*. Khan’s article, *Modeling World History in Math Is Possible* at <http://www.unz.com/gnxp/modeling-world-history-in-math-is-possible/>, is a commentary upon an article summarizing results of a research project, an effort to build a simple mathematical model of the development of complex societies: *War, space, and the evolution of Old World complex societies* at <http://www.pnas.org/content/early/2013/09/20/1308825110>. That simple model is very convincing in some ways, but I’m now going to provide the beginning of an argument that we need far better understandings of human nature, of individual and communal human being. I’ve been trying to make this argument and even trying to provide pointers to one possible better understanding over the previous 8 years but I’m now trying to put more energy and time into this general effort.

Khan’s article briefly discussed another idea which supplements the main theme that much of the pattern of civilization birth and growth on Eurasia and north Africa can be explained by the raids and invasions of nomadic, horse-borne warriors from the grasslands of central Asia. The sedentary, prosperous peoples under attack either developed their own complex, centralized societies or did so under the rule of those nomadic warriors. In

addition, Khan tells us:

A second broader issue that Turchin has promoted is the idea of inter-group competition driving the rise of ultrasociality. In other words, cooperative societies stocked with highly social and altruistic individuals simply eliminated earlier forms of social organization which relied more on individual self interest. He is keen to not allow the argument to reduce down to ‘group selection,’ but rather to focus on the abstraction of multi-level selection more generally. Conflict and warfare are obviously key drivers of this culturally Darwinian process. But I wonder where that leaves us at the end of history? Perhaps without an external threat imposing cohesion and inducing norms to regulate and punish selfish strategies anomie will reign?

I’m not sure how to proceed; regular readers might have picked up that this is the primary goal of my efforts—trying to figure out how to develop proper and properly rich and properly complex ways of describing and analyzing human communities. All of this within the context of a worldview which is a response to both Christian revelation and modern empirical knowledge. See Chapter 53, *How a Christian Finds Metaphysical Truths in Empirical Reality* for some discussion of this problem. I’m proposing that the concrete, thing-like being of this world is shaped from more abstract forms of being including that described in the formalisms of modern physics and mathematics. This wouldn’t end with one level of abstract being generating our concrete, thing-like stuff but would work level by level back to the truths God manifested as the raw stuff of this Creation. At various levels, some different sorts of created being become one in analogy to similar unifications in particle physics. The chart in Chapter 53, *How a Christian Finds Metaphysical Truths in Empirical Reality*, displays in a very simple way what is involved in this way of thinking about created being.

So, let’s consider biological selection processes, including “multi-level selection” processes. In at least a trivial way, but I think a meaningful way, those processes take place in a space of some abstract sort, but not a space necessarily more abstract than those an engineer will assume when he designs a machine of complex motions nor more abstract than a space in which an economy operates. In the case of a space describing human nature, through which the factual path of human evolution has traveled,

we would have the characteristics—cognitive power, hand-skills, language skills, social inclinations—of the individuals.

So we have perhaps something like an  $f(x_1(t), x_2(t), \dots)$  in which time perhaps plays the role of an independent parameter. This can be readily seen as—possibly—a manifold which may not have much in the way of fully quantifiable geometric properties but might be ‘solvable’ in terms of qualitative properties. I’m proposing such is true—see Chapter 144, *Adopting Mathematical Reasoning in Non-quantitative Fields of Thought*. The current thinking, even among some of the founders of group-selection theory, is that the selection processes upon ‘ultrasocial’ creatures are not group processes but rather multi-level processes in which individuals are selected for their social inclinations and behaviors. Seen from my more abstract perspective, the distinction between ‘group’ and ‘multi-level’ might be more a matter of choosing how to state the problem.

Evolutionary biologists and geneticists have become experts in some very advanced statistical techniques but they might wish to think where physicists would be if they just analyzed the data of quantum events and gravitational events by statistics rather than moving to greater abstractions. All sciences have their own proper ways of exploring and analyzing the empirical world, but I suspect we’ll be finding that practitioners in many fields of study would be wise to treat their data in terms of state-spaces with the potential to borrow from the powerful, and often qualitative, techniques of modern geometry—many of those techniques being already well-developed in the physical sciences including engineering. This might be one way of dealing with evidence that individual entities in a grouping might be part of higher level entities with their own separate, if sometimes more abstract, existence. Looking at the geometric structure formed by all those functions mentioned above, the small regions formed around points would be the individuals and would be described by many of the quantitative and qualitative tools of basic differential geometry while the communities would be the global properties explored over the previous half-century or so by mathematicians.

The issue which motivated this essay is the importance or even the basic role of conflict in the evolution and development of human social traits and of specific forms of community. Do we need conflict between communities or between communities and individual outsiders, war?, to draw our communities into more tightly bound forms? If so, can we divert our aggressive tendencies in more fruitful directions? Wars might be more a

cancer than a healthy part of the evolutionary and development processes, but that is a very uncertain line of thought. Wars, violent behavior in general, might also be indications of an underlying need not being otherwise met; in other words, we might be able to overcome our 'need' for war by proper understandings of our own human nature, individual and communal, and by proper responses to the world in light of that better understanding of our own selves. Currently, we have no satisfactory ways of discussing this or related issues which allows much in the way of convincing descriptions of the situation. We certainly have little clue about how to replace war by better behaviors.

I'm producing no more than suggestions, not even well-formed potential answers to the question raised in Turchin's research and Khan's article and I don't plan to provide an answer anytime soon. There's too much basic work to be done in understanding the nature of this concrete world and its relationships to the abstract realms of being from which it was shaped. As I've already mentioned, the most successful works of this sort already in a mature form are the mathematical formalisms of quantum mechanics and general relativity and little work has been done in even speculating on other realms of abstract being which generate the other aspects and traits of this concrete realm of created being. See Chapter 90, *Shaping Our Minds to Reality*, for my responses to the difficulties a Cambridge professor had in convincing elite physics majors that a vector isn't an arrow, at least not to a theoretical physicist, but rather a mathematical object with certain transformation properties. John Polkinghorne, who was an Anglican priest when he wrote about that problem, also noted that physicists still don't 'understand' quantum mechanics and won't until it becomes a part of their basic thought processes. I claim physicists will understand quantum mechanics when they accept it rather than trying to 'explain' it in terms of a less adequate understanding of physical reality. I'd suggest that many similar 'bits' of understanding will occur when empirical scientists in many fields accept the reality of the abstract being from which concrete, thing-like being is shaped. Our abstract thoughts are no more and no less than approximations to that abstract being.

Communal human being is built upon genetic family lines and individual human being is a particularization of such genetic family lines. Communal human being culminates in the Body of Christ but there are a multitude of communal structures between the individual and the Body of Christ. It's not even a simple building process since an individual will be a part of a

multitude of communities which play the role of organs in a living creature. The Body of Christ is a complex entity though it might have some aspects which can be modeled well without considering its complex make-up, especially in early stages of human social evolution when we deal with very simple egalitarian hunter-forager societies or tribes/kingdoms with well-defined hierarchies. Simpler sorts of mathematical models—simple in the sense of non-complex though they might be complicated—might work well for looking at the global or communal aspects of early human being. Looking at human being in this more sophisticated way won't even shoot down any ideas of hierarchies being adequate for organizing and running human communities, it will simply render hierarchies irrelevant—in the Catholic Church as well as in political communities. This isn't to say there won't be any authority, but it will be the authority of a smaller-scale community which has a particular role to play in a larger-scale community.

We need more sophisticated models of human nature, richer and more complex, to understand such complex communities as the nation-states of the United States and Russia and China in 2014. Such models are also needed for the other various communities, inside and cutting across nation-states, such as the religious communities of Christianity and Judaism and Islam and others. Even such ephemeral communities as those of physicists or musical composers could be better understood. Political scientists and economists and historians and other social scientists have done some good and convincing work in understanding aspects of these various communities but no one can really speak intelligently of what it is that forms when human beings gather, in some way if only through journals or over the Internet, to some purpose general or specific. I suspect we are seeing the concretization of abstract being of a certain type but this becomes more plausible if some more sophisticated model, of the type I'm advocating, is shown to work in modeling the evolutionary and developmental processes of something which can be labeled 'human being'.

As it is, we're stuck in a rut where we try to understand even very large-scale human communities by way of phenomenological models or by way of reasoning which pretty much assumes a community is some simple additive function of its individual members. I claim that a community is neither separate from its members nor is it just the sum of those members. It is more like the physical universe which is both what it contains and also has its own properties—see Chapter 193, *A Universe is More than it Contains* for a discussion of PJE Peebles' point that straightforward applications

of physical laws show that, in a universe governed by general relativity, the law of the conservation of energy doesn't hold for the universe as a whole even if it holds at all regions in that universe. (Or read Peebles entire book, *Principles of Physical Cosmology* [109] if you wish.) Even more to my point, spacetime at the level of the universe (and in some sorts of fairly small regions, such as black-holes) is non-Euclidean though it is Euclidean in most small regions. This is one sign of a manifold in the sense of differential geometry. To stay with physics for a moment: physics can be Newtonian at small regions while Einsteinian at larger regions because what happens in the small happens, so to speak, on a Euclidean plane tangent to the manifold which has the properties described by the general theory of relativity. Something analogous would be true under the very vague model I'm proposing the human nature, individual and communal.

Let me discuss briefly a particular problem which shows the difficulties of taking a community as a straightforward sum of individuals. A people can be nonviolent and well-meaning in the small but, in the large, as a people, can be murderous and thieving war-mongerers. In recent centuries, some of the most violent nations have been those with populations made up of individuals who are law-abiding and even somewhat gentle by historical standards: Germany in 1914-1945, Japan in the 1920s through the 1940s, Great Britain during the years of Empire and a bit beyond, the United States through much of its existence as loosely connected colonies up to now and still going strong though maybe about to run out of gas. We Americans tend to be generous and even somewhat self-sacrificing as individuals or as small communities such as church or synagogue congregations, fraternal organizations or professional societies. We are quite likable much of the time, genial, and inclined to get along with others. As a nation, we have proven ourselves from at least *King Phillip's War* (see [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/King\\_Phillips\\_War](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/King_Phillips_War)) to be a people not only violent but self-righteous in our violence. See Chapter 408, *The Need for Abstractions in Moral Self-understanding* for a discussion of this issue in a way important to the general effort to understand how communities are formed and deformed.

As I noted above, there is not complete separation of individual and communal human being nor is communal human being just a sum of individual human being. The evil done by the American state in such places as Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Ukraine is generally supported by majorities of the American people at least until they are personally hurt

in some way, though those American citizens are rarely full of hatred. Yet, we Americans are often self-righteous and morally irresponsible in forming viewpoints—see Chapter 465, *Dumber Every Day, With Beer in Hand and War on TV*. I also had discussed this general issue of American moral irresponsibility (and failure to develop the character traits important for life in complex communities) in Chapter 313, *The Interior Richness Which Lies in a Civilized Man*. The brutality of Americans as a people certainly draws upon moral weaknesses, including cowardice, of individual Americans but it seems to be the trait of an entity which is not just a sum of those individual Americans taught by war-profiteers and morally-twisted ideologists to fear anyone they wish to attack. Our predatory economy and polity seem to be as much the cause as the effect; they are global properties of an ill-formed human community.

We Americans have utterly failed to shape a morally good national community but we really can't even describe such a community in a plausible way—nor can the best of social scientists. Sometimes we can see somewhat firm outlines of such a community in history but no one has succeeded in abstracting from this historical knowledge much in the way of useful knowledge. We can't identify with certainty aspects of communities subject to study in numerical terms nor in more general mathematical terms—see Chapter 144, *Adopting Mathematical Reasoning in Non-quantitative Fields of Thought*. Models such as that of Turchin and his colleagues would show the growth of the historically unique American Empire as colors on the globe and would probably have trouble dealing with the premature ending of this Empire because this mismatch between a parochial population with local virtues and a nation-state with great, worldly power isn't something that such models could deal with. There is nothing in models such as those used by Turchin and his colleagues which indicates how a people well-behaved as individuals engage systematically in brutal warfare. Communal human being is completely separated from individual human being. It's as if the universe not only had its own properties but worked in such a way as to have nothing to do with stars and galaxies and gas clouds and so forth. In fact, simple physical cosmological models can be built upon such a basis and provide some serious insights but ultimately they don't depict the universe in its completeness: an entity on its own and also made up of all those stars and so forth. Even more to the point, it's as if we were to treat an human being as a freestanding entity having nothing to do with all those genes and metabolic processes.

I suggest that this is a clear case where our conceptual and mathematical understandings and related tools in social sciences are grossly inadequate, not at all capable of dealing with our human world grown so immensely complex and so immensely massive in terms of a 'mass' which bends our human spaces; neither I nor anyone else can currently define that mass. We need new understandings and tools and we need specifically to have understandings and tools which recognize the existence of local (individuals and—maybe—small communities) and global (larger human communities) aspects to the totality of human being.

## 316 The Demonology of Sexual Behaviors and Preferences

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1906>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/11/19.]

The world is what it is and we Christians, of all human beings, have to accept it and work with it. For example, against the various do-gooders including those who think themselves Christians, I believe the Body of Christ has to be built of the human material which is us, the material created by God through some evolutionary and developmental processes which can be ugly even when things go well and can be quite ugly when things go wrong. In the way of this world, some of those processes can seem pretty when things go very badly—Baudelaire was not entirely wrong in claiming to see a certain sort of beauty in some evil things and evil acts. A pretty face truly can hide an evil mind or heart.

I'm less concerned about evil in my writings, including this one, than I am about the need to make peace with empirical reality, the one created by God, and not to pursue dreams of a world designed according to our desires or ideals or dreams. If evil exists or threatens to come into existence, then we need to deal with it. (It's not a problem of theodicy: I have no problem at all with the suggestion of Martin Buber, Jewish scholar, that God can create a world in which evil exists without at all affecting God's all-goodness. Satan isn't needed.)

So, what are we to make of a free-thinking paleoanthropologist who tells us *Yes, Demons Do Exist?* (See <http://www.unz.com/pfrost/yes-demons-do-exist/>.) What does Frost mean by 'demons'? We can find out in the first paragraphs of his article:

Are we being manipulated by microbes? The idea is not so

wacky. We know that a wide range of microscopic parasites have evolved the ability to manipulate their hosts, even to the point of making the host behave in strange ways. A well-known example is *Toxoplasma gondii*, a protozoan whose life cycle begins inside a cat. After being excreted in the cat's feces, it is picked up by a mouse and enters the new host's brain, where it neutralizes the fear response to the smell of cat urine. The mouse lets itself be eaten by a cat, and the protozoan returns to a cat's gut—the only place where it can reproduce (Flegr, 2013). [Links for this and other references can be found in the original article.]

*T. gondii* can also infect us and alter our behavior. Infected individuals have longer reaction times, higher testosterone levels, and a greater risk of developing severe forms of schizophrenia (Flegr, 2013). But there is no reason to believe that *T. gondii* is the only such parasite we need to worry about. We study it in humans simply because we already know what it does in a non-human species.

Recently, there has been some joking, as well as serious commentary, on the Internet about a “dumb virus”. This isn't a cognitively impaired microbe but rather one which can alter our intelligence levels. See this abstract, *Chlorovirus ATCV-1 is part of the human oropharyngeal virome and is associated with changes in cognitive functions in humans and mice* at <http://www.pnas.org/content/111/45/16106.abstract>, where we can read:

Human mucosal surfaces contain a wide range of microorganisms. The biological effects of these organisms are largely unknown. Large-scale metagenomic sequencing is emerging as a method to identify novel microbes. Unexpectedly, we identified DNA sequences homologous to virus ATCV-1, an algal virus not previously known to infect humans, in oropharyngeal samples obtained from healthy adults. The presence of ATCV-1 was associated with a modest but measurable decrease in cognitive functioning. A relationship between ATCV-1 and cognitive functioning was confirmed in a mouse model, which also indicated that exposure to ATCV-1 resulted in changes in gene

expression within the brain. Our study indicates that viruses in the environment not thought to infect humans can have biological effects.

Frost also talks about the sexually transmitted infection caused by the bacterium, *Chlamydia trachomatis*:

Chlamydia is a major cause of infertility, and this effect seems to be no accident. Its outer membrane contains a heat shock protein that induces cell death (apoptosis) in placenta cells that are vital for normal fetal development. The same protein exists in other bacteria but is located within the cytoplasm, where it can less easily affect the host's tissues. Furthermore, via this protein, Chlamydia triggers an autoimmune response that can damage the fallopian tubes and induce abortion. This response is not triggered by the common bacterium *Escherichia coli*. Finally, Chlamydia selectively up-regulates the expression of this protein while down-regulating the expression of most other proteins. (Apari et al., 2014).

But how would infertility benefit Chlamydia and other sexually transmitted pathogens? Apari et al. (2011) argue that infertility causes the host and her partner to break up and seek new partners, thus multiplying the opportunities for the pathogen to spread to other hosts. A barren woman may pair up with a succession of partners in a desperate attempt to prove her fertility and, eventually, turn to prostitution as a means to support herself (Caldwell et al., 1989). This is not a minor phenomenon. STI-induced infertility has exceeded 40% in parts of sub-Saharan Africa (Apari et al., 2011).

As it turns out, pathogens might also be able to change human sexual habits and sexual orientation. After a couple of disturbing paragraphs—when understood in the context of human moral freedom, Frost tells us: “Both male and female homosexuality seem to have multiple causes, but it's likely that various pathogens have exploited this means [changing sexual preference] of spreading to other hosts.”

In his conclusion, Frost writes:

This is a fun subject when it concerns silly mice or *zombie ants* [see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ophiocordyceps\\_unilateralis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ophiocordyceps_unilateralis)]. But now it concerns us. And that's not so funny. Can microbes really develop such demonic abilities to change our private thoughts and feelings?

It surprised me a little when I read that conclusion and its concern for privacy and then I remembered yet again that I live in a world in which even our most fundamental understandings of Creation have been restated in terms compatible with a radical individualism—even when that restatement is so much at odds with Christian doctrines.

A Christian believes in a Trinitarian God, Father and Son and Holy Spirit in one God. Three Persons sharing one nature. Human beings are an image of this God. But how could that be? Certainly, a modern individualist, even if Christian, should recoil at the deep conflicts between such views and their belief in their own individual, private selves. Human beings, to modern liberals—including both collectivists and libertarians, are freestanding entities which engage in contractual, voluntary relationships. We exist as fully-formed human entities and then choose to form friendships and political or economic or cultural relationships. Even collectivists have no concept of communal being, only that of entities being connected in the way of cogs in a machine.

So goes the modern liberal worldview and the strange belief that privacy should, or even could, be of primary importance in a world in which entities penetrate each other or live inside each other in various ways, including the way in which human and non-human entities exist in our all-too human empathetic and sympathetic faculties.

Can freedom exist without privacy?

To orthodox Christians, Father and Son and Holy Spirit can be free despite having no 'privacy'. They share all thoughts, all feelings, all actions. Yet, each is God; each is free.

I'm not presenting arguments but rather conclusions forced by the basic assumptions of orthodox Christianity, Trinitarian Christianity true to its traditions and its historical descriptions.

To be sure, we aren't God though maybe, by the mercy of the Almighty, destined to share in His life. In this world, we develop by processes which can be damaged without some significant amount of privacy. Loss of this privacy would lead to a failure of development of our individual human

natures as improper social development, or genetic problems—including any introduced by microbes, would lead to a failure of our communal human natures. We need some significant amount of freedom for both individual and communal human natures to develop properly. I'm not upset about my privacy being violated by infectious agents and, in principle, I'm not even upset about my privacy being violated by my fellow Christians because the nature of the Body of Christ, if He is to share the life of God and to be as God, tells us we won't have privacy in the modern sense if we are resurrected by God to share the life of Jesus Christ.

The implication that infectious agents can remove a significant amount of our moral freedom is more disturbing and will require some serious research and contemplation by Christian moral thinkers. Freedom is entangled with privacy in this mortal realm but is ultimately something quite different from privacy—if not, then we orthodox Christians are wrong either in our understanding of God as Triune or else wrong in our belief that we are, somehow, the image of God and we are part of one perfect Man—the Body of Christ.

I'm holding on to my belief in orthodox Christianity and am working to understand the world, as known to us through modern empirical sciences including all disciplined human studies.

So freedom remains a problem. How can we have any true freedom, even if limited, if a stray virus thought to have been adapted to infecting pond algae can make us dumber, if a bacterium can force some women to lead disordered lives by sterilizing them, if other microbes (discovered or only conjectured) can change us from heterosexuals to homosexuals or from bisexual women to obligatory lesbians? True it is that a 'heroic' effort can help us to remain within the boundaries of Christian moral teachings but calls to such efforts on the part of parents and clergymen and teachers have failed and such failures have motivated many Catholics and Baptists and others to join in the call for changes in what they were taught to be absolute and unchangeable truths. More fundamentally, we still need to understand why it is that some need to put forth a 'heroic' effort to behave as demanded by Christian tradition and, indeed, by any straightforward reading of the Bible. We still need to understand why it is that some will never feel as they are told they should feel, even with a 'heroic' effort.

Will we go to Hell because we caught a flu-like illness that has a side-effect of changing our sexual preference? A seemingly silly question but what's truly silly is that Christian moral thinkers, and moral thinkers of

other dispositions, have no way of answering this question outside of perhaps a blanket dismissal any sort of normality, a trivialization of sexuality and of any other particular aspect of human being. The previous statement covers those who advocate tolerance of homosexuality and other forms of sexual practice condemned by Christian teachings. Traditional Christian and Jewish moral thinkers have claimed the Biblical condemnation of homosexuality may have begun with disgust at certain sexual acts but have been seen to be more fundamentally concerned with respect for the importance and goodness of sexual acts between man and wife, mirroring in some way certain acts of God toward His creatures.

What does all of this mean?

It means that modern Christian moral thinkers (including artists) and teachers are standing upon shifting sand which is almost washed out from beneath their feet. This is not to predetermine what the results would be of refounding Christian teachings of human nature, including sexuality, upon more solid ground. I'm strongly inclined to believe the old rules will be mostly reconfirmed but that is a matter beyond human certainty until we go through the process of examining our mountains of empirical knowledge of human nature and bravely, with faith in the Almighty, asking the appropriate questions—no matter how difficult or uncomfortable. When we know a little better what a human being is and what it means to be male or female or to have male or female sexual preferences, we can better understand claims about what a human being should be. And we can better understand why there is a significant difference between 'is' and 'should' in many areas, at least in this mortal realm—I've denied in the past that there is, or could be, an ultimate difference between 'is' and 'should' but that's a discussion beyond the scope of the current essay.

I'm certainly not claiming that Christian moral teachings are suddenly wrong; I am claiming means that explanations of those teachings not stated in terms of acknowledged reality are implausible and cast doubt upon the teachings, even those which seem to be clearly stated in the Bible. It means young people, and many not so young, who are trying to form or recover an understanding of the world or their own human being or the human being of their children will find tales of a special creation of human beings and a fall from grace at the same time Christians have been forced to acknowledge the truth of the evolution of human beings from creatures which were also the ancestors of chimpanzees. Yet, Christian moral teachings are founded upon the misunderstanding of the story of Adam and Eve: we have an

identifiable pair of ancestors who were created in a state of grace and fell by way of a freely made decision.

Is it any wonder that young men and women raised as Christians often conclude that Christian leaders are just being mean to homosexuals or to men or women who married and then fell in love with someone not their spouse or grew bored with their spouse after their children grew up? Is it any wonder Christianity has lost so much credibility as a guide to human conduct?

Reality, the reality created by the God of Jesus Christ, is biting back and the leaders and teachers of Christianity can do no better than to back up claims that they are the teachers of the great truths with absurd discussions based upon superstitions which are the decay products of scientific knowledge and philosophical speculations which were once valid. A lot has changed in the human understanding of empirical reality, that is, of the provisional human understanding of the thoughts God manifested in His Creation.



# 317 The Modern Failure to Deal with Large, Complex Human Communities

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1943>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/01/06.]

See the commentary, *Notable: Bigger groups make less social time for red colobus*, at <http://johnhawks.net/> at the website of the anthropologist, John Hawks. Professor Hawks discusses an article summarizing research on troops of red colobus monkeys in Uganda. The research article provides empirical evidence that, for this particular primate, greater group size can reduce socializing because of the greater need to move about to gather food. For monkeys as well as men, there are only 24 hours in the day. Think of this trivial truth in light of a complex human community where “making a living” covers a lot of ground, education when young and, at various times and in various ways, participation in the lives of overlapping communities of a political or economic or religious or cultural nature.

I’ll move to more speculative realms of thought, seeing what can be made of this empirical data within the context of my Christian understanding of monkeys, of men, of this world, of all of Creation.

Of course, the obvious difference between men and monkeys is that men supposedly are more rational and can work to make their lives better in various ways. Obvious, maybe in theory and in the practice of better ages and better communities than those of the modern West. Not so obvious in light of the growing incoherence in the political and economic and other communities of the West, including that community which is Western Civilization itself.

The world is too much with us. There are only 24 hours in the day and we are given only our three-score and ten years on earth. We must make choices and set priorities. Are we to be active political animals? Are we to be devoted to demanding careers? (This latter was, and sometimes is, more possible for men in ages or social groupings where the wife takes on the role of building and maintaining family and other relationships as well as running the household.)

Though it might be coming to an end very soon, modern men of the West have been rich enough to be able to afford to waste much time (not in the useful way of creative writers or artists) and to teach their children that they can go to school for seven hours a day and practice/play a demanding sport a couple hours a day and play the guitar another two hours and watch three hours of videos each evening and spend many hours on their cell-phone and. . . Then you can look at the school-day and see it is typically a smear of diluted learning and shallow socializing and the satisfying of bureaucratic rules and. . . There's always time to do many things and much time to play our roles as vulnerable consumer widgets but not enough time to do the important things right—which often means intensely.

There have been some strange life-styles made possible, though only for a decade or two in all likelihood. Think of all those people, mostly but not all young, who seem to ignore all traditional and more earthly forms of socializing to engage in socializing by way of cell-phones or video games or Facebook and similar stuff.

Speculatively: I think that, faced with the need to choose activities, modern human beings—at least those of the West—have chosen a way of socializing that numbs them rather than truly engaging them in a rich, complex human life. Deeper engagement in careers in science or art or literature or house-building or teaching is sacrificed, often under pressure from exploitive political or economic systems. I've read testimony that some in the younger generation have good formal skills in many areas and show no real life inside of them—they make better physics students than physicists in one such testimony, at least so long as being a student is defined in terms of textbook learning and the corresponding tests.

Within our limited lives, many make their choices according to this pretense that each of us can be whatever we want and we can be that soon. In recent years, we've seen a lot of damage being done to individuals and communities by the shallow sorts of men and women who are devoted to feel-good busyness rather than to accomplishment. In particular, a great

deal of harm has been done by the ambitious but mostly untalented human beings who have chosen to devote themselves to careers and volunteer-works which allow them power over human communities and human individuals. Politics, in the United States and other Western countries, is dominated by those with little in the way of knowledge or intelligence or the intellectual skills which can help the less-intelligent to function by way of thoughts and rules of behavior developed by the great thinkers and doers of a human community and filtered through communal consensus. (For my use of ‘intellect’, see Chapter 127, *Intelligence vs Intellect* and, for the greater context of a complete human nature, Chapter 282, *Do We Need Heart and Hands as Well as Mind to Understand Reality?*. Better still, download my book on the subject: *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53].)

In a world where human beings tend to be busy rather than engaged, those with the talents of being busy dominate over those who might do their work in more appropriate ways only to emerge from, say, their cubicle at CIA with an intelligent analysis of the shooting down of flight MH17 over the Ukraine only to find the busy little bees have already set a disastrous policy in place. It doesn’t take long for a busy little bee to generate a flashy presentation using all sorts of graphics, to-do lists, and have-done lists.

How have we arrived at so basically incoherent an understanding of human nature? How have we constructed human communities so fundamentally incoherent? How have we built so many political and economic and cultural communities and institutions dominated by those not good at much except acting beyond their competence? By way of what I call “the poisons of individualistic ideologies.” As I will explain in the essay I plan to finish and publish soon, a creature both individualistic and communal which pretends to be radically and almost solely individualistic will greatly deform itself; that deformed creature will live in small-scale communities partly deformed but at least somewhat conforming to human nature; these deformed individuals and small-scale communities will start to gather together in ways which seem voluntary and, in any case, correspond poorly to the needs and legitimate desires of better-formed individuals and small-scale communities (such as families and economic groups). The resulting large-scale communities might well be absolute disasters, as is true of the economic and political communities of the West.

From there, our communities at all scales will grow still more incoherent and the individuals in those communities will be more deeply deformed over the years. Until the breaking point comes. And it might be almost here for

the West.

# 318 The Invisible Hand, the Invisible Heart, the Invisible Mind

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1962>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/02/03.]

Adam Smith famously took a new approach to the ancient problem: how to describe and understand the mysterious workings of created being in which ordered forms exist or even can be seen coming into existence. Those ordered forms can be forms imposed upon concrete matter—concrete entities such as stars or human beings, the latter being Smith’s primary interest. Those ordered forms can also be relationships between concrete entities.

As I see it, the above problem is pretty much the problem of understanding the formation of complex entities, human beings are of particular interest to we who are human beings, in this particular world as shaped by the Creator from more abstract forms of being. The evolutionary and development processes which have shaped human beings on a species level and an individual level have produced actual creatures which have the characteristics of persons in analogy to the three Persons, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, who are the one God. There is much for Christians to do in developing a new, richer and more complex, understanding of Creation—including a specially focused understanding of human being. There are many who are fighting battles to defend tradition because of what is clearly good and true in it and many fighting to take down tradition because of the many outmoded speculations—often masquerading as theorems of a sort. Few there are who are willing to pay attention to God’s revelations as they

emerge in this age when men have developed remarkable skills and technologies for the exploration of certain realms of created being. Fewer still there are who can even realize we are watching new forms of created being emerge as human communities grow to tremendous sizes and to surprising degrees of complexity. This is partly because nearly all men, especially those who are highly educated, misunderstand the nature of the human mind and misunderstand the nature of created being and of human knowledge and of the relationships between created being and human knowledge.

Men of the West were disturbed greatly by the discoveries of Galileo and his successors that matter and energy don't behave the way that contemplation upon experience would indicate. They would be still more disturbed by relatively recent discoveries that matter and energy are something different from what even Galileo and Newton thought them to be. The same can be said of the more recent discoveries about the nature of space, time, infinity, and mathematics as a whole.

It will be still more disturbing when men, especially Christian men, face up to the discoveries by Darwin and his successors that God's ways of shaping human being are strange and indirect, not so amenable to the forms of analysis preferred by traditional philosophers and theologians and historians and politicians and so forth.

Adam Smith was active during a period when physics stood about halfway between Newton and Einstein; Erasmus Darwin was writing a poem about an emergent form of evolution but his more hardheaded grandson, Charles, wasn't yet born. Within the limits of Smith's possible understandings of this concrete world, human communities as well as the physical stuff increasingly important in the Industrial Revolution, Smith managed to come up with vague language about the nature of forms and how they come into existence. It wasn't so much Smith's terminology which was good as was his prophetic success at capturing the spiritual essence of the formation and operation of free markets as they were in the second half of the 18th century in Scotland and England. He also saw into the future to some extent, predicting that the British colonies on the east coast of North America would become so powerful and wealthy as to likely overshadow Great Britain herself in the next century or so. (In line with some of my recent writings, Smith had not a clue that his specific theories about markets were mostly relevant when discussing a small sub-population of the human race—Europeans and especially those of the northwestern regions, a people very much skewed to individualistic traits.)

We should honor Smith for being a courageous and insightful pioneer of the modern world—his insights can be seen as prophesies of more exact forms of thought not only in the social sciences but also in the physical sciences. See this short introduction, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ilya\\_Prigogine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ilya_Prigogine), to the thought of Ilya Prigogine, a physical chemist and Nobel laureate who was a pioneer of concepts we can loosely describe as those of self-organizing systems. We should bear in mind that qualitative reasoning which can point toward more exact forms of thought are also important in physical science and are not just a fuzzy-minded child growing up into a tough-minded adult—qualitative reasoning remains important even in quantum mechanics and gravitational theories but has to always adjust to the results of explorations amenable to quantitative exactness. The global, often qualitative, aspects of a complex entity remain as important as its local, largely quantitative, aspects. Abstract being continues to exist even in the most concrete of things.

Though I've made some attempts to move toward a more exact understanding of created being on the "local" level and Creation on the "global" level, I've often worked on a higher level of abstraction than did Adam Smith. I usually work at a level which is necessarily qualitative because it is above the level of the more particular forms of being, including those of quantitative mathematics and the sciences which study concrete and 'mostly' particular being. (I put the scare quotes on "mostly" because quantum mechanics explores forms of being, energy-matter in this concrete world, which range from the very concrete to the not so nearly concrete; something similar could be said about other modern theories of physics with respect to spacetime.)

The type of analysis made by Adam Smith is still necessary for making greater sense of the discoveries of geneticists and anthropologists and historians and mathematicians and others, but Smith didn't get it quite right. He couldn't have gotten it right and needed to courageously do it the best he could, though it is also true that the better understandings of human being I've used as a starting point can be found in the ancient traditions of both Jewish and Christian thinkers. Men are hearts and minds and hands and yet one—defectively but truly. Men are born as communal beings as well as individual beings, or, as I prefer to put it, we have both individual and communal being. Smith, the radical individualist of northwestern Europe, was perhaps blind to knowledge emphasizing communal human being too strongly.

At the same time, we are a multitude of individuals, who remain such, and each of us is also, incompletely and defectively, our communities. We are told by the Bible and commentators from Judaic and Christian sources that we are images of God. Christians believe God to be Father and Son and Holy Spirit in one God—three individuals, who retain their individual Selves, but each is also fully and perfectly the one God.

# 319 Individualism: A Trait Become a Disease

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1965>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/02/06.]

It's not the failures but rather the great successes of the West which have left it as a hollowed-out and collapsing civilization, that is, our successes as individualists and our successes in nurturing our individualistic inclinations and pushing them ever further at the expense of our communalistic inclinations.

It's not hard to understand.

1. Human being is both individual and communal and both of those parts of human being start with traits encoded in genes and then refined by the development of a human being in a specific context within a particular culture. (The genes evolve, of course, within a total environment which includes culture which leads many to talk as if we are pure individuals but are subject to selection within an environment which includes cultures and communities and, thus, leads us to act **as if** we have communal being as well as individual being.)
2. Different ethnic groups subject to different evolutionary histories, cultural and 'natural', lie on different points on a spectrum from individualistic to communalistic. A community will itself have a spread of traits so that some strong individualists might be born into the most communalistic of peoples.
3. Northwestern Europeans are radically individualistic as opposed to, say, Chinese who are radically communalistic. (Actually, it is appar-

ently more accurate to say the most strongly communalistic of Chinese, and a few other peoples, are those who have been rice-farmers for centuries.)

4. It would seem that the genes and culture of Northwestern Europeans have evolved in unison over the past millenia or better.
5. The thinking class of those northwestern Europeans, and some other Europeans as well, had developed within the priesthood and also, more freely, among the laity once education was more widely available. That thinking class seems to have been still more inclined to radical individualism than their fellow-Europeans and they developed political and economic ways of thought which assumed that it was a metaphysical truth that human being, if not deformed by culture, was radically individualistic. This started with Hobbes' observation of the nearly sociopathic inclinations of many of his fellow Englishmen and his missing observations of rice-farmers in the south of China. Locke and Smith and Jefferson and Rousseau and Mill (both father and son) and the Classical Liberals in general, most especially the ones proudly bearing the label 'Libertarian', glorified what was a good trait so that it seemed good to make individualistic traits strongly dominant, and sometimes absolutely dominant, over any communalistic tendencies.
6. European political and religious leaders, unlike those of most regions and most certainly unlike the Confucian rulers of China, enhanced their power by weakening other forms of human community, even the family. The Catholic Church, though biased toward the less radical individualism of Italian culture, also was guilty in treating human communities as nominal entities, as mere gatherings of individuals. Though partially true in corresponding to an imbalance in the human being of Europeans, that reinforced the evolution and development of a still greater imbalance of individual over community, though some communities claimed the right and had the power to control individuals.
7. The result was the war of all against all seen by Hobbes. Europe became a continent filled with unbalanced, murderously competitive communities of closely related peoples fighting themselves and those other peoples to whom they were closely related. Those peoples, once

they had achieved what seemed to be high states of civilization, waged a prolonged war of extraordinary brutality; starting in 1914 and calming down for periods, but fully active again in some regions by the early 1930s and for much of Europe by 1939 or so. After the Cold War and its proxy wars in Asia and Africa and Latin America, the Europeans started actively fighting each other again in the Balkans, often to the profit of American politicians and arms-manufacturers, in the 1990s. Sociopaths had come to almost complete power over political and economic and cultural institutions.

8. Along side these ultimately pointless wars, the West had to endure a prosperity of an deeply unattractive type. Westerners gave birth to start-up companies more often than to babies and the babies who did come were often raised in institutions or by women who spoke Spanish as their primary language.
9. We in the West have passed on our moral rot, of the radical individualistic species, to some other peoples who seem to have had inadequate defenses. Maybe they also were inherently unbalanced in the direction of individualism over communalism?

Peter Frost has published another frighteningly insightful article about the ongoing self-destruction of the West and the spread of our moral disorder to some other peoples. In the article, *A Faustian Bargain?* found at <http://www.unz.com/pfrost/a-faustian-bargain/>, he discusses the Parsi, a once proud and prosperous people who are non-breeding themselves out of existence as a result of their adoption of Western understandings of the good life. Please read it. It really is frightening to a thinking man.

Technicians, including many who present themselves as deep thinkers in the fields of economics and politics and sociology, tell us that our ways of life, our political and economic and cultural infrastructure, needs some fixing up. Replace a few support beams, put up a few more walls to keep the government out of some rooms, and throw on a coat of paint. In fact, the West is rotting, has been showing signs of decay since at least the 1800s. The West showed florid disease symptoms in the American War Between the States and the brutal and criminal war against the Filipino people, in the events of 1914 through 1945—both the wars and the economic collapses, in the political and financial corruption of the United States (existing from before the War Between the States but developing to absurd levels over the

20th century) and the turn to a brutal and criminal imperialism. Even the most ordinary observations in our towns and urban neighborhoods should tell us of demographic problems and of decreasing moral order in the youth of the best of families.

It would be evil to even try to rebuild the West as it once was. It would be an act of rebellion against God, an effort to push the Body of Christ out of the way so that we men can climb back up the ramp of decay to build another civilization subject to the same sort of decay as we've seen in recent centuries. It was a good experiment and the age of Enlightenment and a seemingly healthy form of radical individualism produced some darned good science and music and literature and art, even some interesting philosophy and theology. The experiment went bad, though not how or when most traditionalists imagine.

We are so many herds of individuals with no internal structure to those herds, no lasting relationships. Each head of Western human animal can move freely about inside the herd and form relationships as he wills at the time.

That herd isn't part of the Body of Christ, though once it was the major part of the Body in its pilgrim, mortal life. That herd is marching toward the permanent grave and not toward Heaven.

Am I saying the typical American or European of northwestern European descent is a radical individualist? To this point, I have at least implied that to be true. Now it's time for me to make an important correction.

Our rebellion against reality, against God the Creator of this reality, is soft and half-hearted. We can't ridicule what is holy in our traditions because most of us are more individualistic than, say, Chinese but not nearly as individualistic as Hobbes and Locke would have us be, not nearly as individualistic as the Mills were and would have us be. We want our communities, strongly bound in their own ways though perhaps a bit more weakly bound than those of Chinese and certainly African tribal peoples, but we've been taught to desire the fruits which might come to a courageous Bohemian. We've been seduced into inappropriate ways of life by those who are even more radically individualistic than the great majority of northwestern Europeans. We're destroying ourselves and only a small number of men and women are benefiting, those men and women who are radically individualistic to the point of sociopathy.

Though I strongly criticize the tendency of modern men of the West to develop certain traits into sociopathological conditions, though the West

probably has a disproportionate number of men and women who have sociopathological tendencies, on the whole, the individualism of the peoples of northwestern Europe is a good and useful trait so long as it isn't developed to an extreme and so long as economic and political and cultural systems of an individualistically inclined people aren't forced upon other peoples. The Body of Christ is going to be a complex melding of valid human traits, in their various manifestations along spectrums of possibilities. We need team-players and we need healthy individualists.



# 320 In a Complex World, the Community Must be Smart for the Individual to Be Smart

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1984>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/03/13.]

Fred Reed is a smart and insightful man. Courageous as well, caring more for truth than for conventional opinions and public myths. And a friendly, neighborly sort of fellow so that just “Fred” is usually sufficient.

In the recent article, *The 145 Solution: Sapience, not Sentience* at <http://www.unz.com/freed/the-145-solution/>, Fred writes:

If fourteen percent [of American voters] are illiterate, a larger number must be nearly so. People who can barely read don’t. People so little engaged as to think Iraq attacked New York—forty-six percent!—vote almost at random, or in the direction in which they are shooed by cunning electoral mechanics and fixers.

The educated and thoughtful may have no idea of the night in which the rest live. We tend to associate with people like ourselves. Consequently if you know where Iran is, you probably don’t know anyone who doesn’t. But—a pre-Copernican quarter of the population believes that the sun moves around the earth? As we said in the Sixties, that’s a whole nuther head-space.

Thus a test of literacy, or more correctly of competence to vote. It might involve reading a paragraph of prose at the level of

college, or of what used to be the level of college, and answering questions about it. There might be questions such as how many Congressmen are there, name a country bordering of Iraq, list three rights guaranteed (ha!) by the First Amendment, and when did World War Two take place.

When we address the sheer ignorance and functional stupidity—on mostly public matters—of the American citizenry, voters and non-voters alike, there is so much to write about or talk about as to be overwhelming. When we add in the moral issues: self-righteousness to the point of antinomianism grounded upon ignorance of much including the wider possibilities of human being, we come to the real horror. I addressed this horror to some extent in Chapter 495, *Quietly Charitable or Quietly Murderous But Always Quietly American*. I've also pointed to Graham Greene's novel, *The Quiet American*, where he claimed that we Americans feel the world exists to give us opportunities to feel good about ourselves. (The novel was a story about a romantic competition of sorts and was also a political thriller about terrorist, that is—criminal, acts that American government agents were committing in Vietnam by the early 1950s.)

A digression on the title of this essay. Historically, the Antinomians were a sect originating in Germany in the 16th century. They took the Protestant doctrine of faith so literalistically as to claim that the moral law was not obligatory on those who have a Christian faith; in the United States, this often means simply those who have come forward at an Evangelical revival and declared their faith in Jesus Christ. Whatever nuances might have been in Luther's writings and sermons were wiped away and "faith alone" assures salvation and frees the true believer of moral obligations. (Sometimes it might be a Gnostic doctrine of "knowledge of the divine alone," but I'm not sure I would consider either flavor to be truly separate. And, no, I'm not denying that most American Christians, Evangelicals and Catholics and others, are well-behaved in their own neighborhoods and workplaces, only that they hold themselves and the United States above moral rules when dealing with other peoples.)

In various essays, I've dealt with the problems of misformed minds in the modern world, especially American minds. For example, in Chapter 308, *Unreliable Memories, Minds Like Silly Putty*, I more or less claimed Americans have willingly allowed themselves to be turned into compliant objects for

the propagandizing of primarily the American government but also other American institutions.

Morality in a complex world is dependent upon intellectual understandings, not just because the social and cultural worlds of men are complex but also because the world becomes complex when men learn more about God's Creation of which we are a part; simplicity returns with a greater understanding—see Chapter 641, *Enriching Our Moral World: Simplicity Is Digested Complexity*. But the world is recursive in some crucial ways and intellectual understandings of the better sort come only with the application of certain moral characteristics—honesty and humility. We must be honest and open in dealing with reality. We must be humble enough to realize there are few answers inside our heads and those few answers are sometimes unreliable instincts about how the world works, though reliable enough to have aided in the survival and reproduction of our ancestors. We must also expend a serious effort if we would wish to understand a very complex world which often seems so messy as to be unordered—curiosity can energize the actual effort and even turn it into a game, though a quite serious game.

Most Americans are muddleheaded thinkers because they imagine the world to be transparent to their penetrating minds. They don't think to seek information and this is true of most of the smart Americans I know. They certainly don't seek to find new ways of thinking or to refine their existing ways of thinking. From their ignorance and muddled thought comes the self-righteousness that hardens into outright antinomianism, perhaps the "invincible ignorance" which Jefferson detected in Americans, or at least overlapping with it. This is both a general view of the world and also a way of dealing with aspects of the world, human and non-human, which don't act according to our American standards. If the Russians don't accept that we good Americans just want a strong presence on their border to do some more good, then they must be evil; and certainly we would never suspect that our American leaders are up to more or up to something different than their words indicate. If the world doesn't have enough petroleum which can be cheaply extracted, then we'll plan on an economy which can continue to grow by using petroleum which is expensive to extract and refine; we certainly won't consider improving our school system to nurture the better quality minds which might find new ways to provide abundant energy. We like our current school systems with all those pep rallies and homecoming games. We like our library systems all the more as they get rid of all

those hard-to-understand books and replace them with thriller novels and computer terminals and DVDs.

What is the problem? Is there something unique about the United States, something exceptional? Was that something never as good, as promising of greater good, as was advertised by many? Or did that something go bad in some way? I think the West as a whole went wrong first in intellectual and cultural matters; the moral problems followed from there though, as I said above, all human characteristics are intertwined and all are involved when things go well or badly. Americans are leading the charge into regions of moral and intellectual incoherence but most European peoples aren't so far behind us.

We human beings can usefully and in substantial truth be described as mind and heart and hands. (See Chapter 282, *Do We Need Heart and Hands as Well as Mind to Understand Reality?*, or download my book, *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53], for a discussion of this issue.)

But it's the mind which is of greatest concern here because it is the beginning of the peculiar form of American decay—it has been said that Americans are the first people to pass from a state of barbarism to a state of decadence without passing through a state of civilization in between. I think it largely true and largely true because of the weakness of the American mind, a mind which functioned well in parochial circumstances but doesn't function so well in the fluid and dynamic cosmopolis, let alone a globe of civilizations and cultures not linked to specific civilizations.

But we each and all have two intelligences—individual intelligence and intellect or communal intelligence. I consider the intellect to be the communal intelligence of real communities and do not use the word as merely a way of speaking of our collection of long-lasting customs and the stuff in our libraries and the other stuff in our art museums and so forth. But I'll start with words from a serious thinker who seemed to advocate a view of the 'intellect' which is profound and insightful but—perhaps—more in line with mainstream understandings of human nature. In *The House of Intellect* [7], Jacques Barzun tells us, first:

We [in the United States] have in fact intelligence in plenty and we use it perhaps more widely than other nations, for we apply it with praiseworthy innocence to parts of life elsewhere ruled by custom or routine. [page 4]

Later on that same page, Barzun goes on to tell us the difference between that intelligence we Americans have “in plenty” or at least had “in plenty” in the 1950s and the intellect which we largely lack:

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

I’m a little uncertain about the exact meaning of Barzun’s words. I agree with him to a large extent but it’s possible I go where he wouldn’t travel: I believe the intellect, “the capitalized and communal form of live intelligence”, to be the (abstractly) observable aspects of a true communal mind which is subject to evolutionary and developmental processes which ultimately leads to the mind of the Body of Christ. It’s quite possible Barzun believed communities to have only a nominal existence.

In any case, I think that Barzun would have agreed that much of our moral reasoning, certainly when it covers very complex issues, is ‘done’ at the communal level. This isn’t to say that individuals minds aren’t working hard, maybe just to spin their wheels, but it is to say serious thinking is done, at the very least, in conversation with Jeremiah and St Paul and St Augustine and Shakespeare and Melville and Minogue and many others—a complete list will include geneticists and evolutionary thinkers and brain-scientists and many others as well as far more prophets and poets and theologians and philosophers. Even a book which is morally questionable to a Christian, but also honest, such as *Madame Bovary*, should be part of the Christian’s deeper thought processes and likely will be, for good or ill, if he’s read it.

There are certain core parts of any communal mind which come from the individual intelligences of those more gifted in speculative or practical reasoning, with the curiosity of individual minds driving much of the development of that communal mind and sometimes providing for less talented thinkers to overachieve. Americans can admire great doers, entrepreneurs

and politicians as well as athletes and soldiers. Americans can admire those who are driven by the heart, missionaries and certain poets and musicians as well as mothers and teachers. Americans seem to try to admire great thinkers, even turning Einstein or Watson and Crick into celebrities of a sort. Americans can't figure out why great thinkers are of great importance because of the reasons I gave above—basically, they think their empty and unexercized and perhaps untalented minds are as capable of getting to the truth as all those analysts at the CIA and the DIA and all those universities. They think it a waste of time to check out a book or two on the history of Iran or that of American diplomacy and military interventions overseas. After all, the world is transparent to their minds; if Iranians act in ways that make no immediate sense to the average American suburbanite, then those Iranians must be irrational and up to no good. Since the world is transparent to our minds, then any confusion we see is clearly irrationality or immorality. And we don't let any wise-guys try to talk about, say, the different understanding of Iranians which is held by retired CIA or DIA or State Department officers who actually learned the languages and histories of the peoples in and around Iran, who interacted with some of those peoples in hostile or friendly situations. Certainly, we Americans react strongly against anyone who starts a conversation with words such as, "I read a history of Iran which is down at the town library and..."

When we don't admit into our own minds the knowledge of serious historians and military or civilian intelligence analysts and diplomats or soldiers with boots on the ground experience, we show that there is no American community mind. Furthermore, we show ourselves to be rebels against reality, against the Almighty who made and sustains that reality. (Herman Melville made this latter claim against Americans back in the 1850s.)

## 321 Worldviews and Human Identity

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2080>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/07/14.]

In the past few months or so, I've tried to allocate more of my mental energies to studying mathematics and history, concentrating for a short while (4 or 5 substantial book's reading time) upon some histories of the ancient Celtic peoples (Gauls to the Romans) and the Germanic peoples of the era of the Roman Empire and succeeding centuries as Europe was being born in a 'civilizational' sense.

One claim by some historians is striking: in formulating newer, more complex **sets** of ideas about the ways in which the larger peoples have formed. It seems that, for example, Roman Gauls formed as various groups of Celts were assimilated to Roman or Latin culture. Large but not overwhelming numbers of Germanic peoples moved in as the Roman Empire concentrated its energies on dangers from the East—the Sasanian Empire of Persia and then Arab raiders followed by Mohammedan armies. Over a number of generations, these Germans, along with many of the Romano-Gauls formed something of a Pan-Germany (Germany and France and Belgium and other countries) by way of a mixture of migrations, political takeovers, and linguistic/cultural takeovers. Some of the movements of 'Goths' and 'Vandals' in the first millennium AD did correspond to large-scale migrations though apparently not nearly all of the people who had lived with and around the migrants. As it was, the Goths under Theodoric (first Germanic Emperor of a major part of Europe) had a wagon train behind them of 2,000 vehicles or more—miles of wagons bearing supplies as well as those not capable of walking hundreds of miles in a year or two.

Some centuries later, a political takeover in which elites replaced elites and left the workers in place is documented in excruciating detail—the Norman replacement of the Anglo-Saxon elite. I’m personally a member of peoples formed by an earlier linguistic/cultural takeover: those descended from early farmers of England who became Brythonic Celts and then Anglo-Saxons (without the Normans much disturbing the general culture or language) and those similar peoples in Ireland and the Highlands of Scotland who became Gaelic Celts. (Those early farmers were also the result of such processes with much of the culture and perhaps some languages and perhaps some or a lot of genes coming from the first agricultural peoples of modern-day Turkey.)

This wasn’t greatly surprising to me, partly because I’ve trained my own self to accept the world as it is—perhaps with some goal of making it a little better. Still, I was a little surprised to read of the likelihood that some of these cultural/linguistic takeovers were rapid and the (almost) certainty that there was at least were rapid transformations of some cultural aspects tied to what I’ll label “interior human character traits” as these ‘peoples’ were forming.

This is disconcerting to see solid evidence that fundamental human attachments can be so shallow as to be changed during a march from the Balkans to Italy. It certainly makes such dystopias as *1984* more plausible. Yet, my understanding of how this comes about leaves open better possibilities.

I’ve updated the Thomistic understanding of being and of mind and have tied them together far more tightly than was possible before modern science largely confirmed the Thomistic understanding of mind-formation (see Walter J Freeman’s *How Brains Make Up Their Minds* [35]) and also came to strongly support the understanding of being held by St John the Evangelist: relationships are primary over stuff; relationships create and shape stuff. See Chapter 83, *Is Christian Morality a Natural Morality?*, and the next five essays I published for my take on Thomistic theories of the mind by way of discussing Freeman’s book. See Chapter 156, *Einstein and Bohr’s debate on the meaning of reality* and Chapter 157, *Quantum Mechanics and Moral Formation* for short discussions of being under the related understandings of the ‘radical’ quantum theorists (such as Niels Bohr) and the school of St John the Evangelist.

Chapter 61, *Imposing Ideals Upon Empirical Reality is Insane and Not Noble*, relates a much more recent version of my highly empirical Christian

worldview. I feel my stance to be far more consistent than the empirical stances of St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas and Galileo and John Henry Newman but I live after Einstein and Bohr—they made it possible to be more consistent. Years earlier, I had written an essay which became Chapter 100, *What is Mind?: Can Inadequate Formation Mimic Mental Diseases?*, which developed some of the fundamental ideas showing up in that recent essay—the earlier essay had explored the failure of many to pay proper attention to the world around them, that is, to reality. The underlying idea for this line of thought is, simplistically, that our minds are more or less accurate images of what lies around us, some portion of the thoughts God manifested in Creation. In greater detail and unapologetic Christian form, that underlying idea is this:

The human brain is a complex organ of a physical creature. Shaped at the species level by the contingencies of evolution and at the individual level by the contingencies of development (including both environmental factors and our decisions), the brain has additional constraints coming from our own limited natures and also the limited range of possibilities manifested in this particular, concrete world. Yet, that brain forms (“makes up” in Freeman’s terms—again, see *How Brains Make Up Their Minds* [35]) a mind which can rise to somewhat understand more abstract and general levels and that understanding is recursive in allowing a better understanding of concrete reality.

The first sentence of the above paragraph starts with the stuff of the human body, but we have to concentrate on the remainder of the paragraph, the relationships and processes which create and shape stuff, starting with the divine love which brought into being the raw stuff of Creation.

Totemism is usually more obvious in boys than in girls—boys used to pretend to be bears or gorillas until the Western entertainment industry pushed stranger or more horrible ‘games’ into their heads; girls used to play house. Yet the more general version of totemism, shaping the mind and sometimes the entire human person to what lies outside and is of interest, can be seen as the clue to understanding the human mind. The brain is primed from conception in healthy embryos to shape (or “make up”) a mind as an encapsulation of what that human being has

chosen to respond to or been forced to respond to. Our understandings of reality, when the result of ongoing and honest responses to that reality, are like unto an ancient hunter's understanding of that animal he 'emulates' to better anticipate its behavior, that is—to better understand that animal. That understanding is dynamic and not a mere image and it is a means to changes in heart and hands, that is, feelings and emotions and well as behaviors, habits and others.

Another complication: the human being is both individual and communal and the same is true of the human mind. See Chapter 127, *Intelligence vs. Intellect* for an early development of this idea in the context of responding to *The House of Intellect* [7] in which Jacques Barzun makes a similar but more qualified claim.

Now we're ready for my response to the ease with which human characteristics and beliefs can shift so rapidly so that Eurasian nomadic horsemen can 'become' Goths or Vandals or vice versa and, more horribly, so that 'nice' human beings can learn to peacefully accept rule by Nazis.

Most of our worldview, our larger-scale understanding of "the universe and all that", comes from our community. We become vulnerable when our communities decay and maybe leave us in the presence of a powerful worldview, perverse or noble. We also are vulnerable when our communities are such as not to have such a worldview, an understanding of the universe or of all Creation as being unified, coherent, and complete in a particular and rational and plausible and emotionally satisfying way. A simple, peasant worldview held by a farming folk of limited experience (the Goths and their traveling buddies) can be destroyed when those folks are suddenly exposed to a wider and more complex world. Such destruction can also occur when facts and information about reality pile up without anyone making sense of them within an existing worldview capable of handling those facts and that information (modern Christians). In such states, we are like soft clay and can be easily shaped in response to a madman or a noble genius or anyone else who responds in an energetic way to a world suddenly richer and more complex.

The Germanic people of the period 0-500AD or so were shaping themselves in response to the Romans (including the Gauls or Romanized Celts) and their civilization and shaped themselves into the individuals belonging to the partly new peoples: the Franks and the Goths and so on.

The leaders and intellectuals and artists of the Christian peoples of the modern West have failed to respond to the rich and complex, sheerly wondrous, knowledge we have of Creation; they failed to make greater sense of it and to reconcile it in a worldview explaining how this world of quantum uncertainty and biological evolution and curved spacetime and frighteningly complex human communities is the work of the Triune God, Father and Son and Holy Spirit. The children of those Christians are shaping themselves and their communities in incoherent and desperate responses to the world as modern empirical researchers have shown it to be; those children respond also to the pleas of political scoundrels and various other sorts of exploiters as well as to the pleas of those non-Christians who are trying to make good, but non-Christian, sense of the world as we now can see it more clearly than could prior generations.



## 322 We Should Ask First: Are Human Beings Made for Democracy?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2098>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/09/28.]

I don't get it. What world do political theorists and philosophers, political commentators of all sorts, live in? For decades, their fellow practitioners of the humane arts and sciences, the historians, have been trying to deal with the realities of human biological existence—William McNeil, the distinguished historian from U of Chicago, was well-known for trying to deal with climate, disease, early human material culture as revealed by archaeologists, and even evolution and genes to the extent possible. More recently, the geneticist Bryan Sykes and a variety of historians have dealt more directly with genetic information in the context of human history as well as with updated (and sometimes dramatically changed) knowledge from archaeology, paleo-climatology, paleoanthropology, and other fields. I've been reading books by some of those historians: Barry Cunliffe, Peter Heather, Norman Davies, and others as well as some books by archaeologists and linguists. I'm also keeping up with the writings of bloggers who deal with anthropological issues, especially those issues falling under HBD (human biodiversity)—look up Peter Frost (currently on hiatus but his past writings are still readily available), Razib Khan, Steve Sailor, the Jayman, and follow their links to others or do your own searches. Razib Khan also has up a number recommended books including many good works on history. For now, I have a clear interest in the European peoples of Indo-European

cultures and languages.

Political scientists and philosophers?

(Warning: my discussions of this general issue cover what I know and that means: a little bit of the political thought of the West, mostly restricted to the Anglo-American regions of space and time and thought. I also have an aware citizen's knowledge of what passes for political discussion in this age of decayed minds and weak moral characters.)

Some political scientists have shown a fondness for quantitative models before their time in that field but neither political scientists nor political philosophers have shown much inclination to question the foundations of their thought in general—at least not any thinkers who have made an impression upon the mainstream of modern human culture. I'm sure those political thinkers will claim to accept Darwinian insights in general, but you wouldn't know it from their teachings and discussions of politics. Even Plato and Aristotle seem to have been nearly delusional about some aspects of human nature relative to the authors of the Old Testament. Despite the distorted understandings some have of Biblical teachings on human nature—largely due to irrational and literalistic readings, the authors of the Bible said much that anticipated the Darwinian understandings. The insights of Plato and Aristotle were many and profound and true but were founded upon deeply erroneous assumptions of the nature of human individuals and human communities. In the centuries since Aristotle? Progress in political thought seems sometimes to be the substitution of Roman gentleman or Germanic/Celtic warrior (the truly free) or—God help us—American bourgeoisie for Athenian gentleman as the true human being and the true political actor. Some will endorse Hobbes and some Locke as expressing deeper truths, but the first was a pessimist who assumed a static and idealized model of human individuals and communities and the second was optimistic. Neither seemed to have considered the possibilities of evolution or true development, both assuming some model of human nature which holds for all men and all peoples in all times and regions.

The more prominent political scientists and philosophers seem oblivious to the issues geneticists and evolutionary biologists are actively addressing—the whole bundle of human biodiversity (HBD) matters, such as the real pace of human evolution (very rapid since the formation of more complex human communities circa 10,000 years ago) and the consequent differences between the 'pools' of rapidly evolving human groups. Let me provide a tentative list of questions we need to answer before we can discuss

higher-level political issues:

1. What are the true characteristics of human nature?
2. Are there really uniform characteristics across individual men and across ethnic groups?
3. What do individual men really need and desire in their political and economic lives?
4. What do communities need and desire?

If we could answer such questions, we might be able to come to understand why it is that few peoples in the world seem much interested in political systems which came to be in the western and northern regions of Europe in recent centuries. We might come to understand why efforts to force into democratic 'molds' the governments of Southwestern Asia and other regions have so badly failed. We might even come to understand how it is that the American republic has come under the dominance of political machines and their clients while most political scientists and philosophers continue to blabber on about "American democracy."

Returning to the above list, the reader might notice the belief I express, if somewhat implicitly, in the fourth question: communities have a real existence. Based upon my understanding of history and human biological nature, I could have expressed the third and fourth questions as part of a group beginning with: What is the balance between individual being and communal being in a human animal? Is that balance the same for Irishmen and Italians and Nigerians and Malaysians? Also: Does the balance change if that human animal succeeds in becoming something like a human moral person? Does the balance change as the human mind expands in active response to God's Creation?

It wouldn't matter if someone were to approach these issues with a different overall understanding of created being and a different initial assessment of human nature. The goal should not be, and could not be, to eliminate a metaphysical understanding of the being of which the human animal is part. The goal is to take your metaphysical understanding, try it against the details of empirical reality, and reject or adjust as you think appropriate. It is true that the metaphysical understanding of men and their communities (how can there be such understandings?) as ideal creatures independent of

the surrounding being with its evolutionary and developmental flux will be ruled out of court as soon as the basic questions are asked.

Because reality so quickly teaches the open mind, it's not so much a problem that political scientists and philosophers initially approach their task understanding human animals as radical individualists of perhaps an Athenian gentleman sort or a modern WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic) sort. It's a great problem that they never test their basic assumptions against the reality of enfleshed and biologically diversified human animals, just as great a problem that they never test those basic assumptions against the seeming (and true, as it turns out) reality of human biodiversity.

I would suggest, against the position (circa 1993) of Fukuyama (in *The End of History* [58]) and likeminded thinkers, that the 20th century and, even more so, the 21st century have indicated that democracy is a failed system. Is this because the typical human being has not the right characteristics for this form of government? Is this because it's not possible for the typical human animal to understand our political and economic systems, or to properly estimate the moral character of the candidates for public office in this complex and confusing world? Have our educational systems failed? Our cultural systems? Our religious institutions? Our families? Or is a mass democracy simply bound to destroy itself through the fear that allows the destruction of our own freedom by our own leaders and the theft of our own wealth by our own leaders? Or were we always in error in idealizing political systems?

There is a lot that needs done to either start fixing our broken systems or to start to move towards new ones by way of intelligent guidance, or sometimes wise non-guidance, of evolutionary and developmental processes. It would help if we had political scientists and economists who move beyond study of the prisoner's dilemma and the writing of pseudo-philosophy which is little more than attempts to justify systems of knowledge which have proven to have little to do with reality.

All that I said above can be used with relatively few changes to speak about the mismatch between reality and Christian theological and philosophical systems. When we consider the importance of such thinkers as Augustine and Aquinas and Newman in political thought and political acts, then we can foresee the likelihood of a very complex history of human thought. And I can foresee the likelihood of realizing those three thinkers in particular were far more empirically-minded and closer to the truth than

the thinkers preferred by the political thinkers of the modern West.



## 323 Virtual Reality as Darwinian Selection for Reality Orientation

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2119>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/11/21.]

Wayne Allensworth has a frighteningly interesting commentary on virtual reality, an addictive abuse of technology which might generate still more problems than what we're seeing from our better established abuses of technology ('ordinary' video games, cellphones for 4 to 104, etc), *Disconnected: Our Virtual Unreality* (found at <http://www.chroniclesmagazine.org/2015/December/39/12/magazine/article/10829745/>) where he writes near the end:

Alistair Charlton of the International Business Times recently quoted a subject who had tested VR sex. VR pornography, he said, will "probably spell the end of civilization. I just know some people will never, ever take that thing off."

My take on these matters is simple: charitable concern and actions for others can do only so much and, if we do other than cut off those who sink into such a hell, then we're merely wasting resources better used for the healthy among our children. So far as I can tell, we who are concerned about saving a civilization and its healthier children have to let Darwinian natural selection and other related forms of selection take over. In other words, if human beings insist on letting themselves be passive victims of exploitive technologies, let them perhaps live and die in modern-day equivalents of opium-dens.

When it comes to saving civilization and those, currently dwindling, healthier children, we can choose from two basic responses:

- Bring a better moral order to society by way of central powers. This would necessitate some sort of criminal prosecution against many in the entertainment industry (including mainstream news organizations) and would leave someone or some small group of someones in charge of Western culture.
- Restore healthy processes in smaller communities by way of which economic and cultural ‘systems’ will organize themselves in accordance with some plausible and intelligent moral order—that is, allow the Invisible Hand to work while recognizing it isn’t a magic force and that Adam Smith was observing an economy organizing itself in the context of a society populated by those who didn’t necessarily believe in the Christian creeds but did act according to some version of Christian moral order.

I’m putting my money, of which I have none left, but also my life on that second possibility: the rebuilding of Christian Civilization by way of individual and small-community effort. My regular readers may remember that I consider Christian Civilization to be the totality of the Body of Christ of which the Church Herself is but an organ, albeit the central organ and organizing organ of that Body. I’m one of those pessimists who think we’ve destroyed too much of the foundation of Western Civilization—an early version of a true Christian civilization, not by failing to keep up our infrastructure or by putting up Modernist buildings—those were, at worst, symptoms of decay and not the source of decay. No, we’ve destroyed too much of the foundation by corrupting our own selves and our children. Most of the capital of a civilization is found in the minds and moral characters of its members.

As it is, few Christians of higher intellectual competence bother to read the Bible—as did the great physicist James Clerk Maxwell and other serious scientists from prior centuries; few Christians or non-Christians in the West of any level of intellectual competence bother to read demanding works of the West other than work-related manuals or papers; few even read demanding works of a secularist sort or demanding works of anti-Christians. Modern anti-Christians or—still worse—those indifferent to the issues of serious theological belief, live in what a Supreme Court Genius might label as the penumbra of the teachings of Rousseau or even of serious writers of a Unitarian mindset such as Locke or Dickens. There is no Christ in

*A Christmas Carol*, but only feelings of good-will connected to roasted turkeys and eggnog and medical care for all; it be a very bad sign indeed that so many alleged Christians wish to beat up on store-clerks who say, “Happy Holidays!” and then go home to watch *A Christmas Carol* with their children. This shows a serious lack of intellectual development or of any sort of spiritual insight.

Let me tie together the pieces of this essay: those younger human beings (and a few older ones) addicted to video games or cellphones or the still worse life of virtual reality are true children of the West, for the modern West is a virtual reality which, so long as it had Grandma’s bank accounts to run off, could shelter us from past or present realities. Unsheltered by that inherited wealth and by the inherited moral order we seem by our acts and words to greatly despise, then—as individuals and as communities, we might well prove ourselves to be Darwinian failures. God’s story will go on and I believe more strongly with each day that Christian Civilization will move East, to be centered perhaps in Russia and perhaps somewhere in the Pacific Rim. (The West coast regions of a fragmented United States are one specific possible location—or perhaps South America for those who believe in Nostradamus and who believe he really predicted the Pope would move to that continent at about this time.)



## 324 Yes, Genetics and Evolutionary Biology are Relevant to Our Political and Social Problems

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2127>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/12/01.]

I've been reading a fair amount of works of narrative history lately, most dealing with the history of the Celtic peoples—especially those of the British Isles; lately, I've been reading more general histories of the British peoples for greater context. For decades, some prominent historians have been integrating archaeological and linguistic knowledge into their analyses of history and doing so in a properly skeptical way, skeptical but also openminded. More recently, there is greater or lesser use of genetic analyses from peer-reviewed scientific communities—to be sure, even peer-reviewed work can be subject to changes of both claims as to underlying facts and, most certainly, changes in interpretation. One main line of recent genetic/historical research has tried to determine who the European peoples are. It turns out there is a base of genes from the Neolithic modern humans of Europe; there are also elements of what seem to have been peoples who had come from the steppes of Western Eurasia—modern-day Ukraine and southern Russia; along some geographic bands (coast of Spain, Portugal, and France up into the British Isles and also up through Europe into northern Germanic populations), there are also genes coming from peoples from northern Syria and the adjoining regions of Turkey—the “First Farmers (of Western Eurasia)”; there is even a few percent of Neanderthal genes in modern Europeans.

The basic story seems to have stabilized most recently, but there was confusion from genetic analysis as well as from archaeological and linguistic analyses of, say, the events underlying what might be labeled the Indo-European phenomena of (mostly) prehistory. These phenomena were the partially mysterious events of the creation of a family and subfamilies of languages and cultures which spread from Ireland to India and Western China, from the toe of Italy to the northern borders of Scandinavia. These phenomena were also the corresponding spread of a warrior culture which seems to have been, more basically, a patron-client or master-vassal culture. As it turns out, these cultures and languages spread partly because of invasions of large numbers of peoples and sometimes by invasions of smaller numbers of bands of warriors who brought no families or women with them and sometimes by processes of cultural imitation.

I'll provide a list of books covering these subjects in the order in which I read them, giving titles and authors only as they are readily available in bookstores or major library systems:

- *The Horse, the Wheel, and Language* by David W Anthony.
- *War! What is it good for?* by Ian Morris.
- *The Ancient Celts* by Barry W. Cunliffe.
- *Empires and Barbarians: The Fall of Rome and the Birth of Europe* by Peter J Heather.
- *The Fall of Rome : and the End of Civilization* by Bryan Ward-Perkins.
- *African Exodus: The Origins of Modern Humanity* by Christopher Stringer and Robin McKie.
- *Languages of the World: An Introduction* by Asya Pereltsvaig.
- *Archaeology and Language: The Puzzle of Indo-European Origins* by Colin Renfrew.
- *Deep Ancestry: Inside the Genographic Project* by Spencer Wells.
- *On the Common Ancestors of All Living Humans* by Douglas L T Rohde (to be found on Internet in pdf file).

- *First Farmers: The Origins of Agricultural Societies* by Peter Bellwood.
- *The Seven Daughters of Eve* by Bryan Sykes.
- *Druids: A Very Short Introduction* by Barry Cunliffe.
- *Saxons, Vikings, and Celts: The Genetic Roots of Britain and Ireland* by Bryan Sykes.
- *The 10,000 Year Explosion: How Civilization Accelerated Human Evolution* by Gregory Cochran and Henry Harpending.
- *Britain Begins* by Barry Cunliffe.
- *The Barbarian Conversion: From Paganism to Christianity* by Richard Fletcher.
- *Population Genetics: A Concise Guide* by John H. Gillespie.

There are many others, including some works on evolutionary biology or genes and some on historical works which might or might not deal directly with the new knowledge of human origins and human blood-based nature, but such knowledge is becoming part of the basic thought processes of those educated in recent decades, which group includes older thinkers who take care to keep up with new lines of research. It is those historians, or at least some future group of historians, who will help the scientists in providing a narrative structure which will turn all this knowledge of human biology into deeper understandings of human being. Philosophers, novelists and poets, theologians, the better sort of political and economic actors (are there any in the West in 2015?), and others should also join in. But, so far, few have done so.

In addition to these books, I've been reading the blogs of John Hawks (see <http://johnhawks.net/weblog/>), Razib Khan (see <http://www.unz.com/gnxp/>), and Peter Frost (see <http://www.unz.com/author/peter-frost/>) on a regular basis, the blog of Steve Sailer (see <http://www.unz.com/isteve/>) on a less regular basis. (Sailer deals with the current situation, modern politics and culture in light of genes or HBD—Human Biodiversity and that's of lesser interest in light of my current work. I have my reasons to be more concerned with the view out the rear-window than with the view to the front.)

As a rule, the modern historians (Heather and Ward-Perkins and Cunliffe for sure) are respectful and also properly skeptical toward genetic research. Why should anyone be skeptical toward facts? Simply because their meaning is determined by greater contexts, as is said in the old warning: theories determine facts. Actually, ‘global’ facts such as narratives also determine ‘local’ facts. Genetic analyses of peoples in Europe or elsewhere tell us where our ancestors came from only when we understand fully which peoples were living in various locations at the crucial times of history and prehistory. (Prehistory can be reconstructed, but history is human documentation at least in the form of myths of origins or legends of ancestors.)

Recently, some geneticists published work they did trying to answer the question: Where did the first out-of-Africa migrants cross to Asia? One possibility is close to the Mediterranean, maybe even where Moses and the Israelites are said to have crossed when leaving Egypt. There are other possibilities, including places where the waters are too deep now but were far more shallow during periods when huge glaciers had absorbed much water and brought the sea-levels down throughout the world. A somewhat naive interpretation of the results led to the conclusion that they had taken the northern, ‘Israelite’ route, but some commentators pointed out that this assumed the people living nowadays in northern Egypt are direct descendants of people living there 40,000 years ago or so. The people currently living in northern Egypt might well be descendants of some people who crossed further south by way of some people who crossed back into Egypt. (In fact, there has been large-scale movements between Asia and northern Africa over the centuries.)

Historians, as well as historically sophisticated geneticists, are generally skeptical because they have studied the movements of peoples by way of ancient histories and legends and archaeological evidence and know better than to assume something of that sort—likely enough, some of them or some of their teachers or mentors had themselves made naive or implicit assumptions in the past. In some cases, we now have accurate knowledge of the movements and locations of peoples from thousands or even tens of thousands of years ago; thus it is that the indigenous peoples (think Cro-Magnon) of the British Isles, ancient Anatolians mixed with Mediterranean peoples, Scandinavians, Saxons and other Germans, and Normans (a Scandinavian people—mostly) can be mapped and set in historical context with a high degree of confidence. Thus it is that historians can understand how it is that Portuguese and other Spanish peoples can have Anatolian (‘first-

farmer') blood along with a fair amount of shared genes with the Celtic peoples of the British Isles. Thus it is that they can understand the linguistic claim that the poetic name of Portugal (Lusitania) seems to have come from a Celtic word.

All of this is necessary background to understanding why it is dangerous for Europeans and North Americans to allow large-scale immigration of peoples who evolved in far different environments and, thus, have characteristics not suited for the political and economic and social communities of Europeans, especially those communities which have evolved and developed along with the individual Northwestern Europeans. Peter Frost summarized some of that background in a recent essay, *A Pauper's Death* found at <http://www.unz.com/pfrost/a-paupers-death/>, by way of discussing a strange genre of rock-and-roll (black metal) and the ongoing national and ethnic suicide of the Norwegians, with other Sweden and other Northwestern countries and peoples following.

This all leads to the point raised in the title of this essay: our biological natures need to be considered in discussing our current political and social problems and in developing policies. More broadly, the question could be asked with respect to philosophers and theologians and researchers in the 'softer' human sciences and even writers of poetry and imaginative fictions. This, in turn, leads to the question: Are even the best traditional understandings of human nature, individual and communal, roughly equivalent to the more exact understandings of modern science—including the work of those historians who, with seeming competence, blend 'traditional' historical knowledge with archaeological and genetic knowledge, who blend 'traditional' analytic techniques with those of modern physical science?

Why does this proper use of modern science not show up in the works of most serious journalists, even those who can truly be labeled 'journalist-historians' (other than a few such as Steve Sailer)? Is it not relevant to the unfolding immigration disaster in Europe that Northwestern Europeans are radical individualists with internalized moral systems and high degrees of trust in their societies while most peoples of Southwestern Asia and Africa are **deeply**, that is—genetically, tribal in their characteristics? See Frost's essay, *Western Europe, State Formation, and Genetic Pacification* (found at <http://www.unz.com/pfrost/western-europe-state-formation-and-genetic-pacification-3/>), for a discussion of the 'pacification' of the males of (mostly) Northwestern Europe—that title seems to be a mistake if only because the Spanish,

and Basque, peoples seem not to have been so much ‘pacified’. Peoples who haven’t gone through this process require a, shall we say, strong leader to keep the young men and sometimes the older men under control. Even Saddam Hussein at his most brutal wasn’t so bad, or at least not so rationally brutal, as some of the kings of England and France, Germany and Norway during the centuries when those states were growing and—along with the Catholic Church—were pacifying their populations by removing certain genes from that the population, that is, by killing violent criminals—at the site of the crime or in prisons or on the scaffold. Men who were often themselves violent wished to destroy any ‘commoner’ versions of themselves in the interests of a peaceful and prosperous state. I repeat: they changed the characteristics of Northwestern Europeans by ruthless, year-in and year-out, executions or other sorts of killings of men who had committed violent crimes such as murder or rape. As a result and by the time that Northwestern European systems of justice became more gentle (circa 1800), the men of that region had become quite peaceful, in the sense of following ‘national’ laws and customs, even when dealing with the murder of a loved one; men of Northwest Europe (with some exceptions such as some populations of Gaels) no longer sought to carry out personal acts of revenge—they cooperated with systems of justice to an extent beyond the imaginations of even the prophets of Israel.

Is not this knowledge relevant to our fuller understanding of the dangers and opportunities which come with immigration? Is it not relevant to our efforts to understand the utter failure of the United States in its sometimes well-meaning and sometimes outright criminal efforts to reshape the world to American standards?

We should remember that the horrors of the Dark Ages (perhaps 600-900AD), such as famine and poverty and constant violence at the level of individuals and ‘states’ or tribes, came about because of the failure to assimilate huge numbers of German barbarians into Roman ways. We should remember that we Americans have failed to assimilate a very large number of African-Americans though they and their ancestors have been here for centuries. We farming and manufacturing Americans also failed to deal fairly with and to justly assimilate the nomadic and semi-nomadic Amerindians<sup>1</sup>. It might be that geneticists and evolutionary biologists and at least some

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<sup>1</sup>I’ve since read *1491* [93] by Charles Mann and learned how densely populated much of the Western Hemisphere lands were and how settled many of the populations are. Like most of my contemporaries, I viewed Amerindians through the eyes of those who saw

historians are right in claiming that evolution is for real and human characteristics are biologically based—farming peoples have genes for one set of characteristics, tribal peoples from tropical and subtropical regions have different genes, and tribal peoples from the Americas who lived nomadic and semi-nomadic lives for centuries have still different genes. Not all peoples are just chattering-class Americans who had the bad luck to be born in the wrong situation or with the wrong color of skin or the wrong facial features. The differences are more than skin-deep and need to be considered before we go over there or invite them over here. It's those who think we're all the same who are the bigots—the proof being that 'same' refers to the characteristics of chattering-class Americans.

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them after suffering through devastating epidemics and being forced from their farms and villages and towns.



# 325 The Philosophies of Liberalism Are in Conflict with Reality

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2131>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/12/21.]

Paul Robinson is a professor at the University of Ottawa. At his website, he states: “I write about Russian and Soviet history, military history, and military ethics.” His general view of the politics seems to be describable in non-standard terms as “liberal realism”. For example, while making it clear he is far more liberal than Putin, he acknowledges there are good reasons for at least some of Putin’s ‘non-liberal’ actions. In this essay, *Democracy ≠ Liberalism* found at [https://irrussianality.wordpress.com/2015/12/18/democracy-\\$neq\\$-liberalism](https://irrussianality.wordpress.com/2015/12/18/democracy-$neq$-liberalism), I think his realism is revealed to be that of someone who is a true believer in liberalism and only compromises his ideological purity to the extent of allowing others time and space to catch up with him and the other enlightened ones. In other words, he assumes the liberal philosophy to be true, to be a valid and accurate depiction of human beings, individual and communal, and apparently believes that the troubling existence of non-liberalism—which he conventionally labels as ‘conservatism—is a matter of primitive human behaviors and attitudes. Eventually, such conditions will go away with enough. . .

Prosperity?

Education?

Something, anyway.

Imagine that we could measure the inclinations of human beings on a scale of individualistic to communalistic. Doesn’t it seem true to observa-

tions that some individuals are inclined to be free of nearly all communal constraints and are willing to pay the price and others want the security of communities which are constraining to the point of smothering and most are in between those extremes. And, again, we ‘truly’ modern human beings—certainly academicians at major universities—claim to believe in evolutionary biology of a sort which combines Darwinistic natural selection with the insights of genetics; Darwin himself had no way of knowing how inheritance worked.

So it is that human beings attain reproductive success and pass on their own characteristics by proper (or at least not overly bad) responses to their environments, but the environments of any social creature reflect at least partly their ‘communal situation’. In the case of human beings in major parts of the world, the culture has become an increasingly larger part of their environment and evolution, adaptation to specific environments including culture, has accelerated. See *The 10,000 Year Explosion: How Civilization Accelerated Human Evolution* [23] by Gregory Cochran and Henry Harpending for a very accessible discussion of this issue. See the writings of the anthropologist Peter Frost at <http://www.unz.com/author/peter-frost/>, for more specific and more tightly focused analyses on this topic.

There is, in fact, a deep problem in assumptions that human life will be completed and made at least a bit more perfect if we all behave and feel according to a particular human philosophy of a particular historical period and a particular people—those of northwestern Europe over the previous millennium or less. Yet, modern liberals think themselves to have discovered some key to important aspects of human nature which leads to a vault of true treasures: absolute truths beyond modification by mere facts of history or evolutionary biology or anthropology or genetics. To a liberal, to a true follower of Hobbes and Locke and Mill and the economists of Classical Liberalism, the individual human being is bedrock human reality and communities are voluntary arrangements—though perhaps necessary for caring for the young or even feeding ourselves. Communities are an external environment of sorts, a breeding ground and source of nourishment for individuals. This remains true of even collectivistic liberals who use central powers to correct sub-optimal environments or their accumulated effects on the insides of individuals.

Suppose Hobbes and company were wrong or at least that they wrote about human beings of their own sort, those at the extremes of individual characteristics and inclinations within a population itself extreme

in this way relative to Chinese and Indians and Africans and all others. Suppose, if only in the way of a Devil's advocate, that the accumulating facts and understandings well-stated by Peter Frost (see <http://www.unz.com/author/peter-frost/>) are a better reflection of human reality, a reflection of a human reality of greater diversity, not diversity in the sense of individual preferences in the marketplaces of a liberal society but a true diversity in human characteristics and inclinations, a diversity which has resulted from events in the empirical world of Darwin and Einstein. Suppose further that the school of thought to which Frost and Cochran and Harpending belong is right that there are also true groupings of human beings, those who are from family-lines which have evolved in response to particular, largely local and peculiar, environmental conditions. One example used well by Frost and other scientists is the difference between wheat farmers and rice farmers. Wheat farming can be productive, can lead to prosperity and reproductive success, when practiced in the way of 'individuals', that is, by loosely bound communities of nuclear families in which individuals aggressively express and sometimes realize their personal preferences. Rice farming is much more a communal activity and rice farmers with characteristics of, let us say, "submission to the community" gain greater reproductive success than to those with characteristics of a more individualistic sort. The so-called "Tragedy of the commons" (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tragedy\\_of\\_the\\_commons](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tragedy_of_the_commons)) may be strongly true for the wheat farmers of northern and western Europe (and North America and so on) but not so true for the rice farmers of East Asia—they feed themselves and their families by way of the commons.

Other things are true of many aboriginal peoples who were still under selection pressure for nomadic ways of life and not for any sort of settled, agricultural way of life.



# 326 Darwinism is Fine so Long as I Can Still Believe All Human Beings are Just Like Me

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2134>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/12/28.]

Most modern Americans don't truly believe in biological evolution because it conflicts with a once plausible idea which remained strong in ghetto-Christianity after the separation of Christian understandings of Creation from mainstream science and philosophy; the idea is "human beings came into being once and for all and nothing can undo that". Most Westerners, including most Christians, have accepted the factual claims and core theories of evolutionary biology, "sort of" and "kind of" and "in some ways". Believers in so-called 'Creation Science' and others who accept a literalistic understanding of the creation stories in the book of Genesis are not so large a group and not so much a problem. The true problem comes from those "sort of" believers in evolutionary biology, some Christians but many mainstream secularists of a radical sort. And many others. The strength of this idea even in open enemies of Christianity points to the partial-truth in claims of this sort: "Marxism (or another secular faith of the modern world) is a desacralized Christianity." I suspect at least some of those in other faiths or from outside the West are simply confused by the Christian claim to believe in evolutionary biology at the same time that they also believe in human homogeneity.

I suspect there to be a plurality, and maybe an outright and strong majority, of educated Westerners who accept that man evolved up to some point maybe 100,000 years ago. They probably know, at least approxi-

mately, that Human ancestors had already separated from our chimpanzee cousins something like 5,000,000 years ago but believe them to have evolved in stages, shedding their ‘ape-like’ characteristics. At some magical point, something like that 100,000 years ago, some generation became true human beings and selection on our race came to an end, except for traits considered superficial such as skin color or hair color. In fact, these ‘superficial’ traits in particular are probably related to issues of reproductive success which is as important as natural selection in the sense of survival—the ‘point’ is to survive to reproduce.

The fact that modern liberals, as one example, would define human beings as possessing a certain chattering sort of intelligence and a variety of rights, while Christians might define human beings as having some special relationship with God is immaterial. In fact, I would guess most Christians would—if honest—admit to defining human being in a way more similar to what is implied by the American *Declaration of Independence* or Locke than by what is assumed by St Paul.

It would seem that most modern Westerners think all human beings were made for the same general sorts of lives, political and economic and cultural. By sheer coincidence, these are lives approved by the various ideologies of modern liberalism, ideologies which reflect the preferences of a vocal and strong-willed minority of those descended from the peoples of Northwestern Europe over the previous five to ten centuries. This is the region which was studied by two famous and important residents: Adam Smith and Karl Marx as well as by Hobbes and Lock, Quesnay and Rousseau, Mill and Say, von Mises and Hayek. Yes, by sheer coincidence, all these thinkers in a small school of students indistinguishable from each other in the eyes of an anthropologist from Mars and hard to distinguish in the eyes of an anthropologist from China, decided that the traits and inclinations of Northwestern European man (and North American man before long) were the signs of the realization of true, complete and perfect, human being. This true human being was seen as a radical individualist who formed communities by contract or, in more general terms, by way of a marketplace conglomeration of wills. It’s hardly surprising, given the feverish devotion of most—liberal and conservative—to individualism that even the family has now been redefined as a small community of individuals who choose to love each other and—maybe—live together.

This glorification of the individual along with the denigration of community isn’t a break with the traditions of Western Civilization, no longer

Christian Civilization, but rather a continuation along the path we've traveled for several centuries, a path first seen and advocated by at least the Renaissance and perhaps implicit in the Nominalism of Medieval Christian thinkers. (I personally read signs of radical individualism out of Dante as well as—more expected—Milton.) You could claim that it is a break with the deeper and more ancient trends of the West, but that is largely meaningless in light of the dynamism of both communal and individual human being. (See *The 10,000 Year Explosion: How Civilization Accelerated Human Evolution* [23] by Gregory Cochran and Henry Harpending for a start on recently discovered facts about the speedup of human evolution about 12,000 years ago—the time of the Neolithic Revolution (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neolithic\\_Revolution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neolithic_Revolution)); this speedup in human evolution has run a race of sorts with cultural evolution.)

Individualistic assumptions drive our politics and distort our political relations. If you take seriously international neo-liberalism, if you take seriously the glorification of individual involvement in politics at all levels, if you take seriously the glorification of career over family and other traditional communities, or—mostly certainly—if you take seriously the claims that each of us becomes some sort of entity only accidentally tied to a particular body, Zulu or Chinese, Kung or Igbo, Arab or Germanic, male or female, biological or 'techno-enhanced', then you are a thoroughly modern Milt or Millie.

(Warning: It would seem that elites in the West have often preached "Radical individualism and liberty for me and serfdom for thee.")

When these individualistic assumptions show too much sign of stress, many modern thinkers retreat not, choosing instead to stand upon a bedrock of a basic dualism, an assumption that there is a 'me' inside of my body but independent of it and nothing, not brain structure nor skeletal muscle mass nor sex organs, can change that. This is not to deny the reality of a variety of experiences of being out of synch with one's body—many of us will have those sorts of experiences, perhaps in dreams or perhaps as a result of stress and exhaustion during combat. Heck, part of the initiation rituals of peoples with Shamanistic religions involve the deliberate creation of such states so that a warrior can discover if he be an eagle or a war-stallion. Shamans themselves are said to sometimes nurture experiences of being feminine, perhaps to be closer to the maternal gods than men could ordinarily get.

So it is that I ask: What is this true 'me'? Modern man doesn't worry

the issue too much, so long as he can sustain the illusion that this 'me' is linked inextricably with his desires, at least his desires of today, if they be no more than a respectable middle-class life with some good football on television or if they be an effort for a man to become a woman or a woman to become a man. This implies, at least to an honest and faith-filled sacramental Christian, that this true 'me' inside must be free of capture by mundane reality, by matter and its relationships including for sure those which are revealed in the disturbing processes of evolutionary biology. In other words, this modern attitude which is held by nearly all including nearly all who call themselves 'Christians' is the ultimate rebellion against God as Creator. (This is a rebellion already seen by Herman Melville in the 1850s or so and explored in some of his writings and, most of all, through the character of Captain Ahab who seems to have been intended as a courageous version of Ralph Waldo Emerson.)

What is this true 'me'? To a Christian, it might be a soul. To many sorts of tougher modernists, it might be a will. To softer modernists, it's a so-called will which is actually desires untrained to higher purposes, individual or communal or idealistic. To those in the sexual revolutionary armies, it might be a 'me' that is female and stuck in a male body. To elaborate a little on the last, there is little doubt that male sexual development (to-date, more deeply researched than the female sexual development which is assumed to be, and might prove to be, simpler and more straightforward) is complex and things can go wrong that result in partially masculinized bones and muscles; it can even happen that the body is properly masculinized but not the brain so that sexual desires might be directed at members of the same sex. (Such desires might come for other reasons, but that's of little interest to me in this essay.)

Developmental problems in a biological creature are far different from the problems of a female 'person' stuck in a male body or vice versa or the strange variations found in the thoughts of those attempting to justify even the most dangerous and exploitive sort of sexual behavior. Restating our sexual problems in terms of our biology doesn't lead to easy answers but it allows us to move on. By this I mean we can move on from the local problem of a human being's sexuality to a more global context, the entirety of a human being in his individuality and communality.

The very way in which even the most important of sexual moral issues are discussed in individualistic terms by those who claim to be traditionalists lets us see how much the liberals, that is the heirs of Hobbes and

Locke, have won the war to control public language and concepts. It hardly matters whether those liberals call themselves libertarians or (free-market) conservatives or (collectivist) liberals <sup>1</sup>. The very fact that these institutions have been so badly damaged with the individuals moving on to malls and political conventions is evidence that communities have real existences somewhat separate from those of individuals, that is, they can't just be reconstituted according to the desires of even the most devout of Christians. The very fact that psychologists have begun to speak of large percentages of badly damaged individuals in the younger generations lets us know of the wounds from even partial separation from communities of various types and at various levels (that is, human communal being is federal and there are communities of communities). Much of the damage of radical individualism shows in the form of neurotic disorders such as narcissism but our problems with certain types of 'non-profit' and exhibitionistic crimes at least hints of more serious damage to some and perhaps the likelihood that those 'merely' neurotic disorders might fester and turn into still more serious conditions.

If only Christians could be true to their alleged faith in the all-powerful and all-knowing and all-loving Creator of this world. If only Christians could truly accept the facts of this world, including those sometimes nasty facts in evolutionary biology. But a similar comment could be made about that large group of secularists who were happy enough to use science to pound upon Christian teachings but are oblivious to the growing body of evidence that we humans are not a homogeneous species, one species but not homogeneous and not capable of simply moving into each other's neighborhoods without badly damaging what is good in those neighborhoods.

Too many Christians believe in biological evolution so long as it doesn't interfere with a traditional understanding of the story of Adam and Eve. Our hearts and livers may be the product of evolution but we have souls which were the result of a once and for all special creation of human being. From that point, we have all been more or less fallen versions of Adam and Eve and have all been capable of full moral awareness and of being self-governing.

Too many intellectually inclined conservatives believe in biological evolution so long as it doesn't cast doubts upon traditional schemes of morality

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<sup>1</sup>'Collectivist' liberals are the heirs of Hobbes and not some sort of special creation of the Late Modern Age; collectivism is that of Leviathan who protects the radical individual by crushing families and religious communities and ethnic communities and so on.

in terms of the categories of virtues and vices—all Chinese and Nigerians must have the same moral character as did those butchers and pin-makers studied by Adam Smith in Glasgow and London, the same mix of potential for specific sorts of nobility or degeneracy. Once the apeman evolved into Aristotle, the highest and final state of human being was reached.

Too many libertarians and collectivist liberals believe in biological evolution so long as it doesn't cast doubts upon the claim that all human beings are alike even if they evolved in dramatically different environments in the 50,000 years or so since a surprisingly small group of modern human beings were gathered in the northeastern part of Africa, some to go onto the Eurasian continent and some to turn back into Africa.

## 327 Are Communities Real Entities or Just As-if Entities?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2161>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/02/12.]

The answer is: communities are real entities, just as real and just as strange as the abstract forms of being, quantum wavefunctions, from which concrete being is shaped. But no more real nor more strange.

To see the reality of communities (and some other ‘abstract’ entities), we can return to my basic claim about being, one compatible with the teachings of St John the Evangelist in the Christian Testament and also with quantum physics and its basic understanding of concrete matter. I wrote briefly about the first in one of my first blog posts which is published in this book as Chapter 157, *Quantum Mechanics and Moral Formation*. I wrote just as briefly about the second in another early post which is published in this book as Chapter 156, *A Christian View of Einstein’s and Bohr’s Debate on Reality*.

This is how I’ve been writing and speaking:

1. Relationships are primary over stuff.
2. Relationships form stuff; stuff doesn’t come to exist and then start forming relationships.

I’ve generalized the second claim so that stuff is being—abstract as well as concrete. This is where we find hints of greater understandings than what is possible with the conventional split between being which is concrete and then abstractions which **describe** relationships between concrete being. This seemed pretty reasonable in the centuries before Darwin and

Einstein, before we began to realize that concrete stuff comes into being as the result of a ‘collapse’ (truly dangerous word) of something strange which we describe in terms of the wavefunction of quantum physics. Then again I say that wavefunction is a real form of being and our description is like the description of oxygen or more complex concrete entities. That wavefunction exists as does oxygen. And, of course, complex entities don’t just come into existence ready to love each other, to worship God, to build cities. Love comes from neural and hormonal activity directed toward, first in the opinion of many evolutionary theorists, offspring and only gradually toward mates; after many millenia of showing signs of burying loved ones as if preparing them for an afterlife and of showing related signs of gradual awareness of divine forces (maybe fertility goddesses at first), human beings developed instincts conducive to animistic paganism; and anatomically modern humans existed for as much as 100,000 years of technology at the same level as archaic human beings such as Neanderthals before starting to farm and to build cities. So far as the last goes, there is some serious evidence that farming and urban living led to an acceleration in human evolution—especially in abstract reasoning skills. Those modern human beings who retained primitive technology developed by apish human lines might not have had minds of the sort we’d recognize as being fully human.

My viewpoint is generous with the name of ‘being’ rather than stingy. One way of explaining this summary is to say that all that is not God is created by Him; there are not abstractions separate from God and from Creations but rather abstractions accessible to a concrete, flesh-and-blood creature just because those abstractions are also creatures. If they were not part of Creation, how could a creature access them?

Is the thing-like being of this world really so concrete? Equivalently, are the abstractions which develop in the adolescent brain real being? Do our mental conceptions deal with abstract being as real as the concrete being our hands and eyes deal with? Are the mathematics which seems to come to apish creatures of flesh-and-blood as if by magic true being, an abstract form of being? Was Dr Johnson’s common-sense (common-foot?) rebuttal of Bishop Berkeley’s claim about being as valid as it was painful? Would Dr Johnson have said his beloved Anglican Church wasn’t real because he couldn’t literally kick it with his foot? He could have kicked Winchester Cathedral; he could have kicked an Anglican bishop or a devout widow; he couldn’t have kicked the Anglican Church as such. Certainly, he couldn’t have kicked the seemingly more vaporous Body of Christ, which he believed

in though he might have differed from me in the particular definition of that Body.

What would Dr Johnson have said about the Body of Christ, or any of its particular communal members—such as the Anglican or Catholic or Orthodox churches? If pushed to speak about something so dangerous—and not just because of the religious conflicts still remembered in terms of blood and mutilated human beings, he might very well have spoken in terms similar to those his Deistic (or atheistic?) friend, Adam Smith, had used in discussing the economies of Scotland and England and perhaps much of Western Europe. The Invisible Hand was perhaps partly a metaphor to Adam Smith, but it's effects were observable, for real. If it was truly a metaphor, it was one meant to speak of real relationships among human beings, individual and well as communal (beginning with families and partners). Those relationships organized economies as if by magic. We can believe in magic or we can hold the belief which is the modern equivalent of magic: it just happens and so we'll wave our hands about and move on. Some Medieval thinkers claimed a man couldn't be made of soul and body where soul is of a different sort of being from body; assuming such plays too loose with the concept of being. I'd say the same about abstractions and thing-like being—ultimately, they have to be derived from the same sort of proto-stuff which is some sort of abstract being, such as the wavefunction of quantum physics.

The economic relationships observed by Adam Smith shaped a true economic community into being.

Unfortunately, the invisible forces of magic have been banished only to be replaced by a dullness of thought, not what Adam Smith would have wished upon us. We think that so long as we deny magic, we are being rational and scientific. The simple, including those who choose simplicity, just wave their hands; the more sophisticated write and speak vaguely of self-organizing forces, imagining that such is sufficient to explain how millions of human beings can act as if one, how the populations of United States or Russia or Vietnam can act 'as-if' those states have a true existence and only as-if. To be sure, there are many, especially knowledgeable historians and novelists, who accept reality and do write and speak of nations and other communities as having true existence. That existence is sometimes a lot more fluid, more ephemeral, than some would admit, but those nations and other communities can show signs of unity and coherence and completeness during their existence, momentary or long-lasting. It is

sometimes appropriate to speak of real effects as being caused as if by an entity, but sometimes ‘as-if’ should be ‘is’.

In our ordinary discourse we have little power to think or speak of such matters as entities which remain themselves while being fully members of one or more communities. We know only about individuals integrated into Soviet or Borg-like collectives or else communities which are nothing but voluntary and contractual gatherings of individuals. I suspect that family-centered liberals, whether free-market ‘conservatives’ or big-government liberals or free-market and big-government whatever, have done nothing—or at least have been able to do nothing—to protect the family just because its very existence is in conflict with their more deeply held beliefs. To them, communities at all levels and scales are nominal entities just existing to serve freestanding individuals. These very modern thinkers and doers wish mostly to keep these individual human beings free from membership in any community claiming to have real existence—including religious communities such as the People of Israel or the Body of Christ.

Naming something doesn’t always indicate true existence of that something, but any something which is named builds up evidence for real existence the longer that name, or similar names, is used and the more essential it becomes to general human understandings of their world, including our own human being. I claim that some named but invisible entities, such as ‘mind’ or ‘soul’ and ‘community’ and many mathematical entities, have existence as real as that of matter which itself comes mysteriously from some sort of particularization of what is named as ‘quantum wavefunctions’, mathematical functions which are—in my opinions—real being, though a bit abstract to say the least.

# 328 Empathy as a Fundamental Human Way to Understand Ourselves and Other Complex Entities

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2185>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/02/22.]

I'd like to return for a slightly different discussion of the subject of Chapter 251, *Darwin, Einstein, and the Totemic Mind*:

In the totemic mind of ancient hunters of elk, we see the possibility of modern hunters of the secrets of God's Creation, hunters who carry out their quest in the acts of shaping their minds to embody the very actions and traits of what they study. There is nothing mystical going on here, simply normal events in a universe which rewards, at least with survival and perhaps reproductive success, those who are able and willing to reshape their minds to encapsulate their environments, to put themselves in the place of their prey for greater success in hunting, more recently to put themselves in the place of Nature in pagan terms or of the Creator in Christian terms. It's interesting that Einstein was an atheist more than not but one of his speculative strategies was to put himself in the place of the Old One. At other times, he'd ride a wave of light, putting himself in the place of a photon.

To understand the other, radically other or slightly other, we must be

able to put ourselves in their place. Criminal investigators know this as do fighter pilots and anthropologists. Of those three, I suspect fighter pilots are the best at the task.

Empathy isn't some kind of sentiment but rather a serious effort by a human being, mind and heart and hands, to take on another identity. After all, the most economical understanding of 'self' in light of modern neuroscience is as a narrative of sorts we create in our brain, a narrative that shades and shapes, blackens and deforms, all of our relationships with our own bodies and with all that lies around us, material and immaterial alike. This is a crude description of mind, easily expandable to include moral and other forms of reasoning, as well as such relationships as loves of various sorts. More generally, it is a description of 'person' and not just of 'mind'. We are closer to our own bodies and our own perspectives than we are to those of our friends or someone from Greece or Russia, but a strongly empathetic brain works in both cases to create a model which might be described as a 'person'. I also claim this process is what makes us our communities. To a Christian, this process culminates in the state where we are fully Christ, that is—the Body of Christ, and yet remain our individual selves.

All of this could be labeled 'mystical' if you are so inclined, but it can all be described in terms of modern knowledge of what we Christians call Creation, knowledge which was abstractly anticipated by mathematical work in the 19th century—work used by Einstein in describing a Universe which is one though the individual galaxies and planets and living creatures retain their individual being and even physical properties not quite those of the Universe. (See Chapter 193, *A Universe is More than it Contains*, for a very short discussion I'm working to enlarge as part of a new book which might prove to be multiple volumes.)

Unfortunately, Americans don't seem to be able to deal with their own brain processes well enough to see themselves honestly and clearly; brain-washed by the gray water of modern liberalism, right and left, we don't have any plausible understanding of the parts of ourselves which are the public political communities of the United States. We wander around as if billiard balls which bounce off of other billiard balls or the cushions of the table but never enter into truer relationships. We behave in such a manner because we've allowed ourselves to see ourselves as hard, unyielding individual entities and because we are daily trained by schools and the entertainment industry and the words of our leaders, cultural and religious

as well as political, to behave in such an atrocious manner.

When it comes to alien communities, whether those of Eastern Europe or of Detroit and San Francisco—I grew up in New England, Americans seem to have very little ability to piece together an understanding rational enough and coherent enough to be labeled empathetic. Perhaps, we do have some limited ability to understand our own emotions and those of others.

Our inability to see ourselves truly even in our individual selves, our inability to see ourselves as communal human beings as well as individual human beings, our inability to put ourselves in the place of the alien others—even as our leaders unleash brutal military power against them—are incapacities quite intertwined. We need, first of all, to realize we don't inherently or naturally exist as anything which could be truly called a 'person'. We create even that persona, our own higher selves, by way of constructing that narrative I proposed above, a narrative which can be regarded as a model in our brains, a model of our brains and our livers and our toes and our relationships with pets and the landscape and our cars and with other human being whether individual or communal. Once we admit this and begin to integrate it into our ways of thought and feeling and behavior, then we can move on to establish better relationships with our own communities and with alien others, individual and communal.



# 329 Human Moral Order: Developing Better Tools for Understanding

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2240>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/06/28.]

For background, I'll make these three claims without trying to justify them:

- Human beings don't come together just to be together or for any other sentimental reason; human beings come together to do things and because they are dependent upon each other, perhaps as a result of doing things together.
- Most moral behavior is learned within the context of a specific set of communities of various types and scales (such as nation and town, parish or local community, and Christianity as a whole) and is manifested in response to particular cues; members of different morally well-ordered communities may come into conflict over specific issues (even one so simple as: should retail prices be set high and negotiated or set at some 'fair' and non-negotiable price?).
- Individual moral behavior does not readily generate small-group moral behavior and has little obvious effect on large-group moral behavior.

That last claim tells us we have a deep chasm to bridge. Let's try to at least produce a conceptual design of that bridge by stealing some sophisticated ideas from abstract regions of modern mathematics—though the

first stages of this design will involve mathematics not nearly sophisticated enough to produce a real bridge.

We should always remember that individual human beings are, for the most part though not the totality, the building blocks of all human communal being. Thus it is that we must always qualify the third point above; individual moral behavior ‘first’ creates communal moral behavior which then guides further development of individual moral behavior. Communal moral behavior, indeed communal human being, reflects also principles of order which are part of our world and which we know in specifics only as it emerges. Those principles can be derived from more abstract possibilities which can be understood in terms of modern abstract mathematics.

The American physicist John Wheeler once summarized general relativity, Einstein’s theory of gravity, by saying that matter tells space how to shape itself and space then tells matter how to move. Maybe we can play around with this metaphor. In prior years, I expressed the stolen and re-used idea as:

Human beings tell moral space how to shape itself and moral space then tells human beings how to move through life—how to act.

Now, I’m more likely to claim:

Individual human moral actors tell their communities how to shape themselves and those communities then tell individual human beings how to move through life—how to act.

Remember these processes aren’t fully controlled by the human will; they reflect abstract principles of order which we don’t understand very well at all. We need to work toward such an understanding.

We can see readily that the processes which bring order to human being, individual and communal, are recursive processes which began, back in the mists of time, as a bootstrapping of sorts. Human moral order has its beginning in the processes of self-organization which brought about some sorts of complex chemicals (perhaps early forms of DNA or RNA), the precursors of life. From there, we move by nasty processes and cooperative processes through cells and colonies of cells and organisms of multiple cells and societies of organisms. The problem at hand is: how to develop a

disciplined body of words and concepts to describe human being and its acts, individual and communal, in all of its complexity?

This is a problem I'm dealing with in a book I'm writing. It's not a problem to be solved in the way of a high school algebra problem, but rather a problem of developing concepts and terms to deal with dynamic processes in a population of complex entities. Nor am I claiming that it is possible to develop a fully quantitative, closed-form answer to: "What is the meaning of life?" Even as a Christian who believes in absolute truths, I see life as a process to be described and understood as it happens because life is ultimately something God shares with us and something we can learn to share with God. Non-Christians should be able to easily translate this into their own terms.

I'll provide a simple statement of the a first stage in understanding human being.

Imagine a manifold,  $U$ , which represents, is a model of, some well-ordered community. The 'points',  $x$ , of  $U$ , are actually themselves complex individuals in that community. Those points can be mapped to a manifold,  $V$ . Think of  $V$  as a Euclidean or Cartesian  $n$ -dimensional coordinate system for now. The points of  $V$  are themselves descriptions of complex states of being (think:  $x(1), x(2), \dots, x(n)$ ).

We can give our imaginations a bit of free-play—without going beyond the freedoms which are allowed by modern, abstract mathematics. In particular, we can think of the second manifold— $V$ , as having an  $x(1)$  which involves a fully quantitative description of some aspect of individual human being while  $x(7)$  is a partially ordered and qualitative description of, for example, a woman's goodness or saintliness. Another variable, say  $x(99)$ , might represent a characteristic set by a 'random' (that is—factual) process.

Now, let's add a little to the basic model. I spoke of mapping points, individuals, from the global manifold, communities, to a manifold which provides some description of the actual state of being for individuals. That is, for an  $x$  belonging to  $U$ ,  $f(x)$  is a well-defined 'point' (which will actually be some more or less complex set) on  $V$ . This  $f()$  is a mapping in the intuitive sense and not a function which grinds up numbers and outputs one or more numbers. (In a more sophisticated model, that well-defined point of  $f(x)$  would be a region of states of being over which an individual's characteristics roam; that is, even if a woman is on a clear trajectory toward goodness, she might regress a little at times.) It's best, for both reasons of the underlying being and also for better use of the mathematical concepts, if there is a

well-behaved inverse function going from  $V$  back to  $U$ . Let's designate this as  $g(f(x))$ , partly for typesetting reasons but mostly because it might not be exactly an inverse but only 'approximately' due to uncertainties in the state of being and also possible uncertainties in the 'location' of that individual in the community.

So, let us think of the real being of a community and underlying individuals. How does this system ever come into being? Can we think of a poorly ordered group of individuals and a mapping,  $g(y)$ , where  $y$  is approximately  $f(x)$  and allows a bootstrapping of a community? Or do we think of  $U$  as already existing as a result of ancient evolutionary events which we may or may not ever be able to reconstruct? That would leave the bootstrapping process to specialists and allow us to work with the current world of individuals and communities. For now, it's probably best to think of  $U$  and  $V$  as both already existing, realizing that both communities and individuals are the result of ongoing dynamical processes.

There is much to be explored in this effort to bring some discipline to our understanding of human being, discipline which works with rather than suppressing the richness and complexity of concrete human being, individual and communal. Moreover, there is the complication that I already know there are more powerful and more flexible ways of combining individuals into communities or breaking up communities into individuals. I don't have a good handle for now on those ways and, in any case, see great advantages in working toward more powerful ways of thought as a process of climbing a long stairway by aiming at one landing after another. If you know as much or more of mathematics as I currently do: think of these more powerful ways as drawn from algebraic topology and category theory and other abstractions of abstractions of . . .

So it is that my next post will discuss the problems of seeing moral order as arising in a world of evolutionary and developmental processes which can be very nasty indeed. But those processes at their nastiest lead to some sort of order. How can moral order arise from forms of order based upon a struggle to eat before being eaten or to reproduce faster than your neighbor? I won't have any good answers, but I'll try to produce some insights which might lead to a good understanding in a year or maybe a century.

# 330 Human Moral Order: Building Upon General Forms of Order

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2244>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/07/12.]

Let me start by discussing war, a situation in which leaders of states often try to impose their will by wreaking havoc and unleashing forces of disorder, all the while thinking they can keep matters under control. Anthropologists, working with archaeologists and other pre-historians, now have strong evidence that the average level of violent killing (typically, over a generation or so) is lower when states are in power, even during the 20th century with its huge wars, than it is in small-group, pre-civilizational human societies. Tribes and still smaller groups kill members of other human groups, sometimes members of their own group, at surprisingly high rates, though small numbers obscured this from careless observers, such as Margaret Mead, who lived with tribal peoples for short periods of time. The standard reference on this topic, which I haven't yet read, is: *War Before Civilization* [81] by Lawrence H Keeley. (I have read books which summarized Keeley's findings and relied upon them.)

As a speculation, I'll claim that the violent attitudes of the historical books of the Bible show us tribal jingoism evolving into a sort of early state jingoism, far from ideal but a major way down the path toward a greater order, one more clearly moral in a global sense and one which, even in the near-term, allows ordinary human beings to make a living and maybe even seek prosperity for themselves and their children. By 'global', I refer to the development of a sense of moral order which extends to human

groups other than our own; this isn't a once and for all leap to a Christ-like sense of responsibility for all human beings—such is nice as a prophetic statement but any effort to practice such a global morality under current circumstances, and maybe any circumstances which could ever be in this mortal realm, is merely a deluded form of messianism.

Consistent with the above discussion, some commentators, including some I read regularly on the Internet, maintain that the most basic concepts of just-war theory, including that of criminal war, make only limited sense in the real world, and are unenforceable—perhaps just because of the practical difficulties in setting up strong moral constraints on the behavior of states and other holders of great power. There are other arguments, including those involving knowledge in complex, evolving situations. I won't even try to complete a catalog of practical arguments.

A good book for putting things in perspective is one about Catholic and Protestant just-war theory written by a Mennonite theologian who was an advocate of radical nonviolence and definitely didn't believe in just-war theory: *When War is Unjust: Being Honest in Just-war Thinking* [153] by John Howard Yoder. He came to the conclusion that just-war theory is intellectually coherent but inconsistent with the example set by Jesus Christ and, in practical terms, isn't possible given the politics of the modern world.

Before going on, I'll note that none of this implies that pre-civilization tribal peoples are nasty, confederated tribal peoples a little less so, vassal-based kingdoms less than that, and so on up to the liberal, kind of meritocratic, certainly bureaucratic, welfare-warfare states of the modern West. We modern peoples are raised so that we are gentler than our tribal ancestors but that can also mean our virtues are softer. By confederated tribal peoples, I refer to such large and partially organized masses such as the larger groups of Celts or Germans as they entered central or western Europe in historical times—the *Franks* are one good example for which solid facts are known (see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franks>). This part of the process is important for a deeper understanding. The German peoples were not somehow born as members of well-defined tribes, let alone as members of a greater nation of Germany. The great tribes, Franks and various '-goths' and Vandals and others, were coalitions which gathered around successful small tribes. This is a process which worked well when it was gradual and slow and not so well when various ambitious men tried to force the process to keep moving toward ever larger 'nations'.

What Keeley and other anthropologists or pre-historians see and some

others don't is the evolutionary and developmental nature of the human social world. More exactly, they see that sort of progress and regress as being of a more substantial, and less formal, sort than have mainstream modern thinkers from at least the time of Thomas Hobbes (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas\\_Hobbes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Hobbes)). This mistake largely resulted from a mistaken view that all 'true' human beings were pretty much the same but for God granting better opportunities to some, and—at the same time—giving them the duty to convert, say, Southern Asians into Englishmen. This sort of attitude, is a failure to see the depths of human being and the consequent depth of environmental (including cultural) shaping. It might well be due to the misunderstanding of the book of *Genesis* as a transparent revelation, thus a book susceptible to literalistic readings. The founders of modern liberalism shared a basic understanding of the origin and nature of man with Biblical fundamentalists of the 20th and 21st centuries. Man is a special creation. Our parents were fully modern human beings at the time of that creation and we are the same, members of a never-changing race.

Man was always man. Nigerian man is no different from Norwegian. Adam, in his Nigerian and Norwegian nature, was little different from Hobbes and Rousseau and the mathematically-inclined Philosophes. When we seem different, it is because our flawed wills or perhaps our environments keep us from being Adam. It is a fixable problem when a tribesman from Australia or Kenya or Siberia fails to be pretty much the same as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, or at least his man-servant. Thus it was that modern liberalism is founded upon the Biblical literalism which is so viciously attacked by most modern liberals.

Modern liberals most certainly underestimate the sheer bulk of the heritage of both good and bad thoughts they have from their ancestors, the efforts and sacrifices of those ancestors in building the modern West, and the similar efforts and sacrifices necessary for any primitive people to adopt some sort of civilized life.

As a result of this shallow understanding of human being, many modern humans hold, if only implicitly, a view that some call the magic-dirt theory. Select an arbitrary group of human beings, a dozen from a tribe in Africa and a dozen from a primitive farming village in the interior of China and a dozen Brahmins from Myanmar and a few dozen from other random spots. Put them in Danbury, Connecticut and pretty soon they'll all be good Yankees feasting on New England pot roasts, rooting for the Red Sox, and arguing about the relative merits of the political wisdom of Donald Trump

and Hillary Clinton.

This is a very particular universe in a Creation still more particular. The particularity becomes downright peculiar when we take a look at complex, concrete entities in this universe. Human beings are most certainly complex, concrete, and peculiar. The ways human beings have traveled were most certainly complex, concrete, and peculiar. And “ways”, plural, is the right term. About 50,000 years ago, there were only a few tens of thousands modern human beings, with perhaps some scattered outlier groups but most seemingly resident in northeastern Africa. They split into two groups, some staying in Africa or even turning to move back into tropical jungles or savannas or forestlands or mountainous regions or deserts. Others left Africa.

One subgroup of those who left Africa are called the Ancient Northern Eurasians (ANEs) by anthropologists. Those ancestors of ANEs stopped for a short break in the Near East where they mated with Neanderthals—or perhaps some of their females were raped by our all-too human cousins who were quite robust and all too inclined to kill mammoths and wild cattle at short-range with thrusting spears. Tough guys, though there is no reason to believe they were inherently more brutal than we are.

In any case, our ancestors continued into Eurasian regions, bearing problems and advantages gained from their Neanderthal genes—both included changes to our already inadequate immune systems. Those human beings earned their designation as ANEs by moving north into the great steppes of Asia, perhaps moving south again as glaciers advanced, moving north and south until the glaciers left for then and now but likely not for ever. Some moved east, apparently picking up women from the proto-Han, and moved across the Bering Strait land-bridge to become the major of perhaps 3 groups of founders of the American Indians. Other ANEs moved into northeast Asia to become Siberians or Mongols. Some moved west to the regions north and mostly west of the Black Sea, herding animals including horses, domesticating a single stallion (DNA evidence says one stallion was the male ancestor of all domesticated horses), developing metal technology and wheeled vehicles, developing a patronage-based chieftain system, and moving into more western parts of Europe over a couple thousand years or more to become Celts, Gaels (apparently a separate variety of ‘Celt’), Italic-speaking peoples including Romans (close cousins of the Celts they came to hate and fear), Germans, Scandinavians, Slavs, and perhaps others. These were the western branch of the Indo-European peoples and that Western

branch used their chieftain-centered political system to great advantage in conquering vast regions—as their cousins, the Aryans or Sanskrit people, did in conquering major parts of modern-day India.

This ends a near comic-book summarization of the early history of some Indo-European peoples. Their history was, as the saying goes, particular and peculiar and became more so as the western movement led to mating and other less attractive forms of interaction with the ‘aboriginal’ peoples of Europe, usually called hunter-gatherers with some geographical descriptor of east or west. Even the mating was often in the form of rape, or at least incorporation into the harem of a warrior, after the aboriginal men had been killed. Nasty, and the same probably was true of those ancestors of many American Indians when those ANEs made off with women from the ancestral population of Han Chinese.

The kinder, gentler social systems of the modern West—which systems are decaying rapidly—are the result of specific streams of events which involved peculiar peoples responding to particular opportunities and problems in their specific, peculiar, particular environments. Some of the Anglo-Saxon, Danish, Norman, and mixed-British kings were more brutal than Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi. Some were as sadistic, perhaps as paranoid, as Stalin. Yet, they played major roles in the narrative that led to the British Parliament and the American Constitution. And their role was often positive if only in their suppression of other brutal, raping, looting warlords. There is some goodness, however limited, in the basic order established by a brutal warlord. Despite the bloody wars waged by the Romans, it’s likely that they left the world with more healthy and reasonably prosperous human beings by way of the suppression of non-state forms of violence.

After some unknowable point in time, the order of what would become the Anglo-American regions of the West had clearly changed (if only temporarily) into a recognizably moral order. We in the West are falling into disorder, even as we support strange forms of alleged human rights which involve behaviors which become prominent in periods of decadence. We in the West then condemn those, such as the Russians and Chinese, who are rising into greater forms of order not so different from the past which led to the liberties and wealth of our past few centuries; we condemn those peoples because they don’t celebrate forms of disordered behavior.

It’s strange that we might be entering a period when it will be possible to deal with issues of the order proper to a particular complex entity—

mathematicians and scientists have developed powerful tools of thought which have risen to levels of abstraction which can be labeled as ‘qualitative’. My obsession: to lay at least a part of a foundation for ways of discussing human being or even the entirety of Creation so as to properly respect qualitative aspects and parts as well as quantitative aspects and parts, that is—to properly respect both abstract and concrete forms of being.

# 331 Can Good Individuals Form an Evil Country or an Evil People?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2264>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/08/30.]

It's not plausible that morally well-ordered communities will be composed of a population containing a high percentage of morally ill-ordered individuals. One problem is that a morally well-ordered community with even a substantial minority of morally ill-ordered individuals would be a flock of sheep with the wolves living in the flock. But it seems plausible to me that morally ill-ordered communities might form from a population of morally well-ordered individuals. (I simplify greatly as there are a large number of possibilities involving well-ordering and ill-ordering at various levels of human being.)

I'll point to an earlier essay where I wrote of the foundations of good order, even if that good order doesn't rise to the higher level that we moderns would recognize as truly moral. See Chapter 330, *Human Moral Order: Building Upon General Forms of Order*.

The order of swarming sharks precedes the order of the wolf-pack which precedes that of paleolithic human tribes which precedes the political order found in larger tribes and raiding bands of the iron-age Indo-Europeans and other like peoples on horseback which precedes. . .

The earlier forms of order involve the construction of hierarchical relationships and peer relationships based upon various factors including physical power, charisma, cleverness, and even sheer narcissistic ego on the part of would-be leaders. See Chapter 428, *Be Obnoxious and Be Our Leader*

for a brief discussion of that latter factor.

Let me make a broad reference to the writings of Hannah Arendt who was Austrian and Jewish. Professor Arendt was a sometimes controversial (she had substance and courage) philosopher and historian of modern totalitarianism including that of the Nazis. Having interviewed Adolf Eichmann, the logistics genius behind the Holocaust and related horrors after the Israeli prosecutors did their preliminary interrogations, she claimed he was one of the nicest men she'd ever met.

In *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam*, Robert McNamara (with Brian VanDeMark) wrote in similar terms of himself and the other high-level officials who made the 'authoritative' evaluations of the situation in Vietnam and made the recommendations to the President as to future actions. Those well-dressed and well-credentialed men and women were nice people who were really worried about crossing items off their to-do lists so they could get into their nice cars and drive along nice highways to their nice homes where their... They hadn't bothered to read reports in front of them which—McNamara verified this in the still-private papers of President Kennedy and President Johnson—gave undeniable evidence that those officials in Washington were forcing the US military to fight a truly criminal war.

The nice Germans of the 1930s and 1940s, the nice Americans since at least the days of the Indian and then African slave-trades and the Chinese opium trade, were living in acceptance of the evil which their countries were doing. In the case of the Americans of the Northeast and the Midwest, they enjoyed for decades a tremendous era of booms—punctuated by collapses, but the upward trend was strong over the 1800s—and those booms were financed at least in a major part by that trafficking in human beings and by that trafficking of opium into China against the wishes of the imperial government; we even participated in minor ways in crushing any uprisings by the peoples of East Asia when they tried to push the criminal and exploitive sea-devils (Europeans as well as Americans) out of their countries. In a manner of speaking, we Americans were profiteering sidekicks of the British gangsters in our exploitive adventures in East Asia, especially China. It must also be noted that, whatever the efforts of Americans opposed to the African slave-trade, that trade went on so long as it was protected or at least tolerated by the British and then it ended when the British navy began to hang, upon capture, officers of slave-trading ships and to bring the rest of the crew to Great Britain for trial.

In many ways, Americans have been a country of good individuals, certainly when we responded generously to natural disasters or other problems but even when some of us were off in various regions stealing and killing and engaging in various profitable activities, such as drug-smuggling or human-trafficking. Something very similar was true of those Germans of the 1930s and 1940s. I'm sure most were nice, or at least silently and cowardly well-wishing, to their Jewish neighbors right up to the arrival of the Gestapo trucks.

So, yes, good human beings can come together to form communities which are criminal, even to an extent where they can be, at least sometimes, described as evil.

I'm dealing with various issues of this sort as I continue making some baby-steps towards understanding the reality of human being in its individual and communal forms. I plan on posting the book of this short journey on the Internet—God willing—before the end of 2016. It is important to deal with some issues beyond the scope of that baby-step book that I might prevent some fundamental errors.

My first efforts will cover some very basic definitions of individual and communal human being, touching very lightly upon complex entities in general. The emphasis will be upon providing ways of speaking rationally and with proper piety of 'communal being'; I use scare quotes only because I think in terms of human communities and human individuals but also in terms of the universe and all the individual entities which are part of the universe but don't fully define it or constrain it in the way of much modern thought to be only the sum of stars and gas clouds and so on. (See Chapter 193, *A Universe is More than it Contains* for a discussion of a claim made by a prominent physicist-cosmologist.)

The universe is not just a way of speaking about an assemblage of lesser physical entities and a human community is not just a way of speaking about an assemblage of individual human beings. More than that, the formation of human being—that is, the relationship of individual human beings to communal human beings—has to be understood in dynamic terms. Those dynamic terms are oh-so important but are at least a second-stage of knowing, of responding with mind and heart and hands to the way things are and not to the way we assume abstract entities to be based upon modern thinkers, many of high-quality and fruitful of insight but far too inclined to believe that human communities are nominal entities, just voluntary gatherings of the only true human beings—individuals. In this age, to

speak of the universe in such terms, as only a name for an ad-hoc gathering of stars and so on, would invite ridicule from scientists who know well that the universe is a somewhat abstract entity with its own properties apart from the properties of what it contains.

In an analogical sense, the book I'm currently writing is about pre-Galilean kinematics as opposed to Galilean dynamics.

The universe is for real and so are human communities. And so I can see the possibility, however dimly for now, of speaking rationally of human communities which are evil though 'made up' of nearly all good human individuals. And that possibility arises by abstract ideas out of the fields of abstract mathematics which are used to understand assemblages of entities, possibly themselves complex, as being evidence of a single, complex 'communal' entity. I'm extending the ways of thinking developed by Bernhard Riemann (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bernhard\\_Riemann](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bernhard_Riemann)) and used with great effect by Albert Einstein to describe the universe as an entity on its own. Einstein was himself a philosophical sort of physicist but his theory of General Relativity (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General\\_relativity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_relativity)) described possible quantitative models but my claim is that this form of mathematical (mostly geometric and topological) reasoning can be abstracted to deal with qualitative forms of being and with forms of being, including human being, which is a complexity of quantitative and qualitative parts and aspects.

I'm not writing about proofs nor about quantitative calculations. I can't prove the Body of Christ exists, however tentatively in this mortal realm, but I think I can take first steps in providing ways of talking about it in rational terms, that is, terms rational in the context of solid modern knowledge about many parts and aspects of God's Creation. And I certainly can't calculate the number of members of the Body of Christ, nor the percentage of living human beings who will rise from the grave to share the life of Jesus Christ and His Father and Their Holy Spirit, but—again—I think I can take first steps in providing ways of talking about it in rational terms.

# 332 Are Warlords and Their Top Warriors Responsible for Our ‘Smart’ Genes?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2293>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/11/22.]

I might be adding 1 to 1 and getting 5, but...

In recent years, I’ve been reading a bit about human ancestry, especially that of those peoples with languages and cultures and at least some substantial amount of genes which came from some (proto-)Indo-European people. These peoples include Europeans, Iranians, northern Asiatic Indians, and some others. In December of 2015, I wrote three essays on the general issues:

- Chapter 324, *Yes, Genetics and Evolutionary Biology are Relevant to Our Political and Social Problems*,
- Chapter 325, *The Philosophies of Liberalism Are in Conflict with Reality*,
- Chapter 326, *Darwinism is Fine so Long as I Can Still Believe All Human Beings are Just Like Me*,

The first of those essays includes a bibliography which provides a list of most of the relevant books I had read to that time, all recommended by some respectable scholar and all containing a good body of knowledge as well as a sophisticated understanding of the issues; those books include some ‘mainstream’ history works which written by historians who had considered

this new archaeological and genetic knowledge. The books and writings on that list disagree on some issues, though some of the disagreements have been settled by more recent work. A lot of leads and links to various books on genetics and history—or both—and religion, as well as some commentary by a highly-regarded geneticist and commentator, Razib Khan, can be found at *Gene Expression Blog* at <http://www.unz.com/gnxp><sup>1</sup>.

In addition, there are some study results published in the past two years or so which bring the interested student of human being pretty much up to date on European descendants of those Indo-European peoples (there is also significant ancestry of European peoples from Anatolian first farmers and those already resident in Europe as of 10,000BC or so):

- *Massive migration from the steppe is a source for Indo-European languages in Europe* at <http://www.biorxiv.org/content/early/2015/02/10/013433>,
- *Ancient DNA shows European wipe-out of early Americans* at <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/04/160401144502.htm>, and
- *Familial migration of the Neolithic contrasts massive male migration during Bronze Age in Europe inferred from ancient X chromosomes* at <http://biorxiv.org/content/early/2016/09/30/078360>.

It seems pretty plausible to me that this all supports the possibility that those who led long-distance military raids or outright conquests and those who managed the logistics of a large migration of families and their goods and animals probably had high levels of intelligence of the sort allowing for political and military organizing and for tactical and strategic thinking. Some of those family or tribal leaders might have been brutish in some ways but all of them would have had to take care of the needs of their warriors or more diverse followers. Some might have had specifically technical intelligence so that they understood the metal technology behind their weapons, tools, wagon, gear for horses, etc. Some maybe were just good at selecting good blacksmiths, leather-workers, horse-breeders, and so forth. (Analogously, some have claimed that Genghis Khan was competent

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<sup>1</sup>Khan stopped posting at <http://www.unz.com/> but he can be found easily on the Web.

as a military leader but a genius as a political leader who picked out and nurtured great generals.)

Politics. Military matters. Organizing human communities and inspiring them to follow.

I'm not at all discounting the increase in intelligence as blacksmiths and other technicians became important and gained greater reproductive advantages, but they were probably selected in a social environment for which the war-lords and their greatest warriors were disproportionately responsible. In other words, as a speculation by an outsider knowing just enough to be dangerous, I'm suggesting that it was the warlords and great warriors who were the driving force behind the increase in human IQ, at least once the process first began; this speculation includes the idea that those warlords and warriors were the best customers of many of the blacksmiths and other technologists. The evidence indicates that the leaders of those military or migratory events gained reproductive advantages both by way of killing resident males and taking the girls and women and also by way of setting up their descendants in positions of power and wealth.

Interesting ideas to a Christian who believes in the Body of Christ, the idea that the friends of Christ are destined for an everlasting life of peace and fullness of our human nature. Why do we travel through a world where violence and disease and natural disasters are so common? The prophet Jeremiah asked such questions of God and records no revealed knowledge; he and many others have had to travel on, wondering and often mourning, but always struggling to keep the faith and to work towards God's Kingdom. We're farther along on in the journey and have great empirical knowledge of our past but still no convincing way of explaining why God makes us travel through such a wonderful but often distressing world to get to an everlasting life of peace and fulfillment of our legitimate desires.

To pile on a little, we have to remember that the book of Genesis tells us that it was the first murderer who founded civilization and technology. Maybe those ancient authors knew a lot more than we often think, even if they lived before the days of archaeology and genetics.

Food for thought, at least for those of us who wish to deal honestly with the Creator and His Creation, accepting what He actually did and working to build the Body of Christ in full recognition of the tough facts rather than just trying to jump toward some utopian state in this mortal realm.



## 333 The Amoral Roots of Moral Order

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2322>. It was finished and uploaded on 2017/01/17.]

Or...

Are they? That is, are the roots really amoral? More appropriately, do we humans see wrongly when we separate moral order from other sorts of order, raising moral order to angelic, ethereal realms? Once upon a time, when the West was truly Christian, we Western men did that with human nature. By tying Christian beliefs into these confused beliefs, we sought to protect “human dignity” from any hints we’re cousins to chimpanzees, more distant cousins to bears, still more distant cousins to alligators and eagles and sharks and so on. We paid a price: when we try to see ourselves as not quite creatures of this world, by trying to see the world of the resurrected as a realm of pure spirits rather than a completed and perfected version of this world, we badly damage the credibility of revealed truths—directly and indirectly by ceding our central role in a civilization which then advanced by leaving behind its Christian foundations. That the West has no other foundations and is now something of a low-flying castle in the sky is largely the fault of Christians who failed to see God’s Creation as it truly is rather than as we would wish it to be for our comfort and convenience.

I’ve dealt with these issues, but I risk repeating earlier thoughts because of the problems being caused by both Western Christian leaders and the so-called power-elites of the West as they thrash about, trying to save their own power and wealth—even at the risk of destroying what is left of the West, what could be used as part of the foundation for reforming or rebuilding a once great civilization which promised even more greatness. Powerholders

in the Vatican and other powerholders in Western Christianity have joined with the various sorts of neo-cluelessness in idealizing morality and human communal structures. In this way, they seek to hold onto power they no longer are capable of even understanding, let alone using properly.

This incoherent behavior of those who hold power in the West comes from a strange way of thinking among many in the West over recent centuries, even some who were extremely intelligent. In the spirit of the times, I could claim those many in the West, including most Christian leaders and intellectuals, apparently acquired their understanding of order and moral order from some book titled: *Order and Moral Order for the Totally Clueless Who Wish to Remain Totally Clueless*.

Life didn't jump from an oceanic swarm of eat-or-be-eaten critters up to Francis of Assisi, George Washington, and Albert Einstein. It also didn't jump from the common ancestor of humans and chimpanzees to human beings of such high achievements and (mostly) good moral order. It didn't jump from early hominids to Hammurabi, let alone to da Vinci or Goethe.

Civilized human life partly developed by way of barbarian warlords who could organize military raids and handle the logistics of taking captives to the slave-markets, by way of similar men building irrigation systems with labor extracted from human beings without a hint of representation, by way of the brutal conquests of the Chinese emperors as well as Mongols or Manchus and by way of decentralized conquest of European lands by Indo-European warlords. . .

Humans can only develop into civilized human beings, their tribes into civilizations, if they have the proper characteristics. The family lines of those particular humans gain those characteristics by way of natural selection, including selection for good social characteristics in the cases of human beings, voles and some other rodents, elephants, whales, and so on.

There is a nasty matter which arises just because the political theorists and practitioners of recent centuries, non-Christian and anti-Christian as well as Christian, have ignored the realities of evolution in positing that the abstract reasoning abilities of all peoples and of all individuals in those peoples have risen in unison. It's likely that many peoples are missing either the abstract reasoning ability or the proper emotional settings to be properly disturbed by, say, brutal war crimes committed by the leaders of their tribe or kingdom or empire or state.

In general, it takes a high level of reasoning ability to understand the huge and complex human communities of the modern world, to be even

potentially self-governing in a meaningful way rather than just being cattle to be manipulated by political machines or demagogues.

Geneticists tell us that a high percentage of Y-chromosomes in Western Europe, China, and probably most regions of civilized order came from a small number of men who were almost certainly great military and political leaders, though I'd guess that many blacksmiths and horse-breeders and others who had knowledge and skills important to the warriors also left a fair number of descendants. At the same time, political and military power seems to have given reproductive advantages to male-lines over many generations, so that the paternal lines of even successful merchants and technologists might have dwindled; many of those other men might have left us most of their genetic heritage through their daughters.

It is hardly surprising that the order of Indo-European warlords established the foundations of what would become Christian Europe. It is hardly surprising that the real but incomplete morality of warrior-bands is still with us in the West. It is hardly surprising that modern attempts to idealize morality as something above and beyond this Einsteinian and Darwinian universe is entangled with forces of moral breakdown, that is, idealists threaten the real foundations of higher morality and that could lead to a breakdown of higher morality.

The rise in IQs across Eurasia occurred rapidly over the past 10,000 years in apparent synch with the development of more advanced stone tools and weapons and then the development of metal technology, of semi-nomadic agriculture leading to true agriculture, of organized warfare and also the organized movements of somewhat larger groups of peoples—logistically complex movements since women and children and elderly men were in the migrating groups. All of this seems to have also been entangled with the development of harsh forms of order imposed by warriors, including the organization of larger-scale agricultural operations with the likelihood that clueless subsistence farmers were rounded up with threats of spears so that they could dig the irrigation ditches and settle into regions under the control of one warlord or another—the ancient works of Hebrew scripture give us stories of such complex events and make us aware that much suffering came with the benefits of urban living with its technologies.

It's far from clear that modern Western forms of liberal social organization and their associated forms of liberal morality will last. It's far from clear they are the best of currently possible ways to organize our human communities and to develop our systems of morality with rights and duties.

It's quite possible that we of the modern West have misunderstood the nature of order and of moral order so that we have simply exploited the material wealth and ordered communities we inherited, turning those communities into unstable forms so that the next few generations will inherit a civilization in ruins.

# 334 Freestanding Individuals Form Herds, Complete Human Beings Form Communities

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2333>. It was finished and uploaded on 2017/02/07.]

['Complete' in this essay refers only to the willingness of a human being to acknowledge his communal human being as well as his individual human being and is no claim that we human beings can ever be complete in this mortal realm.]

In Chapter 538, *Looking Backward, Moving Forward, Moving in Circles*, I questioned liberalism: is it ever good? Conservatism and progressivism can take on corrupt or misguided forms, but liberalism denies the reality of human communities, of communal human being, by declaring the sovereignty of individual human beings. I would suggest that there is no such sovereignty on the part of either individual human beings or communal human beings. Rather is there a complex entity which can be conceptualized as a surface with each small region being an independent entity.

I use 'surface' as an simple concept which can point to the truer, more complex concept of 'manifold'. A manifold can be as many dimensions as you wish. The surface of a globe, a 3-dimensional ball, is a 2-dimensional manifold which is pretty much a Euclidean plane in small regions (street maps are a good rendering of the reality) while any attempt to flatten out the entirety of Earth's surface or even large regions will lead to Euclidean planes which distort various parts of that surface.

I claim this is also the case with human communities and the small regions which are individual human beings—communities are analogically

manifolds with individuals being the small regions which are individuals. More radically, and mostly beyond the scope of this essay, I claim that the mathematics which can help describe the basic stuff of this concrete universe and the shaping of that stuff into complex entities is part of the being of that stuff and those entities.

But there is no way to claim the egg or the chicken, the individual or the community, comes first. In fact, it would seem to be the wrong way of speaking when it comes to human being, individual and communal, which is the result of very complex evolutionary and developmental processes. Individual and communal human being developed together and neither can really exist without the other; it's possible that we can find or at least hypothesize a species where we can observe individuals starting to form communities—some have claimed this is true of jellyfishes which are colonies of specialized individuals rather than true organisms.

If an individual human being doesn't have rich and satisfying communal relationships, he will be open to other offers, in a manner of speaking. The offer might come from an unordered group of human beings, street gangs of the non-criminal sort or at least not being involved with the worst sorts of crimes. It might come from a religious group, perhaps one that draws that relatively isolated human being away from what is left of his family or ethnic ties—for good or bad or both.

Human beings can be said, analogically, to clump together. Since human beings, individual and communal are dynamic entities, it is perhaps best to imagine a flow like that of healthy blood through the arteries and veins. Under good circumstances, the components of the blood will flow relatively freely in synchronization with each other, in chemical and mechanical and electrical relationships which establish that synchronization. But there is more involved, that more being well beyond the scope of this essay and being the study of theorists in the mathematics and sciences of complex systems. A school of fish can move as if directed by a single mind able to change the direction of each and every one of those fish as if by instantaneous communication and response. Rapid it is but not instantaneous; in fact, that tightly synchronized school is really a global entity which comes into existence as a result of only 'messages' and responses between each fish and the ones near it.

But the reality of human communities is richer and far more complex than the reality of schools of fish. We'll move on to more realistic but more ambiguous ways of dealing with human being.

It is better to think of human beings as needing social ties, strongly desiring them. We will form social ties even if we leave behind those to which we were born. If our lives at home, in our extended families, in our neighborhoods, in our ethnic communities, in our communities of worship, are weak or nonexistent, then we'll form attachments as we can. We Americans, probably the citizens of most countries in the West, are mobile and have regularly left behind all those ties, supportive and inconvenient as they are. Even when we live in the same town or small region for all of our lives, we are still mobile in place, if you allow such a strange but empirically justified idea.

When I was young, fourth or fifth grade, I was making my way through a collection of young-person's biographies (George Washington, Ben Franklin, some Amerindian leaders, and so on) when I happened to fall into a conversation with classmates during some sort of indoor recess; I learned I'd have to start watching *The Monkees* television show to be a part of their conversations. My fellow-youth in my hometown were far more interested in those rock-and-rollers than in George or Ben or Crazy Horse. It was only later that I learned I was cheated by a rapidly progressing process of separation from my ancestors from the British Isles. It was decades later that I learned my father's family had so effectively left behind even valid rumors of their roots as to have thought of our (probably) Saxon name, Fueston, as being some sort of Anglicized French name; a few years more and I learned that our Y-chromosome (paternal-line chromosome) is Irish Gaelic by way of Scotland, not French and not Saxon. It's hardly surprising that there is nothing left of extended family relationships with either my mother's or father's family. I've noticed that, like many American parents, mine were willing to break ties with their families while expecting their own children would retain good family ties.

But my ties to my peers in my hometown have always been weak, though I have a couple of nearly 60 year-old friendships. I was precocious when I was young though apparently not enough to make me freakish even in a country where intellectual talent is regarded with suspicion. I was actually interested in those academic subjects which so frustrated and bored nearly all boys and girls. Never once in my childhood in the town where I was raised, only occasionally after my return as an adult, did I hold conversations with fellow residents which dealt with those matters of deeper interest to me. It wasn't that I disdained the conversations about Sandy Koufax or about our families and friends and dogs, but I was forced to wrap the entirety of my

public mind and public interest around those topics as well as various topics of absolutely no interest to me, including *The Monkees*<sup>1</sup> and *Laugh-In*, and never once talked to another human being about my interest in physics (of which I knew nothing other than a few historical facts) and mathematics (little different) and history.

Being rather social in my general inclinations, I badly hurt the development of my talents in mathematical sciences by joining the march of the herd. Some sort of toughness or self-respect was missing or immature in my young self.

Though the particulars of my case might be peculiar, so to speak, this is a story repeated in the mass-consumer societies of the United States every day. I'm sure it's a common sort of story in most human societies, at least if they are in some state of ferment, in some state corresponding to a movement forward. And, in fact, this situation shouldn't be seen as thoroughly negative or even mostly negative. So long as a society is stable, preferably in a morally well-ordered way, most—though not all—young human beings can form healthy communal relationships though they might seem at first to just be joining the march of the herd. It can be negative, leading young men in disordered societies toward some sort of involvement with crime. It most surely led some German young men in the 1930s to follow groups of friends or even strong-willed individuals into Nazi activities. Lt Col Dave Grossman (in his book *On Killing*) relates, from the actual battle reports, how some American soldiers initially tried to stop the killing of unarmed civilians at My Lai but most of those joined in as they were caught up in the emotions, the blood-lust.

On the other hand, we can read in histories that those Germans and other Europeans under Nazi occupation bravely worked in the underground or in rescues of would-be victims of the Nazis so long as a substantial group responded to the leadership of a some strong-willed and moral person, perhaps a priest or minister or rabbi—there were more Jewish partisans and others 'hiding' in Nazi-controlled regions than we might think. We can see local churches or social clubs responding to the needs of the hungry or homeless, perhaps in a far-away region hit by a hurricane or earthquake. There are individuals, even some who are loners, who have acted in heroic

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<sup>1</sup>For what it's worth: I did think some of their music was good-quality popular music, though I'm not sure how such a judgment would hold up in a society in which young people grow up with rich folk music as well as the likes of 'classical' music which can satisfy mind as well as heart and hands (or feet).

ways; sometimes perhaps those human beings are helped a little by their lack of attachment to groups of human beings not responding properly. Mostly, we are at our best when we are members of communities, usually complex networks of communities, which themselves have clear thoughts, strong feelings, and good habits—all three of which are ordered to some system of moral order.

Our moral communities and, hence, our moral individual selves can be so easily deformed, even during the sorts of turbulent times which are leading to good times of strong moral order.

Day-to-day in our hi-tech American lives, what's important is those little pressures to pay attention to things of lesser importance, once the silly entertainment (*The Monkees*) of a sort which is actually good in proper amounts (the problem with TV is that it is so seductive, sit down at 7 and you come to your senses at 11) and, more recently, morally despicable entertainment. Lt Colonel Grossman, mentioned above as author of *On Killing*, was an Airborne Ranger in the US Army and later a psychologist specializing in the training of soldiers and he thinks only morally irresponsible parents would allow their children to watch *Rambo* or similar sorts of stuff. And that sort of stuff has gotten worse in its cynicism and its advocacy of hate and other emotions which are natural but not to be nurtured. It's amazing that so many who have made fortunes producing or acting in this sort of moral trash parade about in public as they pretend to some sort of moral superiority. That stuff isn't just despicable in abstract judgment. It eats away at our individual and communal moral characters. It can even help to make some of us, or some of our communities, outright evil.

We need to do the many little and bigger things which form and strengthen communities, caring for those close to us or—a lesser moral duty—for those poor people in our larger communities or in another parts of our countries or even those on other continents. We need to fill our minds and hearts with good stuff and to shape our hands to good habits. We do these good things by becoming members of morally well-ordered communities; by doing these good things, we shape our communities to a better moral order. It takes generations. Complex human communities, entire civilizations or lesser moral communities, can be destroyed in only a few years but it will take generations to rebuild them—if they are rebuilt at all.

By failing to take these steps toward individual and communal moral order, we become morally weak, as I was as a boy under peer-pressure (unconscious on the part of those peers who were very good young people)

to watch a lot of television and as were those Americans who engaged in hot-blooded murder of unarmed human beings in My Lai. We attach ourselves to groups which are themselves morally unordered, perhaps even morally disordered, even when most or all of the members of those groups are individually morally well-ordered or at least okay-ordered. You might even say we too readily join the herd-like groups worshipping the Lord of the Flies.

Those of us who are Christians believe that the ultimate community is the Body of Christ and, yet, other communities are also potentially good, many of those communities realize some or much of that potential in this world. I've claimed in some of my writings that these communities, economic and political and academic and professional and ethnic and work-centered and so on, will go with us to Heaven where they will be perfected and completed. Heaven will be one community of the friends of Christ and yet that one community will be a symphony of many communities, allowing the fullness and perfection of human life to be realized.

## 335 The Life of a Human Animal Begins at Conception. And Ends at Death. Maybe.

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2409>. It was finished and uploaded on 2017/06/06.]

In the essay, *When Does Human Life Begin?* (see <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/when-does-human-life-begin/>), Brook Stanton makes a clear and forceful statement, with highly summarized arguments which are really—and he admits so—references to well-established facts and theories of modern biology: human life begins at conception. He doesn't show awareness that there is some, if not total, truth in the claim that there are no facts without theories; that is, even raw or brute facts are interpreted by our perceptions and conceptions of what the context of those facts is, what the world is. By the end of his short essay, Stanton does show an awareness of the importance of philosophy in forming greater understandings, based upon the idea that "Accurate science should be the starting point for resolving the philosophical question, not the reverse." Not entirely true. I would urge reading of his entire short essay because of the complex evaluation I'm making of the truth and insights of that essay, as well as the misleading nature of his viewpoint. Let me first quote the beginning of Stanton's essay and then I'll move on with my explanations:

The question of when a human life begins is a strictly scientific one and one for which the scientific community has had an empirical, internationally acknowledged answer for a very long time.

For more than a century, the field of human embryology has documented that in human sexual reproduction a new, whole, individual, living human being begins to exist at “first contact” between a sperm and an oocyte/“egg” (the beginning of the process known as fertilization.) Immediately when these two mere cells make first contact and fuse, organism proteins and enzymes specific to humans are produced. One new single-cell human being with his or her own new, unique, and complete set of human DNA begins to exist. This is an internationally recognized empirical fact that has been documented by the Carnegie Stages of Early Human Embryonic Development since 1942, and updated every year since then to the present by the international nomenclature committee (FIPAT). The 23 Carnegie Stages cover human development during the eight-week embryonic period, and a new human being is represented by Carnegie Stage 1a.

Stanton notes that the life of a human being, new and unique, begins at conception. True enough. Sort of. At least in most cases. Stanton doesn't seem to know about infrequent situations which don't follow his simple understanding. For example, there are human beings who are chimeras, results of the mergers of two different fertilized egg-cells, mergers of two organisms with two different unique sets of DNA. So far as I know, more than two are even possible. In the article, *Chimera (genetics)* at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chimera\\_\(genetics\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chimera_(genetics)), you can learn that some of those with mixed sexual characteristic are chimeras and even that a female chimera might have given birth to children carrying DNA which was not that found in most of her body. Moreover, lesser forms of this phenomena often result in strangeness in blood type when one embryo picks up only some cells from a sibling sharing the womb. Even at a basic ‘factual’ level, the world is altogether too complex to be understood at all without, yes, philosophical or theological principles which can answer such questions as:

- Is a human chimera one human being or two? (Or more?)
- Is a human chimera carrying both male and female sets of DNA a man or woman? Or something else?

We need to acknowledge empirical facts but acknowledging only those which are convenient to our arguments will just put us deeper in the intellectual quicksand we've created in this Modern Age. We'll probably just repeat the stages of the Enlightenment when a promising intellectual program went bad. It wasn't just the Enlightenment which went bad; Etienne Gilson made the well-justified claim that the Catholic Church failed to respond properly to the problems and opportunities of the modern world and the Church's intellectuals and other leaders led the Church into an intellectual ghetto. This problem, spread to many parts of the West, seems to be one of the problems which Stanton is addressing.

I'll write in this context of the life of a 'human animal' to keep important terms clean—I'll explain more fully below, but the term "human being" covers "human animal" and also "human person."q

I'll retreat to a more basic level for now, so that I can lead up to my conclusions about the importance of acknowledging empirical reality, not just 'facts', and the need to see that greater reality by way of the philosophical and theological explorations Stanton would push off to some undefinable time when we have a very good understanding of physical stuff at a factual level.

Yet, Stanton is right—in a way—that this issue can be clearly settled by empirical science; he doesn't seem to realize that is true only if that empirical science is done and understood in a greater context in which ordinary and scientific words and concepts carry the proper moral meanings, as they did for nearly a thousand years in the West right into the early stages of the Enlightenment. He is right that we have to be clear about those empirical facts, but he doesn't show enough awareness of the history of science to realize there is no objective schema given to us that makes sense of the findings of even physics, let alone biology. Think about a puppy and colt and ask yourself what is different about human babies that makes each one different and gives it greater worth than other animals. To say simply that human babies are members of our species is to forget that such feelings develop naturally for those who are members of our local communities, communities upon which we are dependent, whether clan or tribe or urban neighborhood. There is no intuitive understanding of ourselves as members of such an abstractly defined group as a species. Ask yourself also, what biological facts can define the magical point in time when a member of the genus *homo* (see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homo>) gained this special status so that he was of greater worth than the mastodons or cave-

bears living nearby. Or his cousins, the chimps and gorillas and other great apes. There is even confusion in the terminology as the word, hominid, originally referred to modern and archaic humans and maybe chimpanzees and now refers to gorillas and the other great apes as well. These changes reflect the desires of scientists to make some issues more clear—is such a desire no more than a reflexive response to empirical facts?

Modern human beings are still so close to chimpanzees in terms of that magical DNA and in bodily structure and in physiology that the famous anthropologist from Mars might well classify us as different subspecies rather than two species, assuming he even classifies living creatures in quite this way. Our very fine-grained understanding of *homo sapiens sapiens* as a species separate from our close relatives (by standards of DNA) is itself based upon a moral, philosophical and theological, understanding of human being based upon our own feelings but also upon a variety of empirical facts folded into those understandings—facts not fully reducible to that DNA which Stanton proposes as a clean starting-point.

As the anthropologist John Hawks (see <http://johnhawks.net/weblog/>) has noted that we think of *homo sapiens neanderthalens* (see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neanderthal>) as being a non-human species though scientists define him as a subspecies of homo (humanity). We are partly him (maybe 2-3% of the DNA for most Europeans, a little more for many Asians, and 0% for sub-Saharan Africans). The decision as to whether that fellow, robust but no more so than some of our sturdy friends, was our brother or a distant cousin is philosophical and moral and might be of some importance as scientists are recovering better sets of Neanderthal DNA and might be able to fertilize the egg-cell of a living woman to produce a human creature who is at least significantly Neanderthal; ‘progress’ in this sort of activity might even allow the creation of an embryo which is fully Neanderthal. This might well happen and I’d like to hear how ‘only’ empirical facts can tell us if this creature should be accorded full human rights.

We need better philosophical and theological understandings than we have rather than trying to gather ‘empirical facts’ without any such understandings, though Stanton is right that we can only have those better understandings if we pay better attention to empirical facts.

At the risk of being repetitive, I’ll try to deal with some word issues I mentioned above. I use ‘human being’ to include the state in which we are born, ‘human animal’, and also the state which we can reach if we establish

the proper relationship with God or at least His Creation: ‘human (moral) person’. As persons, we become true ‘images of God.’ That seems to me to be a state we really can’t reach until we fully share the life of God in the world of the resurrected. If we don’t respond properly to God or at least His Creation, we remain human animals. In all cases, it is appropriate to consider all of us, from conception to death or beyond, as human beings. We start out as human beings who are ‘merely’ human animals and then, if we respond properly to the Creator or at least His Creation, we can begin to become human persons, images of God in the Person of the Son of God. As human animals, we are images of God in the sense that each bit of created being and all of created being is an image of God, a manifested thought of God in another way of phrasing matters.

I’ll repeat one of Stanton’s strongest statements from the quotation above:

For more than a century, the field of human embryology has documented that in human sexual reproduction a new, whole, individual, living human being begins to exist at “first contact” between a sperm and an oocyte/“egg” (the beginning of the process known as fertilization.)

Fair enough. Sort of true enough, but not fully true—remember those human chimeras and that hypothetical Neanderthal who might soon be among us in an ambiguous moral status. Yet, it is very good that Stanton and his associates acknowledge the importance of the empirical knowledge about human beings. We need to go beyond, first of all, realizing that the very processes of evolution and of genetics blur the distinction between species and obscure the meaning of ‘unique’ and ‘individual’ when we try to deal with certain issues on the basis of ‘only’ empirical facts.

Moreover. . .

Without philosophical and theological thought, how can we reduce the “problem” of the beginning of human life in this way and then deny that the death of that human being, the decay of his flesh—including his DNA, is the end of the existence of that human being. At least to a Christian, this way of ‘solving’ the problem is a bargain with the devil. A real solution to the problem would involve an understanding of why this newly conceived human animal might have a claim to be of greater worth than the embryo of a wallaby or a cobra. And then it might be possible also to understand

what the death of that human being might bring to an end and what it might initiate. And we might be able to deal with that Neanderthal, a member of *homo sapiens neanderthalens*, who might be conceived before long in a test-tube and then born from an artificial womb or the womb of a woman of the subspecies, *homo sapiens sapiens*. We might be able to deal with that very small number of human beings whose bodies are a mosaic involving both male and female sets of DNA or, more generally, a mosaic of two originally separately conceived human beings.

For the past twenty years or more, I've been engaged in a struggle which overlaps that of Stanton and his associates: I've been trying to re-understand the world in **explicitly** Christian terms. The God of Jesus Christ is the Creator of this world and of the greater Creation which this world is part of. This world, indeed—all of Creation, is a manifestation of thoughts of God.

Modern science tells us that relationships are primary, they create stuff. This is the reason for the strangeness of quantum mechanics and biological evolution alike. The strangeness appears because we try to see thing-like being as existing and then forming relationships. And that's strange in itself because Christians were told that relationships create and shape stuff by St John the Evangelist centuries before Darwin and Einstein and Planck and the other modern re-founders of biology and physics. That is, St John told us that God didn't create the world, explore it to understand what He had made, and then decide to love it. The world came to exist because God already loved it, had already formed the relationship of Creator to Creation. A human being is of greater worth, to God for believers and to some group of other human beings for all of us. Such an understanding as this has to be introduced at an early stage when empirical facts are yet being gathered—for one thing, some facts can be—and maybe have been—gathered by acts destructive one of those human embryos.

A world reduced to “empirical facts first and then we'll discuss philosophy when we've got those facts in hand” is bound to be a disordered world, a world of quicksand when you explore for meaning or moral purpose. It would perhaps be even better to see it as a world in which seekers of greater meaning or purpose will ever travel in circles, chasing their own shadows.

When will we have ‘enough’ empirical facts in hand to connect beliefs in moral purpose to those facts? The context of a human life, its meaning if you will, is needed for the task of understanding any part of that life. If we start talking about the beginning of life at conception in terms of DNA, we

better have some answers at hand when someone asks why that human life doesn't come to an absolute end when that body created by the DNA, even the DNA itself, begins to decay at death or even before. We better be able to produce some morally decent understanding of those human chimeras and that hypothetical Neanderthal.

Within the Christian Worldview I've developed, there is an obvious answer that tells us what is the 'true' meaning of a human life: it is God's love for us which brings us into existence and shapes us and maintains us in existence, that is, the Almighty's love for each of us as individuals and for us as communal human beings, including the entire species or—far more importantly—for those who are to be saved as members of the Body of Christ. We are special because we can respond to God in a special way and can share His thoughts as Creator and maybe even share His life in some meaningful sense. When we die and our bodily stuff accelerates its ongoing decay, then we will exist again if God chooses to direct that particular love for me or thee at a, so to speak, small spot in the world of the resurrected, the world of the true friends of God. We will find ourselves in our proper spot in that world on the other side of the grave.

If we choose to deal with empirical facts, imagining that we can ever do such a thing without a philosophical and/or theological understanding of what a fact is and what matter is and so on, we'll soon enough find ourselves, at best, in a world of pagan tragedy, a world of moral despair though possibly adopting a noble sort of fatalistic acceptance of that moral despair. Even worse, we might find ourselves in a world such as the one we've actually created over the past two centuries when the Enlightenment—originally, a good thing on the whole—went bad and took science with it on a path of radical secularism which included the belief which made possible the suicide of the West: the idea that we can produce a valid understanding of this world by the reductionistic path of putting all philosophical and theological considerations aside and then simply gathering up empirical facts. To be sure, the Enlightenment also went bad because of those who adopted idealistic ideologies, seen as above empirical reality and capable of providing judgments upon that reality. Perhaps this latter problem is the one Stanton wishes to solve, but the real problem is a disengagement of ways of gathering knowledge and understanding knowledge which can be only partially separated into empirical research and philosophizing or theologizing and then only by ignoring the intertwined and even recursive nature of all of these ways of thought.

In his article, Stanton advocates a very good idea: we need to have the empirical facts in hand to understand the world and—I would add—all of Creation. When that idea is allied to the belief that we need to go through this exercise and come to some allegedly objective scientific understanding before trying to gain any philosophical or theological understanding, then we arrive back at the point where the Enlightenment had gone bad and was going worse, circa 1800. We can do no better than to reinforce that environment which Nietzsche described so well in the colors of nihilistic despair.

## 336 What is the Totality of a Human Life?: Individuals and Communities.

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2413>. It was finished and uploaded on 2017/06/13.]

A life is made up of moments and events but it's not merely the sum of the moments and events in the way that a universe isn't just the sum of the matter and energy and other specific things it contains and a community isn't just the sum of its members and their individual to individual relationships. A life has properties beyond and different from those moments and those events it contains and the same can be said for a universe and a community. All of these complex entities, a human being's life and his communities and the universe—in fact, all of Creation, are intertwined.

In the strangely limited discourse of modern human beings—even modern Christians, a life or a universe or a community is made greater by 'purpose'. True enough but not enough. Purpose is typically seen as outside of us or our communities or our universe, something not at all directly perceptible and something we strive toward; modern empirical knowledge tells us this is the problem with such worldviews as that of Creation science. A true enough criticism, but not enough of a criticism. Creation scientists are trying to do something proper but they don't do it well enough. Purpose is in the entirety of complex entities which means it is found in some way, if only partially so, in the individual entities which make up those complex entities—especially if those individuals retain their identity in a strong sense. But purpose is outside us in the sense that it is in our communal being—we belong to communities which are purpose-driven perhaps more

than most individual human beings; purpose is also outside us in the sense that God's world—indeed, all of His Creation—is ordered to the purpose of the Almighty. Purpose is outside of us but also inside of us because it flows through all of our human being and also provides a dynamic structure to all of our human being..

Nearly all people living in coherent, well-ordered communities will internalize that coherence and that order, taking in the purpose of their communities in some form they tailor, or sometimes butcher, to their own perceived needs and status. For all but a small percentage, this communal coherence and order will supply what is needed for purpose, along with some understanding of the world and of that community's place in the world. This sort of communal purpose, which has to be personalized to truly be embedded in a human being, is part of a larger package—a worldview at the largest scale.

With such a package, a worldview as true as possible given Christian revelation and also the current state of human knowledge about God's acts as Creator, communities at all scales and individuals can adopt the higher order of that worldview into their communal and individual human being.

Without such a package, a worldview or even some lesser version corresponding to a culture rather than a more complete civilization, most human beings seem incapable of engaging in much coherent thought about the world outside of their direct experience, their day-to-day lives. More generally, not just the thoughts (part of mind) and purpose (part of heart) but also moral habits (part of hands) are formed for all to some extent and for most to a great extent by community standards. Or it could be that, in the event of a decay in the coherence and order of communities, all are left somewhat formless by lack of community standards and most are left largely blind in terms of road-maps through a confusing world. Some who are more creative and more capable of dealing with abstractions might find a good way (Augustine of Hippo) or a bad way (Karl Marx) through a world in decay, even a world in which the processes of decay are working but haven't done much damage yet. Yet, as bad as some of the thoughts of Marx are, it's likely that more damage has been done to Western Civilization by the more ordinary exploiters, such as corporations selling entertainment products which disrupt the intentional (growth) processes of young children learning how to concentrate. And so on.

This much is clear to me: even many of those human beings who are the "good stuff" are not capable of properly forming that good stuff or

of finding new ways through the vast expanses of a decaying civilization. During periods of civilizational or even local decay, it becomes difficult and sometimes nearly impossible for most citizens to even see clearly any possibility of major forms of good, purposeful lives; and, in fact, it might truly be nearly impossible to realize those sorts of lives. So it is that, in particular, the possibilities of Christian forms of life have become nearly impossible for parents or pastors to even see, let alone realize, in a West which is the ruins of a Christian Civilization taken over by secularists who are at least sneeringly indifferent to any religious institutions or practices which are not subordinate to secularist forms of liberalism. It's quite sad that this sort of a takeover of the Christian West by secular liberalism was made possible by Christians who collaborated with their enemies and paid little attention to the damage done to their own human being or that of their children.

In fact, all forms of liberalism, including seemingly conservative forms of classical liberalism, are bound to find themselves working against any form of traditionalism since all liberals—whether serving the markets or some sort of collectivist dream—are in conflict with communities which always have some sort of traditionalist inclinations. There are reasons that the better sorts of classical liberals, such as Hayek and Friedman, denied being conservatives by any definition. In their ways of thought, human beings were mobile workers or perhaps members of a cosmopolitan intellectual and artistic elite. Arguably, anti-traditionalism defines liberalism even better than the original liberal program of turning individuals into freestanding, contract-making entities of a vague sort; after all, some newer branches of liberalism free individuals from traditions to entrap them in various schemes of highly engineered collectivism.

To be sure, the world changes and sometimes too fast for most communities in a region to survive, though it remains true that a period of resting in traditionalist communities—even rigidly authoritarian traditionalist communities—is less damaging to most human being than is a radical destruction of traditionalism and all it carries, including the possibilities of necessary change from a stable starting point. Letting intentional (growth) processes work at the level of individual human beings and at all scales of communal human being gives us progress which might be truly such. And those processes will interact—in theory—with the evolutionary and developmental processes of God's Creation.

In my recently posted and freely downloadable book, *The Shape of Re-*

*ality* [56], I made some progress in supporting a claim I'd been making for a few years: modern mathematics and some of the sciences have concepts and tools for addressing many problems of being which are at the root of a lack of understanding of the complex entities of God's Creation. In particular, I'm concerned with the development of words and concepts, largely abstracted from mathematics, which allow us to think clearly about communities as being real and not just voluntary gatherings of radically freestanding human beings. I made some steps in that direction in the book referenced above.

The modern ideologues, especially liberals of all sorts, have taken away our sense of community, our beliefs that our individual selves and our communal selves are real and interact without one necessarily overwhelming the other. In a similar way, they have taken away our sense of a meaningful life, our beliefs that the moments and events of our lives are real and so is the totality of our lives. To elaborate on a claim I made above: the illiberal ideologues of the modern world, such as Karl Marx, made inroads in the former Christian West only because of the seemingly gentler and more gradual ideas of extreme free-marketers and a variety of activists thinking of themselves as being social reformers.

Much of the damage to individual human beings comes by way of the destruction of communal human being. As I claimed above: all human beings to some extent and some human beings to a nearly full extent are dependent upon their communities to help them "engag[e] in much coherent thought about the world outside of their direct experience, their day-to-day lives." It is this coherent thought, and the related feelings and behaviors, which shape moral character—among other good things.

## 337 What is the Totality of a Human Life?: Individual and Communal Intent

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2417>. It was finished and uploaded on 2017/06/30.]

In Chapter 336, *What is the Totality of a Human Life?: Individuals and Communities*, I explored some issues related to meaningfulness, using terms which might allow a slightly more disciplined discourse and thought than what is currently used by knowledgeable and insightful thinkers as well as many others.

I think it necessary to delve a little more deeply into the individual and communal aspects of *intent*. See Chapter 83, *What is Mind?: Is Christian Morality a Natural Morality?* and, if you desire, some following chapters which discuss the book, *How Brains Make Up Their Minds* [35], by the neuroscientist and philosopher, Walter J Freeman—see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter\\_Jackson\\_Freeman\\_III](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Jackson_Freeman_III). In that book, Freeman tells us:

An intent is the directing of an action toward some future goal that is defined and chosen by the actor. It differs from a motive, which is the reason and explanation of the action, and from a desire, which is the awareness and experience stemming from the intent. A man shoots another with the intent to kill, which is separate from why he does it and with what feeling.

An intent might not even be consciously seen though the goal of that intent is being actively sought: a seed and then a seedling tries to grow and

develop its fullness of leaves and flowers and then sets seeds to reproduce. The directedness of intent doesn't necessarily involve consciousness, at least not within the full context of Thomistic thought of traditional biological or legal thought. The growth processes of all organisms are intentional. The cells of a crocodile embryo in the egg don't just proliferate in any which way, but rather proliferate in an organized way toward various long-range goals but immediately toward the goal of becoming a somewhat more mature organism: an active baby crocodile. A man who regularly drinks to the point of inebriation and then drives can be said to 'intend' to commit vehicular homicide. Whether he is driven by various problems including some rare genetic disorder or whether he simply likes to drink to excess so that he's willing to risk his own life and the life of others, he intends the development of a very dangerous habit.

Consciousness can be very good, even self-consciousness can sometimes be good—though not at all times. Musicians and craftsmen and athletes and professional mathematicians consciously develop their skills but then lose that consciousness in the very processes which are the deployments of those skills.

Jascha Heifetz practiced and thought about music and about the physical acts of playing the violin. His intent was to become a skilled violinist and he achieved true greatness. That greatness involved more practice on a particular piece and the development of an awareness of that piece that he might anticipate some very difficult acts of bodily movement. The actual playing involved a losing of himself in the music and necessarily so as the conscious regions of the human brain don't work fast enough to actually think about such rapid movement of hand and the bow which had become part of his hand.

Evolution gifted human beings with a brain which reached conscious and even self-conscious awareness of self and surroundings. That allowed awareness also of the future and of future possibilities better than those of present possibilities. Our ancestors had become capable of planning beyond such acts as the simple food-hoarding or the positioning of dens or nests for easier care and more secure protection of young ones. Consciousness and self-consciousness can guide us into a future by setting goals and forming the habits of mind and heart and hands which make it more possible to intend toward a goal such as singing well enough to be part of a good-quality choir. Even at such a higher-level, cultural process, most of our thoughts and feelings and acts won't be consciously guided in the way of our setting

a practice schedule. We become part of a choir by losing ourselves even in most rehearsals, learning to respond by habit to the hand movements of the choir director and the voices of the surrounding singers; I'm told I have a decent voice at that lower-level and I seem to have pretty good relative pitch, but I was surprised to realize I intend to the goal of singing as well as my limited talents allow partly by focusing on high-quality voices in a nearby range. I've also realized I instinctively stop singing when my sinuses are irritated so that I can't hear my own voice clearly. Having come to realize these and other facts about my own self, I can use rationality in the light of conscious awareness and self-conscious awareness to do a little better—it won't take much to reach the limits of my modest singing talents.

We modern human beings, both individual and communal, have the capability of attaining to a far higher level of consciousness—which is different from saying we can 'control' our economic or political systems in the way imagined by Marxists or Central Bankers. As communities and as individuals, we can intend good futures, proper growth and development toward a better state of human being and we can do this best in a conscious manner. Yet, there is little evidence in the United States and in other parts of the West that even the best-educated of our leaders have attained much self-awareness in an individual or communal sense. To a certain extent, this is caused by the reductionism I've discussed before—see Chapter 674, *A Very Simplified View of the Woes of Christianity—Now and at Two Earlier Times*. In this and other writings, I dealt with the error of reductionism, that is—reduction to atoms or elements. For some reason, some are inclined to think that only individuals are real and communities are nominal, though few would claim that only hydrogen and oxygen are real and water is a substance which exists only in name. Others have a sort of reverse reductionism: they recognize complex entities, such as human communities—such as those of politics and economics, and think those entities overwhelm the individuals and reduce them to mere components fully controlled by the larger-scale forces of human history. We need a balanced, and necessarily complex, understanding of the reality of both individual human being and communal human being.

If communities are real human being, they must have their own intents, their intentional movement and development are toward some goals which might be quite difficult for individuals to perceive, though it might also be difficult for individuals to see their own goals—however much they might delude themselves. The ultimate community is the Body of Christ, more

complex and more complete in its human being than the greatest of civilizations in this mortal realm.

How in the world could all of this work in providing us with a necessary understanding of the growth and development of human being, individual and communal? I've written of some of the qualitative ideas which can be drawn from modern mathematics—see my freely downloadable book, *The Shape of Reality* [56], ideas which lead to plausible discussion of the reality of human communities on a more or less static basis. Now I'm writing about a complex entity (a large-scale community) which has intents—which involve the dynamic processes of growth and development; that large-scale community which is the pilgrim Body of Christ, or most certainly any community on the scale of a civilization, is composed of smaller-scale communities and communities of all scales are composed of individuals and each of these smaller-scale communities and each of these individuals have intents, directed movements and developments toward goals. Speaking simply, the major intents of each of these human communities and individuals is towards the goal of achieving a properly rich and complex human being.

Below the grand level of a civilization, Christ-centered or not, lie various levels of communities and the human individuals who are the members of this great complex of communities. So it is that we have major parts of the human race intending toward human being communal and individual which exercises high standards as researchers and teachers in mathematics and house-builders and doctors and priests and so on. The Elks and Lions and Moose try to build fraternal bonds by way of both recreational and charitable activities. This is also the case for a large number of groups at various churches and synagogues. Volunteers and paid employees help those in need at the Red Cross and hospitals and food-banks. Policemen keep order and, along with firemen and paramedics and others, try to maintain public safety. Does anyone really think that all of this will go away if we enter the World of the Resurrected, that we strive to become not only good human beings but also good electrical engineers or metal-workers or full-time moms only to become generic angelic critters.

As some Christians have claimed: we work toward a Christ-like state by being better parents and better retail clerks and better volunteers on the committees of our town governments. We are what we achieve and will remain such even as we share God's life in the World of the Resurrected.

Communal intent is an important issue for a charitable reason: in the strongest Christian terms, it allows the weaker among us and even those

with various sinful tendencies to be saved as members of the Body Christ and as members of lesser communities within that Body. In this-worldly terms, a weaker statement could be made which would be of great importance to Christians and to other advocates of civilization(s); short of truly terrible crimes, a man with violent tendencies could be taught habits which could—no guarantees—help him to live up to better standards than might be natural to him. It would then be up to God to complete the processes involved in bringing a person with some level of sociopathic tendencies to salvation. In any case, the progress of penitentiaries from therapeutic institutions to institutions of simple incarceration to pools of cheap labor and probably a bit of all of those at most times, is just one of many examples of liberal institutions failing to help either the alleged freestanding individuals or the societies viewed as contractual gatherings of such freestanding individuals.

It's arguably the case that the 20th century and the early part of the 21st century were settings for a war between those trying to teach us that we're either freestanding individuals (the West) or mere components in collectives. We lost touch with even modest efforts to reach a more balanced understanding of human being, such as the teaching of Edmund Burke and others that we're tied to not only other human beings currently alive but also to those dead and those not yet born.

How does this all come together? Sure, we can speak and write of an invisible hand, but Adam Smith and others used that concept to point to a still mysterious factor in human communal life. There has been little progress toward a better understanding, though some progress has been made in terms of potentially useful mathematical techniques by theorists of 'complex systems. I'm proposing a way to move forward, one which points to a need for some sort of shared coherence, unity, and completeness of human being at the level of communities and individuals. So it is that I'd combined those three important criteria of individual or communal personhood, coherence and unity and completeness, with the concept of intent to produce the concept of growth toward some state which is more coherent and more unified and more complete, a state which allows, for the individual, survival and perhaps reproduction and perhaps even enjoyment or something akin to it. Something of the sort is also true for communities, but I'll leave that for the contemplation of the reader as this essay has already grown in complexity and confusion. For good and bad, the reader is seeing the actual act of philosophy, the development of ideas in real-time.

A bit more simply, intentionality is the path from here to there, whether the particular complex entity knows it is moving and growing towards a goal or whether it is constituted so as to move and grow *as if* it knew all about that goal. Humans, individual and communal, share many unconscious processes with rattlesnakes and even stars. A healthy human baby is starting on a path where he seeks proper nutrition, proper exercise, and proper stimulus to grow to a healthy strong adult. When we consider his communal human being, at first only a seeking of something he desires but doesn't know, then we can begin to see more in the way of higher consciousness—as is true of a grizzly bear cub out for the first time from a winter den and eating tender spring grass and running about with a sister or brother and exploring sunlit regions and all the bushes and trees and rocks and fleeing rodents he notices. And the very process of noticing something and then investigating and then more actively noticing lots of somethings will lead to more focused attention and better vision as well as some sort of global understanding of his small part of Creation.

This is a mess inviting the sort of mind, Plato or Riemann, which can find simplicity and elegance in the midst of confusion. My proposal is to use 'intent' as the organizing concept, especially for human beings, but also many other living organisms. Various levels of communities and their member organisms actively, if not always consciously, show intent toward the goal of being better or at least more mature versions of themselves. I'm proposing that not only are communities real, but so are the intentional processes of both individuals and communities. As such they can be studied and discussed and understood by way of disciplined concepts and analytic techniques, many of which can be drawn from modern mathematics and the physical sciences. Again, this is not to reduce human being to a determined thing nor is it to claim some sort of dominance for quantitative mathematics—though those sorts of mathematics will have an important role to play.

## 338 What is the Totality of a Human Life?: Unity, Coherence, and Completeness

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2421>. It was finished and uploaded on 2017/07/11.]

In Chapter 337, *What is the Totality of a Human Life?: Individual and Communal Intent*, I proposed that ‘intent’ in the sense used by Thomas Aquinas and by biologists and lawyers is a way to help us understand human being in its totality, encompassing individual and communal manifestations of human being—and probably divine human being as well.

These basic points come from my still developing worldview:

- It is our natures as human animals, lived out in some sort of common life, which unites the small, flesh-and-blood communities of human being.
- It is a common understanding of higher, abstract realms of created being which makes possible larger-scale, more abstract communities. Ultimately, a very large-scale community, an instance of communal human being, needs something like a—possibly only partially shared—common understanding of all that exists. The ultimate community, being the fullness and completion of human being in union with God, is the Body of Christ. This Body looks like a civilization with the Christian Church as the central organ, not much like a ‘pure’ church. [Common understanding isn’t a purely ‘rational’ state but rather a state of the entirety of human being: mind and heart and hands.]

It is by way of proper intents that we can truly realize that communal understanding of created being, can encapsulate it in our own being. This is a—usually—slow movement and slow development. It takes years for even a mathematical genius to truly think like a mathematician. It takes years to turn a young man into a soldier. It takes years of effort to learn how to raise children—one reason for the importance of Grandma and Grandpa.

In a more general way: there is not a sudden qualitative change—disruption?—from lower human animal to some sort of higher human animal centered on God or at least on the entirety or part of His Creation. We are a part of this physical universe, this world when the universe is seen in light of God's purposes. We moved from a 'pure' animal intelligence which is a, shall I say, direct encapsulation of experience of responding to opportunities and dangers. Human beings have more complex brains, including regions which allow enough of a concept of past and future that we pass on traditions and plan for what might come. Perhaps building upon this raw human understanding of the flow of time, we have a capacity for abstract thought of a more general sort.

It's not only thought (mind) but also heart (feelings) and hands (behavior and habits) which make up human being. The heart and the hands must also be appropriate to the community, especially such a complex community as a civilization. Yet, as I've said before: it is the mind which leads the way into a future, especially a future in a complex civilization which demands consciousness and rationality. And so it is that I'll move on, finally, to talk a little about the unity, coherence, and completeness of human being, individual and communal—where there is a larger-scale community (even a civilization) at issue.

There is clearly some sort of balance among, roughly speaking, human beings who are individuals or small-scale communities or large-scale and—often—centralized communities. Is balance the right word? Is there a better word which communicates the dynamism involved?

A mess of sorts comes into view. Human being is mind and heart and hands even when we consider human animal nature; when we consider human personhood or human (complex and rich) communities, human being has to be unified and coherent and complete—at least in terms of some sort of intentional trajectory or growth and development heading toward some goal, some desired state of human being. Keep this in mind. I'll propose the use of intents, deciding upon future goals and moving toward them, growing and developing; the trick will be to somehow allow proper freedom

to individual human beings and various scales of communal human being while keeping it all together—in a loose manner of speaking.

Let's try looking at an important stage in the development and growth of the Christian West, which development and growth were toward some only partially seen goal of becoming a truly Christian community in politics and in economics and in art and in music and in all other domains of human life.

Very roughly speaking, the peoples of northwestern Europe in the early Medieval Age or later were baptized, typically for the convenience of their leaders who were impressed by the qualities of the Christian kings and lesser nobility of the Anglo-Saxon world. There had been intermarriages and trading arrangements and even some peaceful transfers of territory and those probably increased. Countries grew closer or even absorbed each other by way of treaties or conquests. Unity and coherence were generally increased—often greatly so—by methods not always so consistent with Christianity. More importantly, most individuals and most smaller-scale communities found themselves suddenly in a world which was centered around this God-man who seemed so strange to warrior peoples and farmers worshiping fertility goddesses and gods of death. The overall structure of divinity in this new world was still stranger with a Father and a Son and a Holy Spirit—no goddess to have borne the Son and so on. It took centuries for a religious conversion to take hold, a conversion brought about by admiration for a people who were Christian (the Anglo-Saxons and some related peoples mostly in the British Isles) and by a need for political unity and coherence.

Was completeness served at all? Only in the long-run as those continental Germanic peoples built more complex communities with a greater variety of human being partly by developing richer and more complex forms of art and music and philosophy and theology and so on. But all roles in these larger-scale communities were made richer and more complex—to the confusion and frustration of many not prepared for these roles which seemed to them merely alien and confusing.

It's likely that those continental Germanic leaders who, for example, accepted baptism for themselves and their peoples from St Boniface (an Anglo-Saxon nobleman and cousin to those continental Germans), were adopting a more complex view of the world around them (did they grasp the concept of Creation at all?) which brought them immediate gains in unity and coherence and completeness at the level of confederations of tribes

(something like proto-states and proto-archdioceses) and a lot of longer-term gains for their successes at that same level. They also damaged the unity and coherence and completeness of smaller-scale communities and of individuals which found themselves with goals inconsistent with these new-fangled goals of Christianity. In the long-run, those smaller-scale communities and individuals also had a chance for greater unity and coherence and completeness or, at least, their descendants had such a chance.

It's not as if the larger-scale quest for unity and coherence and completeness always dominates, or should always dominate, the smaller scale entities including individuals. In fact, it's not likely that such aspects realized at the larger-scale will filter down unless, or until, the smaller-scale communities and the individuals are prepared for what is essentially a re-organization of some fundamental aspects of their own human being. What about changes which occur at some lower level: the tribal level which still exist in many parts of the world or the level of professional communities which has played so great a role in good and bad aspects of Western enlightenment or the level of individuals? I'd advocate these changes from below as better than changes from above—usually. Best of all would be changes which occur gradually and steadily at all levels and scales of human being.

But all of the movement through time which I've described above adds up to such a mess. . .

Through time.

We need a way to guide this movement, this growth and development, by allowing individual human being and all scales of communal human being to move toward goals appropriate for those individuals and communities.

There is no such way to control this messy complex of intentional movement, growth and development, at all scales of human being. There may well be a variety of ways which work at one scale or another and which work at various levels of consciousness. Even those must work successfully in the way of open systems existing in complex environments, responding to those environments and—at least in the case of earthworms and human beings—greatly changing those environments as part of the response to opportunities and problems.

Let's return to the messiness of this complex of processes. I'll make a few general claims and a few claims about the most important, and most dangerously out-of-control, community in our age: the United States of America. Then, I'll leave all of this to stew in the back-regions, yes—unconscious regions, of our minds.

- When intents on one scale differ from those on one or more other scales, unity and coherence and completeness can be damaged—perhaps fatally.
- When intents of one important community differ greatly from those of other communities and individuals on various scales, unity and coherence and completeness can be damaged—perhaps fatally.
- When intents of one or more important communities are unrealistic, unity and coherence and completeness can be damaged—perhaps fatally.

Western (Christian) Civilization is in bad shape, largely because one of its energetic frontier regions, the United States, has behaved badly, incompetently and criminally at times through 1988 or so and incompetently and criminally on a consistent basis in the years since. This goes beyond sad; the American people have trusted blue-blood criminals and their allies and those people have not only murdered and stolen (perhaps committing some of the spectacular crimes of the 1960s and onwards), they have also destroyed the United States and the West which needed it by moving the United States toward goals which are immoral and also inconsistent with American capabilities and inclinations and talents.

It is in barbaric but promising regions such as the United States, that a weakening civilization can revive. For that to happen, the people(s) of those energetic frontier region(s) must have conscious and unconscious intents which are consistent with the needs of the civilization which is their greater home in nearly all human aspects: spiritual and cultural and intellectual and political and economic and so forth. The American leadership became full of something smelly and empty of appreciation for reality by at least the years following World War II, years in which the powerful financial interests and allied groups were exaggerating the power and danger of communist countries and distorting the relationships between Chinese ‘communists’ and Russian communists, setting up the CIA as a servant organization of those financial interests, squeezing most productive business interests out of the circles of power, destroying the local political machines in the interests of the two national political machines, etc. Al Capones with higher IQs, social connections, degrees from Yale and Harvard and Cornell and so on.

We have to note at this point that the bulk of the leadership of United States had set off on a new course (and old course for those who know about

the Northeastern fortunes made in the ‘China’ (opium) trade and the slave trade in the first half of the 19th century). Seemingly respectable men, such as John McCloy, General William Donovan and the Dulles brothers—with the help of the British spymaster William Stephenson, unleashed energetic and ambitious blue-bloods upon the world. Those young men used such criminal activities as drug-smuggling and arms-smuggling at least as sources of wealth for those they thought themselves to be manipulating. Those young men probably carried out at least some of the (mostly 1960s) murders of public figures who endangered their perceived interests. They probably destroyed Nixon when he tried to set his own course of action. In their more mature years, they tied Reagan up in knots, brought promising (soft-boy) thugs such as Bill Clinton into their circles, and so on. In general, they corrupted the country—the energetic frontier region of Western Civilization—and prevented it from carrying out its possible mission of reviving the West, a noble mission indeed for those who admire that quite imperfect Christian civilization. The United States could have rescued the West and have been the core region during a new phase of Western Civilization, not necessarily a phase which would have excluded the possibility of a related civilization in Eastern Europe or more foreign civilizations in China or in India or in . . .

What happened to the United States leadership, leading to immense damage to the common citizen’s interests as well as the unity and coherence and completeness of the United States, was in line with the three ‘bad things’ in the list above. The American leadership acted as if the United States was a power unto itself, forgetting that our country is not a civilization and not even a freestanding part of Western Civilization—which is impossible, in any case. That leadership also came to be dominated by financial interests which became dominant over all productive industries but for weapons-manufacturers; those financial interests became enamored over the prospect of controlling the American economy and political system (partly by their dominance in the intelligence services as well as among the President’s top officials) and soon enough were dreaming of that worldwide empire from the nightmarish scenarios proposed by the eccentric Brooks Adams (brother of Henry Adams and grandson of John Quincy Adams—see Gore Vidal’s novel, *Empire*) and Halford MacKinder (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Halford\\_Mackinder](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Halford_Mackinder)). (For what it’s worth, Brooks Adams saw that such a world-spanning empire would need to control the coastal regions of East Asia, Shanghai, and not just the

heartland of the Eurasian landmass. The American thugocracy seems to share that insight—wherever they got it from.)

On the whole, that American thugocracy, has unrealistic intents—they think to grow into something like a world-spanning Roman Empire. For geographical reasons, because of the nature of the American Project (so to speak) and the resulting American peoples, for demographic reasons, because of the (easily distorted or corrupted) idealism of the American peoples and people, the United States makes a good fortress and not so good a cosmopolitan center for any sort of overseas empire. More than a century ago, Lord Acton—not really a fan of empires—advised Americans to focus their imperial ambitions on the Western Hemisphere. I don't know if he would have been comfortable with the conceptual structure of intent, of growth and development, but he certainly was aware of the geographical and other specific barriers to a stable and prosperous American overseas empire.

Would an Empire of the Americas have truly become the core region of a revived West? Maybe not. Maybe it would have become a separate civilization, though I think it quite possible that the West, centered in Europe, might still have been re-energized.

In any case, I think that many foreigners—including Vladimir Putin—retain a respect for the basic American intents, the currently stymied efforts of most American human beings, individuals and communities, to grow and develop into a peaceful and prosperous people, a people willing to defend their own true interests but one wishing to order their individual and communal lives to something like Christian standards. To be sure, there are many Americans no longer certain of the truths of Christianity and many believers who don't know how to set proper goals or to grow and develop toward them, but that's a problem which we can deal with if we can figure out how to correct or replace a leadership class which is not only criminal and seemingly incompetent but is also driving toward goals not possible for the United States to realize, goals which would mean the formation of an imperial structure, political and economic and social, which would mean an end to the United States as most Americans wish it to be, even as that empire was doomed to failure. We are seeing hints of a terrible future and those hints have been with us during nearly two centuries of imperialistic behavior in the Americas and a century or so of imperialistic behavior overseas—think Morgan and Rockefeller, Roosevelt and Mahar. Again, see Vidal's *Empire* or even the entire series of novels, *Narratives of*

*Empire*—see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narratives\\_of\\_Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narratives_of_Empire).

The United States has failed, at least for now, as a great power just because we have that thugocracy, leadership class, with unrealistic intents for themselves and this country and those intents are also out of synch with those of most American human beings, individuals and communities.

## 339 What is Man? And All That?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2534>. It was finished and uploaded on 2018/07/30.]

Liberals lie. And I include libertarians among liberals. Perhaps they lie first to themselves, but they lie. All liberals, from Hobbes to Locke to Jefferson to von Mises to Nozick and on to the collectivist enablers or advocates of a 'liberal' and totalitarian order. The biggest part of their lie is the one which claims man to be a secular creature who worships God (or—historically—what anthropologists and archaeologists call the "moral gods") only as a matter of choice—worship isn't seen by liberals as an inherent part of human being as is engagement in marketplace activities and some level of political activities. All but true extremists, anarchists, agree that some minimal system of justice is necessary along with defense against foreign peoples.

As the past few centuries have passed, it would seem that nearly all liberals—including not a few Catholic bishops and leaders of other Christian communities, not a few Christian thinkers—have accepted this radical separation of religion from the "more important" parts of human being. As far as free-market (classical) liberalism goes, the major scholars themselves admit that that form of capitalism is more revolutionary and sometimes more destructive of human institutions than is Marxism and other isms of the modern world. For example, feminism and homosexualism and other forms of anti-human thought developed in the context of Western societies as they mutated first into classical liberal forms and then into collectivist liberal forms.

Liberalism is founded upon myths of political communities (Hobbes and

probably Locke and the Founding Fathers of the US) or economic communities (von Mises and Hayek); both forms of communities are actually fully voluntary (contractual) gatherings of individuals in the ideal. Those myths weren't meant to be taken literalistically but, in the Augustinian sense, are to be taken literally. That is, there was never a specific event or even series of events in history which corresponded to some sort of contract, political or economic, between individuals but the general idea is that individuals are real and communities are but nominalistic entities formed by the wills of individuals and breakable by those same wills—or, more likely, the wills of descendants of those original individuals. See Chapter 674, *A Very Simplified View of the Woes of Christianity—Now and at Two Earlier Times* and Chapter 545, *Civilizational Decay as a Loss of Shape* for my rough, non-scholarly take on the ways in which this misunderstanding of human being, indeed—all of created or contingent being, developed in the West during centuries when Christian thought seemed dominant.

In fact, the histories of human communities in the Mesopotamian or Mediterranean communities from which the West largely came indicate a primary importance to the temple (priests and worship) over the palace (kings and political activities) and the marketplace (merchants and economic activities). This isn't to deny that human beings gathering for "collective worship of moral gods" needed police and soldiers of some sort as well as merchants to trade, say, surplus grain or goats for agricultural tools and weapons. This is to say that there is a lead horse (or 2) in the largest of teams, though as the team forms, all the horses need to work together. And we should be clear that much came to the West from those ancient communities, ancestral to the Hebrews and other Semites and also to the Indo-European peoples—including Greeks and Romans, though in a somewhat different and less restrictive way.

Even so far as the Indo-Europeans on the Russian and Ukrainian steppes are concerned, their dominant male-line DNA (R1b) evolved on the slopes of the Ararat range of hills and mountains as—so to speak—Abel the pastoralist who looked upon, and raided, the various members of the tribe of Cain—such as Semites, farming the river valleys of that northern region of Mesopotamia. The Bible and empirical evidence gathered by archaeologists and other empirical scientists or historians indicate that it was the tribe of Cain which initiated outright war against the tribe of Abel—perhaps for good reason. The later-emerging Indo-European peoples, the Slavs, have a high percentage of R1a male-line DNA; that line evolved on the plains

of modern-day Iran, east of Cain and Abel—so to speak. For what it's worth, R1a is also a much more common Y-chromosome than R1b among the Iranian peoples, some tribes of Afghanistan, and the higher castes of India.

These peoples, genetic lines, have heritages and are not some sort of accidental groupings of generic humanoid. Other peoples, other genetic lines, have different heritages and are also not some sort of accidental groupings of generic humanoid. (I'm not slighting the other peoples who contributed genes to the Indo-European family-lines, including most especially the ones coming in through the mothers of those peoples, but I'm trying to keep the story simple and true though it be impossible to tell the entire truth without a multitude of volumes each hundreds of pages long.)

In this very interesting and probably very important article, *The Mutant Says in His Heart, "There Is No God": the Rejection of Collective Religiosity Centred Around the Worship of Moral Gods Is Associated with High Mutational Load* found at <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs40806-017-0133-5>, we learn that individuals inclined to “collective worship of moral gods” are genetically healthier than those not so inclined—the immune system is of particular importance. Those not so inclined to that worship have the same sorts of loads of genetic mutations as schizophrenics, autistic peoples, and homosexuals. This isn't a proof that the God of Moses or the God of Jesus Christ, or those “moral gods,” exist; it just means that human nature, think especially of personality/social characteristics, evolved to live in complex communities centered around that collective worship. As a speculation, I would suggest that our form of abstract reason is also that appropriate for a world created by, or at least controlled by, “moral gods” or even the God of Jesus Christ.

We know that men are:

1. political animals,
2. economic animals,
3. family-centered animals,
4. beer-brewing animals,
5. rational animals, and
6. so on.

How about adding two to the list, two certainly found in the Hebrew and Christian Holy Scriptures:

1. worshipping animal and
2. believing animal?

In fact, I'll continue to make the claim that human beings are, first and foremost, religious animals. The authors of the above referenced article, *The Mutant Says in His Heart, "There Is No God": the Rejection of Collective Religiosity Centred Around the Worship of Moral Gods Is Associated with High Mutational Load* found at <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs40806-017-0133-5>, have already made this claim plausible by showing that those human inclinations to worship and believe are, like reason or abstract intelligence, so basic to the core of human nature that defects in the complex systems of genes which regulate such characteristics are associated with health problems, often severe health problems. As a car engine with a defective alternator might sputter or might shut down completely, so it is with human beings bereft of some basic religious inclination. I simplify their results because I'm starting a journey in a manner of speaking and I just wish to know what I should pack and in which direction I should head to get to the point of understanding human nature. As an example of an interesting complication, the article indicates that the inclination to believe and the inclination to worship have separate probabilities of heritability, indicating they are separable though we might suspect strongly they are linked. So long as we humans retain our curiosity, the world will continue to offer us interesting problems, some suited for academic study.

It would seem possible at this point that there are no such genes, such core constituents of human being, which play a similar role for the traits of economic man or political man. It might be that economic man and political man arose in the context of religious communities and does so now; this would be consistent with the claim of some that religion supplies the individual moral characters and the communal moral relationships which make stable and complex communities possible. After all, the anti-religious stream of the Enlightenment has conquered the West for now and as religion is driven more and more out of communal (public) life, our economic and political systems are. . . shall we say—fraying? They would fray if they

were dependent upon a set of damaged or suppressed human traits more fundamental than are they to complex human communities.

If true, this would mean that all forms of modernism, liberal and socialistic—as some have claimed before me, were based upon psychoses—dangerous fantasies, basic misunderstandings of human being which were then developed into the systems of Hobbesian justification for radical individuals living in a society controlled ruthlessly by Leviathan, for Locke’s gentler and more optimistic form of individualism, Marx’s ‘liberation’ into a society in which everything is owned in common by radical individuals, John Stuart Mill’s classical liberalism which became a bit of a proto-identity political system with his blessing of Harriet Taylor’s feminism, von Mises’ radical individualism so well suited to Central European intellectuals, and so on. These thinkers were an intelligent lot and insisted on using their intelligence to develop complex and sophisticated systems on the basis of assumptions of human being in its cosmopolitan, late-Enlightenment form seen as political or economic or both—as if the latest growth of a plant could be chopped off, separated from stem and root, and put forward as if the entire plant, capable of sustaining and propagating itself.

Never were those men who built the glory that was Greece and the Grandeur that was Rome seen as the ones who came together to “collectively worship moral gods.” Those men who were the prophets of God in Israel and Judah were shoved into the shadows, embarrassment that they were to those preaching political man and/or economic man as the true Man. As time went on, they had also to ignore the scientists with dirt under their fingernails, the dirt of Babylon and Jerusalem, for those investigators of reality had early on seen hints of the apparent primacy of temples over palaces and of their great importance even after the palaces and bureaucratic mazes are built.

I can’t produce the detailed, scholarly arguments but I feel it likely that this error, this placing of political and economic traits ahead of religious traits, was willful and conscious on the part of many thinkers. Yes, I am claiming many of those thinkers were conscious liars and not just the self-deluded sorts of liars, sons of Satan in old-fashioned language. These men such as Hobbes and Locke and von Mises were truly modern, exerting their wills in order to conquer reality, seeking to change human being into something more acceptable to them by promulgating the idea that, for example, the European men who’d built the Christian West were (maybe) fundamentally political or (maybe) fundamentally economic animals but Christian (a

particular form of religious man) only as an accident of their history. And we're beginning to pay the price for allowing some clever but not wise, and not moral, thinkers and doers to try to change human being into what it is not. It's easier to damage individual or communal human being than it is to improve it.

In any case, we will continue to pay that price for a while because those thinkers have pushed their ideas into the minds and feelings and behaviors of a good number of Westerners: Christian leaders and theologians, educators and "producers of culture," were somewhat willing victims and then began themselves to prey upon the minds and moral characters of the youth and of the mature humans as well as they tried to adjust to a world which was so rapidly changing. Those responsible for guarding the traditions of mankind tried to do so in unintelligent ways, protecting what needed changed along with what was meant to be permanent and what was still good; as those sorts of projects failed, Catholic and Protestant leaders as well as literary critics and academics and politicians went over to the enemies of tradition.

In the end, the title of this chapter—*What is Man? And All That?*—doesn't cut it. To understand Creation and creatures, including human creatures, we must have some small understanding of God even in His transcendence and some great understanding of God in His freely chosen role as Creator of a particular Creation in which arose this peculiar world.

# 340 The Historian and the Psychometrician on Collapse of Innovation and Problem-solving in West

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2582>. It was finished and uploaded on 2019/01/07.]

In *From Dawn to Decadence: 1500 to the Present* [9], Jacques Barzun wrote about a gradual and long-term decay of the West. He wrote that only about 50% of French peasants in 1500 were literate but also noted that those peasants were reading novels far too complex for most (nearly all?) modern-day college professors. Quality of literacy decreased from 1500 among peasants but there was an ongoing explosion of creativity by engineers and scientists, poets and novelists, musicians and painters, and so on. But... He also claimed that the last burst of high-level creativity in the West (as of 2000 or so) came in the generation active around 1900. This generation included Einstein and Planck—physics, Camillo Golgi and Ramon y Cajal—pioneers in neurobiology, Johannes Brahms and Antonin Dvorak—musical composers, Joseph Conrad and Leo Tolstoy—authors of fiction, Otto von Bismarck and Peter Stolypin—political leaders and serious men of serious accomplishments.

Barzun's book might have been the high-point for an entire category of books by morally and intellectually serious historians such as Jose Ortega y Gasset, Oswald Spengler, and others who analyzed the political and literary and cultural signs of some sort of decay in intellect and in forms of human order in the West over recent centuries.

More recently, intelligence researchers led by Michael Woodley of Menie have found ways to estimate IQs over time by proxy measurements. For example, there is a high correlation between IQ and reflex speed; beginning in the early 1800s, the second of those attributes has been measured accurately in increasingly large test-populations for certain populations in Europe and some other parts of the world.

In *The Genius Famine* [21], Edward Dutton and Bruce G Charlton wrote about the nature of geniuses—high IQ plus a personality verging on psychotic. On the other hand, Michelangelo as portrayed in the highly-regarded historical novel, *The Agony and the Ecstasy* [129] was self-sacrificing toward family and friends but learned how to push human beings away when he needed time and space for accomplishing some great work of sculpture or painting or architecture or military engineering. Pope Julius, and others I believe, accused him of having a *terribilita*: “An effect or expression of powerful will and immense angry force (as in the work of Michelangelo).” (From *Terribilita* at <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/terribilita>.)

In any case, these human beings of very high intelligence and autistic characteristics—whether those personality traits be inherent or self-trained habits—are becoming increasingly rare, especially in the United States which has academic results at or nearly at the bottom of developed nations for all levels of academic talent; the American results are particularly bad for highly talented students and many of those students, including me, go on to frustrating lives of—often—low achievement. Genius can’t be created in someone not born to it, but it can be destroyed in those born to it by bad environments such as American schools or American culture in general.

While its true that the good students aren’t necessarily the creative geniuses, even when they have extremely high IQs, it is true more often than these authors think that creative scientists are surprisingly people-oriented and also surprisingly as diligent as those who are the “prize pupils” by way of diligence and hard work and an IQ at least reasonably high, but with few signs of creativity. Take modern physics. We can see Dirac and others who are “on the autistic spectrum,” but we can also see the highly-sociable and non-conformist Richard Feynman as well as conformists—right down to their well-tailored suits—Murray Gell-Mann and Julian Schwinger. A very important corrective can be made to the portrayal of Albert Einstein in *The Genius Famine* [21], who was quite talented in languages and did

well in school. Corrected facts and a better understanding can be found in this *New York Times* article from 1984, *EINSTEIN REVEALED AS BRILLIANT IN YOUTH* found at <https://www.nytimes.com/1984/02/14/science/einstein-revealed-as-brilliant-in-youth.html>.

High-level geniuses seem, according to histories and biographies I've read, to be more complex than the models used in *The Genius Famine* [21] or the next book to be discussed. At the same time, it supports the general viewpoint in those books that the world doesn't much appreciate or support geniuses if even highly sociable geniuses have to develop 'autistic-like' strategies for getting their work done.

In *At Our Wits' End: Why We're Becoming Less Intelligent* [105] by Edward Dutton & Michael Woodley of Menie, the authors write about the disappearance of geniuses and about the more general background to a developing problem with dramatic drops in average IQ in the West since the Industrial Age began, circa 1800. IQ measurement began in earnest in the 20th century, but there are physiological attributes—such as reflex speed—which correlate well with IQ and were measured from the beginning of the Industrial Age by men with skills in physiology and physics and instrument-making. In addition, a simple graph in *At Our Wits' End: Why We're Becoming Less Intelligent* [105] showing significant innovations in science and engineering by year (sometimes to solve existing problems and sometimes as a result of exploration of this world—and drawn from a standard 'timeline' history of modern science and technology) indicates that such innovations peaked in the West around 1850.

The two sets of analyses, those of Barzun and similar 'literary' thinkers and those of Woodley and similar 'quantitative thinkers, agree to a frightening extent: the West is in deep trouble. It's the sort of deep trouble which will lead to a large decrease in population over the next few generations. This might well start at any time. Expect violence and disrupted economic systems and all that comes from those sorts of disorder, including famines and epidemics and many men and women leaving no descendants. Barzun spoke of the West recovering from this sort of a situation before and guessed that, if we recover at all, it will come after—perhaps—a century of suffering and will start with some young men who discover some long-abandoned library and are fascinated by those works which are demanding—think of the so-called Renaissance which was really a revival of and end to the Medieval period and a beginning of the Modern Era. (Unfortunately, those particular young men mistakenly thought the horrible years behind them to have been

typical of the entire Medieval Era and didn't know only a century separated them from the High Middle Age, an age of prosperity and learning and high art.)

Historians, economic and other types, have discussed these sorts of situations before. In *A Distant Mirror* [135], Barbara Tuchman gives a good description of the problems during the century of troubles following the High Middle Age and, in *Farewell to Alms* [22], Gregory Clark presents graphs and economic discussions of cycles in civilizational capabilities of the West from the Middle Ages up to the Industrial Age and beyond. The general scheme of those historians, complementary to that of Barzun and Woodley of Menie, is to think in terms of prosperity leading to population growth, disproportionately great among those with lesser capabilities, putting stress on an economy and causing a great loss of population, a "Darwinian cleansing," which opens up opportunities to those in who are laborers and craftsmen and merchants.

If we Christians wish to live up to our self-righteous claims to be the servants of God, we must start working towards some better way of handling our prosperity and our losses of prosperity, some way which avoids the loss of genetic quality during periods of increasing prosperity while honoring the sacredness of each human being as an adopted child of the God of Jesus Christ. We need to recognize that this Western Civilization which has been destroyed, largely by our drop in intelligence, was a substantial part of the communal Body of Christ—to which we have a great duty, to say the least.

I discussed these matters from a slightly different angle and also provided links to prior writings on the general topic in Chapter 696, *Here Be Dragons*.

## 341 What is a Person?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2612>. It was finished and uploaded on 2019/03/27.]

There is something describable by the term ‘human nature’ and something else describable by the term ‘human personhood’. We’ve confused the two greatly in our modern world, so intellectually challenged in nearly all fields of thought but science and technology and so morally challenged in all fields including science and technology.

To orthodox Trinitarian Christians, Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox and Lutherans and others, it is the most fundamental truth of all truths that God is three Persons, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, in One God. God is three Persons in One divine Being, one divine Nature.

‘Human personhood’ as I understand it is a peculiar set of relationships, first of all with God or at least with God’s Creation, second of all with other individual creatures in that Creation; these relationships are the sort which can make a human being a friend of God, capable of sharing His life. ‘Human nature’ as I understand it is our basic, thing-like human animal beings, in themselves noble enough that they are capable of conceiving of moral truths and other sorts of truth, divine being and maybe divine Person-hood. To avoid confusion, remember that human nature can refer to the characteristics of those bipedal, beer-brewing animals which belong to a certain branch of the family of *Hominidae*—see the side-bar at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homo\\_sapiens](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homo_sapiens), or it can refer to a specific particular member of `<em>homo sapiens</em>`.

So this much we Christians know:

- The Father is a Person.
- The Son is a Person.

- The Holy Spirit is a Person.
- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God, one divine Nature.

and,

- Each individual human being is a human person only as an image of God, by way of God's offer of friendship and that individual's acceptance of that offer.
- Each individual human being is inherently, by birth, a human animal.

We should be careful in assuming we mortal human beings are persons and generous in speaking of efforts by our own selves and by others to accept God's offer of friendship. We should look for signs of the development of that relationship between God and all those we care about, especially those for whom we have some responsibility.

This is the way in which person was defined in the 1913 edition of Webster's dictionary[140], along with an example of (mis-)use by John Locke—a man who, in my opinion, gifted us with a lot of bad understandings of man as an individual and as a community:

**person** 3. A living, self-conscious being, as distinct from an animal or a thing; a moral agent; a human being; a man, woman, or child. [1913 Webster]

Consider what person stands for; which, I think, is a thinking, intelligent being, that has reason and reflection. –Locke. [1913 Webster]

Good try, I would think, but meaningless more than wrong. Or “not even wrong” as some would say. Or even, “It doesn't fly in the modern atmosphere.” But one criticism: our self-consciousness is more often than not distorted rather than true, leading us—for example—to justify what our body was already doing as being the result of an act-of-will. This is why I've downgraded will in my anthropological thinking and completely thrown out 'free-will'. We have the inclinations of a human animal, including the inclination to explore the world and think about it and to project our own selves into possible futures. We can consciously form habits of good behavior. Our wills are constrained by our human animal nature and our minds

work best when working toward the future. In person-hood, however defective and incomplete during our mortal life, we at least see and feel hints of a greater unity, a perfection and completeness possible only to those more fully in communion with God than is possible in our mortal lives.

Too many Christians talk and act as if this sort of situation, where traditional understandings don't work, indicates problems only on the side of the modern world and its thinkers. Too many other Christians and far too many non-Christians talk and act as if this sort of situation, where traditional understandings don't work, indicates those traditions have no validity whatsoever and need to be jettisoned in favor of a non-Christian or anti-Christian worldview.

Words, their meanings and their usages, seem to develop into customs—something which meets some combination of need and various desires. The word 'person' was taken over by well-meaning human thinkers and actors and feelers, such as pro-life activists who needed some way of expressing their moral intuitions about the value of human life. The problem is: rattlesnakes and human beings are both mortal creatures which arose from the dust of the earth, so to speak.

There is much about human animals to make us unique in the animal kingdom—whether it be the case that the differences are qualitative in new attributes or merely quantitative in attributes shared with other animal species. There is also the Christian revelation that human beings belong to God in a special way, by way of an offered adoption, an adoption made possible when the Son of God took on a human nature. He was one of us, yet He brought His divine Person-hood into union with a particular human being—Jesus of Nazareth. Since He was one of us and yet not a human person, we have another line of argument that we are not inherently persons—at least if we wish to protect the meaning of Person-hood when we think of Father and Son and Holy Spirit.

Still, as I wrote, if not inherently persons—we are unique in our totality and in, for example, the level of our abstract reasoning powers even if chimpanzees possess some of those powers.

To summarize:

We become Person-like by responding properly to God or, at least, God's Creation. We become human persons by forming good, loving relationships with the Triune God. We become friends with Him. We learn how to share His Life, though He Is

and we will be mortal creatures sharing divinity and sustained by the Almighty for time without end.

Our person-hood and our life after death doesn't come because we possess some immaterial soul which is inherently part of each of 'us'. Rather is it the case that we're born as human animals and ascend to a higher spiritual state by way of accepting God's offer of friendship.

## Part VII

# The Narrative We Know as a World



## 342 Introduction: The Narrative We Know as a World

In this part, I've collected essays or articles from my weblogs, *Acts of Being* at <http://loydfueston.com/> and *To See a World in ain of Sand* at <http://loydf.wordpress.com/>, I deal the narrative level of this universe, a level at which God's purposes are manifest and the universe becomes a world, unified and coherent and complete.



## 343 Sleepwalking Into an American Empire

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=42>. It was finished and uploaded on 2006/10/01.]

I know just enough about history and economics to be dangerous and what I know leads me to the dangerous thought that a sufficiently large political entity with a centralized government will tend strongly to evolve into an empire, no matter its pretenses to being a republic. It may have initial periods of freedom, but the power and wealth at the centers will be too much a prize for ambitious souls, whether they be virtuous pagans or toads. If no Caesar or Genghis Khan shows up, the prize will still draw the attention of those smaller, toad-like men who will forge a political machine. In either case, the sinister version of the invisible hand of Adam Smith will be moving and it will be organizing the efforts of some sort of ambitious men to the purpose of controlling that power and wealth and further concentrating it.

As is my wont, I'll digress (seemingly) to point out a way in which the United States in post-Lincoln era is similar to the late Roman Republic:

Large-scale wars and long periods of preparatory periods for war, along with the economic advantages of victory, perverted the economy into a highly liquid form, creating great wealth of a certain, morally destructive sort. Agricultural land and other productive assets were turned into commodities to be bought and sold by speculators. Human beings became commodities not much later than the farm-land. (I actually believe we began the process of becoming an empire with the Louisiana Purchase and the rarely-told betrayal of the American Indians which was

part of that Purchase. But that's too complex a story for this blog entry.)

Some say there are more chattel slaves in the world than there ever were, though it's true that the vast majority for now are held in Islamic countries. But we in the West seem well-advanced in our efforts to turn the defenseless into commodities, even to the point where we are harvesting cells and organs from embryos bred for that purpose. More broadly, we value comfort and presumptive security to an unhealthy extent, ignoring the warnings of Benjamin Franklin and others that such attitudes will lose us our freedom. As events are working out, those who die soon will probably die with some substantial freedom of a formal sort. Beyond that short time-frame, the freedom—even in the most formalistic sense—of the average American citizen is pretty much lost, absent a courageous choice I mention later. But most Americans will be little concerned with a loss of their freedom. They will be much more concerned with loss of luxury goods, and we have guaranteed that loss—for most Americans – by selling off our productive capacity to gain spending cash in the short-term.

In fact, there is a strong connection between the conversion of productive assets into commodities and the conversion of human beings into commodities. Human beings are not autonomous agents who float freely between different ways of living and different ways of making a living. Nor is farm-land simply two feet of good soil in a certain location. It is literally the ground upon which particular families will form specific ways of life and will unite to form larger communities, political communities and communities of worship. When farm-land becomes a commodity, so do specific ways of life. In general, when productive assets become commodities, stable ways of life are destroyed. Moral structures are destroyed. And those defenders of corporate capitalism who claim to be moral conservatives will wonder why people with shattered families and communities do not adjust to being well-behaved hotel maintenance workers or competent nuclear engineers or whatever. Those defenders of corporate capitalism who claim to be moral conservatives seem to miss the fact that human beings do not readily take to being treated as commodity items. And the essence of corporate capitalism is the conversion of many aspects of human life into commodities.

A population of farmers who lose their land to speculators will not be magically transformed into a mobile force of generic workers. They will be a population of human beings no longer inhabiting the environments in which

they were formed, for which they were formed. They will be so many Antaeuses separated from the ground which gives them their strength. Their children will tend to be ill-disciplined and socially maladjusted. Even the adults will be demoralized creatures who will seem to have lost their moral focus, their social habits, even their ability to function well in practical endeavors. They will be melting down into a proletariat mass just as the Roman plebeians did when they lost their farms and their shops to the speculators and industrialists of their days.

We have no excuse for not seeing these terrible possibilities. A knowledge of ancient history is not necessary for this insight. We saw the destruction of an already damaged people when large numbers of Southern Blacks left their impoverished but morally structured communities in Alabama and Mississippi. They streamed north to become commodities of a sort in Detroit and Philadelphia. They left the outer regions of Hell to enter the fires of the depths of Hell in the inner-city ghettos. Middle-class youth from the nicest suburbs are taking to the depraved and exploitive culture of the inner-cities with an ease that should frighten us. Have they skipped many of the stages of destruction to move right to the state of illiterate and morally disordered barbarism? I fear so.

A liquid economy and a powerful government will draw ambitious men towards that government where they, and the political machines they form, will tax heavily and build up welfare systems, including programs such as Social Security. They will tend strongly to make the disenfranchised masses dependent upon the central government. Our relationships of dependency form our true loyalties. Power-seekers act as if they know this, but we've collaborated with them in making us dependent upon central powers. It's remarkable that Christians supposedly conversant with the letters of St. Paul could have so willingly and enthusiastically made themselves and their children dependents and beneficiaries of the principalities and powers of this world. It's remarkable that followers of a God who accepted crucifixion for their sake could so easily sell their souls and their children's souls to escape the ordinary difficulties of the world, however harsh those difficulties sometimes are.

A powerful government with lots of liquid wealth to tax will also build large armies and navies. At that point, an empire is well advanced in its formation, though the actual process is complex and very few of the servants of the embryonic empire will even realize they are such. They may even imagine themselves to be defenders of traditional values or freedom or

something else they don't understand.

Soon, we Americans will face the choice Hannah Arendt predicted for us several decades ago, even before we began selling our children's futures to the up and coming Asian countries: we can sink into poverty or we can complete our evolution into an empire and use our military power to steal what we need to maintain our living standards. Then again we could accept an honorable poverty and begin the difficult and demanding task of building this country into one we could proudly leave to our children and grandchildren. I'm not betting we'll have the courage or integrity to make this last choice. I'm not even sure our current political systems would allow us such a choice.

# 344 More on Empires: We Americans Are Not a Wealthy People

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=44>. It was finished and uploaded on 2006/10/20.]

In my first posting on the American Empire which is taking a somewhat more definite shape, I noted the relationship between liquid wealth and the growth of central powers. Those central powers, in the case of the United States—an unholy alliance of politicians and corporate capitalists, will see liquid wealth as so much booty to control. Morally, they are cowardly versions of Genghis Khan, gaining control by destroying true economies and stripping future generations of their productive capabilities.

There are two reasons for doing this. If wealth can be made liquid, that is, transformed into cash and stocks, then the looters – investors and politicians alike—can claim to have increased wealth and then can take their cut. In fact, it is not likely wealth has been increased, though a certain (and unknowable) amount of liquidity can help local economies that need to trade with each other to meet true human needs.

The frenzies on Wall Street and in the corporate suites to cash in as soon as possible make an interesting counterpoint to our country's inability to create enough jobs to cover even the growth in the native population let alone all the immigrants coming to help the plutocrats by dropping wages. It is interesting how well men will pay themselves for selling this country's productive capacity, its economic future, to countries run and inhabited by men with more energy and intelligence and foresight than Americans have.

This dismantling of an economy by speculators is perhaps inevitable as

soon as the citizens of a country agree to a cash-based, speculative economy. And we should always remember how politicians feed the frenzy of the markets. Those in positions of public trust are also stealing from the future generations of this country to build up a cash economy. How else will they get the taxes to increase their own power and to create classes of dependents? How else will they build up welfare systems and systems of public works? How else will they build great armies and navies to project their wills throughout the world?

And it might well be the case that the great armies and navies of the United States will survive as the general population begins to feel the effect of having been dumbed down and de-skilled, of having the productive capacity of this country sold to companies in Shanghai and Tokyo and Seoul. Those armies and navies, and the politicians who control them, will have to learn the skills of any imperial military and government that wishes to survive: having grown by dissipating the economic strength of their core region, they will have to learn how to steal what they need to maintain their power and their personal life-styles.

## 345 Writing Serious Books During an Age of Illiteracy

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, found at <http://http://loyd.wordpress.com/?p=7>. It was finished and uploaded on 2006/11/22.]

Back in the year of our Lord 2000, Jacques Barzun published *From Dawn to Decadence: 1500 to the Present* [9] which tells the story of those centuries in terms of a steady drop in literacy levels over these past 500 years. True it is that some regions of the world have seen increases in the percentage of human beings able to read and somewhat understand advertising and political slogans. This is not literacy. This sort of low-level reading-skill exists for the convenience of corporate advertisers, politicians as dumbed-down as the electorate, and—of course—that portion of the electorate which values the illusions of security which sometimes come to those who give up their freedom.

Ultimately, those exploiting and those exploited have been one in the United States. There are signs that we are splitting into more rigidly defined classes but the exact nature and membership of these classes is not yet settled. In a word, we are becoming the sort of rich vs. poor society we imagined we could never become. For now, those classes are defined by the growing divide between wealthy and poor families, which divide is ordinarily masked by the use of individualistic statistics. High-earning women tend to marry men who earn still higher incomes.

Unlike the situation in European societies before the great drive for equality, the wealthy and powerful classes of this end-times for liberal democracy and corporate capitalism are as illiterate as the slum-dwellers. Equality meant first that the lower classes stopped aspiring to middle-class virtues and the members of the middle classes no longer work so that their

children or grand-children can be artists or writers or scholars—as was true of that lawyer named John Adams.

According to Barzun, French peasants in the early modern period read novels which are too difficult for modern readers who are considered to have high skills of literacy. The educated and wealthy classes in the West chose not to proselytize higher culture and then they chose to drop down to trash culture, not the healthy and vulgar culture of peasant peoples but trash culture. The literati of Western Civilization at the beginning of the third millennium of the Christian Era are incapable of reading any book which requires a serious amount of discipline or knowledge. Despite the airs they put on, they are ignorant of literature and lack the skills of reading difficult books just as much as they are ignorant of science and mathematics and philosophy and lack the skills of reading any of the more substantial works of science and mathematics and philosophy.

Our literary people delude themselves with their calls to straightforward writing as if Hemingway were the only competent writer in history—actually, it's doubtful if Hemingway were the straightforward, simple writer he sometimes seems to be but that's beyond the scope of this chapter. We modern people call for plain writing, at the sixth-grade reading level or less, because we're not capable of reading Melville or Cervantes or Sterne, Plato or Augustine or Nietzsche. Our calls for plain prose are the calls of people with minds inadequately formed to read any richer prose, any prose which allows for deeper thought.

In the modern world where all men are equal, all men are equally ignorant and equally illiterate. We have a right to sit passively in front of electronic boxes and to be entertained by various products of corporations which wish to reach the greatest number of consumers, a goal inherently in conflict with any possibility of reaching the richer layers of human mind and soul of particularized human beings. We have a right to scan prose with little in the way of content, using even books to keep our monkey-eyes busy that our brains not begin to form in particular ways. There are no generic human beings, though a flexible and open-minded human being can admire many things which are human but not his in particular. But those who allow themselves to be degraded into pretenses of generic human beings make better targets for both centralized political powers and corporate economic powers. In terms of my discussion in *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], they fail to become true human persons.

As Michael Polanyi tried to teach us, knowledge is personal – possessed

in a true form only by persons. Even technical knowledge becomes true knowledge only when it is personal. One of his examples, one he knew well, is the training of a surgeon. As I recall, he noted that the first look inside a human body after years of seeing color-coded organs in text-book pictures is shocking. He said that the medical student observing an operation or participating in an autopsy sees a jumble of similar colored organs just flopping over each other. Today, that situation might be different with all the computerized imagery which is available to anyone on the Internet and which is certainly used in high school and college courses touching upon anatomy. But it's still ultimately the same. Reality must be experienced directly, if only by our gazing eyes.

A more important example, which is common to all of us—if we were to simply think what we do in daily life—is:

When a student finds himself becoming a true surgeon, he no longer acts or thinks—during the operation—as if the scalpel were a tool he is holding. The scalpel has become an extension of his hand.

A book is an extension of the mind of an attentive reader—one reason to be careful of what you read. Your thinking processes are not tools of a supernatural mind which exists independently of those thoughts. Your mind is its thoughts. Moreover, you are your mind, including its thoughts, and you are your body including all that is labeled 'appendage' or 'peripheral'. This includes, in a qualified way, the physical tools you are accustomed to use, the clothes you wear, the furniture you sit in, and the recreational devices you use.

Though I have no intentions of drawing a detailed road-map in this context, this entire way of thinking leads to the realization that most modern people—certainly our self-proclaimed literary elite – are a people who are prisoners of their own minds. I imagine they think themselves amongst the great souls who escape Plato's cave with all its illusion, if only for a short while. In fact, they are imprisoned in that cave which is one constructed by human beings unwilling to deal with objective reality because it lies beyond their complete control. I'm not sure that's how Plato viewed matters but I'm not worried by that since I'm not—to my knowledge—in complete agreement with any human thinker. In any case, the cheap and trashy forms of imaginative fiction of our age—science fiction and elvish fantasy

and especially the sex- and species-bending forms of those genres—are truly ours. That is, they are magic—works appropriate for people who are bored or frustrated by the struggle to understand reality and to shape it in appropriately human ways; they rebel and retreat into magical attitudes. As I noted in *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], scientists of recent decades have joined in this retreat into magical attitudes. Another description for this magical view held by modern people is: adolescent power fantasies.

And this provides an over-simplistic but indicative description for the worldview of many modern people, including the overwhelming majority of our cultural, political, social, and religious leaders: the world can be shaped by man and, in fact, we are duty-bound to do so.

The more traditional view, amongst Christians and Jews and pagans alike, is that man shapes the world in powerful but limited ways and most of those limitations are those imposed by the objective laws of God (or the gods) and nature. A healthy imagination is formed within those laws. This doesn't mean that a healthy imagination is formed rigidly, but it does mean that it is formed according to those moral purposes that pagans as well as Christians and Jews can see in the workings of nature, those purposes which run with the grain of the universe as the Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder put it. We Christians have faith that Christ's life and death tell us otherwise inaccessible truths about that grain of the universe. In any case, a healthy imagination must conform itself to what can be known of the laws of nature and nature's Creator.

A false imagination can violate even the rules of its proper playground—what-could-be, but it is part and parcel of the modern imagination to violate what-actually-is. And the line is not always clearly drawn. For example, I would classify the sometimes silly fantasy of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez as a legitimate, in fact—great, exercise of the human imagination. On the other hand, the sex-bending and species-blurring fantasies of the science fiction vein and also the dungeons-and-dragons fantasies and nearly all Christian fantasies are exercises of unhealthy, non-humane imaginations.

And then there are the more typical books on the best-seller lists. They are simply barren of thought and imagination. The appropriate description would be: “Boring!”. Banal. Mindless. The sorts of books written by people who think the essence of reading is to pass eyes over a page of text offering no challenges or obstacles. Published American fiction books are ephemeral, lacking in meat or even hearty vegetables.

So, what will happen to someone who strives for better than that, for an author who prefers Melville and Cervantes and Sterne, Austen and Hawthorne and O'Connor, to the stuff which fills the new book shelves of our modern barns of books? I've read as much as two pages of some of the books by modern best-selling American authors—some best-selling authors from Europe and South America are still worth reading. For the most part, I've not found a reason to continue reading any of those books by American authors, including those who receive rave reviews from critics who claim to be inclined to literature. Any history of American literature will tell you ephemeral trash has always sold better than good books.

I confess that I've over-simplified a bit. The historical novels of Gore Vidal are well worth a read, as are the novels of Wallace Stegner and Wendell Berry, but those men are not of the current generation. Mark Helprin's *Winter's Tale* was a powerful work of the human moral imagination and most certainly the most recent truly creative and profound work of fiction I have read by an American, but that book seems to have faded into the dimness of history, or even some pre-historical Golden Age. Going back a little, there were a number of worthwhile mystery writers (though not my favorite read) and historical novelists. Some writers I would classify as middle-brow, such as Lloyd C. Douglas, produced some interesting books – *Magnificent Obsession* veers at times towards the status of an experimental novel and one far more interesting than those of Coover or Updike or Cheever.

Few American authors have made a living by writing works of fiction which have proven to be of interest to anyone more than a few years after publication of their last book. There are certainly no American authors publishing worthwhile books in the mainstream of the American publishing industry—unless you consider as mainstream those smaller publishers who put out the works of Wendell Berry and perhaps one or two others.

Yet, after fifteen years of failing to publish a novel—with honest agents and editors telling me Americans can't read demanding books – I still refuse to give up. And the situation is still worse than that. One older agent wrote me that he could remember when there were people in the American publishing industry with minds that were developed well-enough to read books of the sort I write, but he claimed to know not a single person at that time (mid-1990s) in the publishing industry who had a well-developed mind. And I did read one literary biography of Melville which claimed that middle-class magazines appreciated the greatness of *Moby Dick*, giving it good reviews.

Melville's career was—arguably—destroyed by the Manhattan literary elite and also by his publisher's decision to stick to an expensive edition of his works. A sturdy but cheaper edition might well have sold well since insurance agents, retailers, undertakers, and metal-workers were apparently more willing, and better able, to deal with the ambiguities and complexities of *Moby Dick* than the literary elite were.

Finally, with the help of Stanley Hauerwas of Duke Divinity School and the open-minded generosity of the folks at the publishing firm of *Wipf & Stock*, I was in print with a book on theology and empirical knowledge titled: *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41]. I fear that book will prove too difficult for most modern theologians, philosophers, and scientists to read because of the decay of the imagination in modern man. When modern minds are seemingly well-formed at all, it is usually a rigid formation to the limited and defective structures of text-books – secondary works and not primary works of the human mind and imagination. Creative thinkers, such as Nietzsche, can be appreciated after a generation or more of plodding scholarly study. I fear that such efforts will tend to distort any true creativity, deforming it so that it becomes amenable to the mental exercises of those who think reality is constructed the way a toy-truck might be constructed from an erector set.

As might be guessed by those who struggled through to this point, I have no intention of cheapening or distorting what I wish to say in order to make it possible for the small minds of our literary elite and academics to handle. This is a matter of principle, but also a practical matter of politics and economics and life-style. For all the self-righteousness of the literary left about our current political situation, they are amongst the criminals who put us in this situation which they claim to despise at times, and they are also their own victims. I'll give merely a hint of what I mean:

Anyone who seriously thinks of either George Bush or Rush Limbaugh as a conservative knows little of deep-politics, of political philosophy if you will. They are a people adapted to an age and country where the average reading level of the newspapers is said to be fourth-grade and I would propose that the literary and popular novels of our age and country are no better. They are a people adapted to a utilitarian politics of looting by way of legal government programs and not to a politics of freedom or a politics of principle.

If you dumb people down by teaching them to read adolescent literature, don't be surprised if they think at that same level when it comes to political and moral issues. Don't be surprised if the authors and editors and publishers of those dumbed-down books settle in at that same level of thought.



## 346 Nurturing Evil

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=9>. It was finished and uploaded on 2006/11/30.]

Some Christians might have given this essay a title like: *Inviting Satan Into Your Soul*. I believe Satan to be a way of speaking literalized into an excuse for those without the courage to see the human face of modern evil. And, so, I speak of a nightmarish perception of that human face, kind and gentle, bearing the nicest of smiles. In the modern world, good under formation is often far uglier than that face of kinder and gentler evil. We modern human beings, Christians and pagans alike, can deal with that pleasant face of war-criminal presidents or Nazi bureaucrats but we would just as soon obliterate those uglier faces, perhaps the more so if we suspect that Jesus bears those uglier faces, distorted by genetic defect or some other suffering in this world which we consider a botched creation.

And what has this discussion of evil to do with literature? Everything. Somewhere, Dostoevsky said it is the job of authors in each generation to name (and describe) the Satan of their age. In my imaginative works, some technically classified as novels and some as philosophy or theology, I've named the Satan of the modern world: nice people organized into nation-states and corporations. That is, nice people who have ceded both their minds and their souls to various sorts of incorporated organizations, commercial and political. They do not think thoughts inconvenient to their role in these organizations and—ultimately—that means they do not develop any possibilities for deeper moral integrity. In fact, ultimately—as Hannah Arendt pointed out in her last work, *The Life of the Mind* [5]—it means they don't think.

It's hard to write meaningful works of literature which can appeal to such a people just because our major form of literature in this age remains

the novel and that is a work of moral exploration. A people who have ceded their minds and souls to that unholy alliance of nation-state and corporate capitalism are not a people capable of exploring their own moral natures. In fact, they will shy away as if they were vampires confronted by the rising sun.

True life scares the morally decrepit as health can sometimes scare sick people (see Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain* for a mythological exploration of this theme). To live is to live in peace, to live truly is to live in the Peace of Christ, And those prospects frighten us modern human beings. Even to be a virtuous pagan requires a reorganization of the soul which would cause us to change our priorities and, perhaps most painfully, to become more active in our thinking, including our moral analysis and decision-making.

A true novel deals with exactly the issues which middle-class people have avoided since 1900 or so. I don't know what is the underlying cause, whether there was true willfulness involved or simply the laziness of human beings descended from creatures who needed to seek some rest from the difficult efforts to survive and to successfully reproduce. In any case, I have accepted—in my various writings – the claim by Hannah Arendt that most of the evil in the modern world has been executed by nice middle-class human beings who simply don't think. They are like Captain Ahab, the captain in *Moby Dick* who claimed to be sane in his means, it was his ends which were mad. Of high capability in practical matters, insane in moral matters. After all, the morality of concrete creatures living in a world which is a story is the setting of purposes, of ends, of goals. Practical intelligence is still important as a way of helping us reach those goals, but practical intelligence by itself leads to a sort of madness which can be seen in *Moby Dick*, most especially in the horrible scene of carnage after some whaling ships discover a nursing ground of whales.

As a side-issue which I'll not explore in depths, I'll note that I do have a serious problem with that single, highly restricted form of novel which might be considered most conventional. It is best adapted to the exploration of the insides of the European or American bourgeoisie, a type of human being inhabiting a society structured to the needs of industrial production. There is much to say about the historical development and rapid rise of the bourgeoisie but I'll stick to my promise and avoid digression.

There are greater opportunities to discuss moral issues in the more loosely formed works of fiction, such as *Moby Dick*, *Tristram Shandy*, *Don Quixote*, or some modern novels such as *The Stone Raft* by Jose Saramago.

To stay within the form of the novel as so well, and somewhat rigidly, developed in the West during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is to stay within the possibilities of the morality proper to the middle-class during the early stages of industrial capitalism—more broadly within the early and liberal stages of modern fascism, but that’s another discussion I’ve touched on lightly in some works including my only published book to-date: *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41].

I’ll move on to discuss our current situation which is that of a fairly advanced state of moral disintegration. We imagine ourselves to be autonomous agents, a fiction accepted as such or as a truth by various economic and political thinkers depending upon the quality of their minds. I’m not convinced it was even useful, or morally desirable as a fiction, but I’ll let that go for now. The point is that we think we somehow stand outside the world we inhabit, judging which desires we should nurture or even create in ourselves. After making our judgments by way of some implausible attribute we label as ‘free-will’, we can choose a bundle of worldly goods that will best satisfy our chosen and innate desires.

This is a strange view of human beings, a stranger view when we realize that we consider ourselves, products of such a strange way of thinking and behaving, to be the best human beings in history—at least as a collective called ‘Americans’. The ‘Americanist heresy’ in Catholic terms, is the belief that Americans as a group are something uniquely good in history. It held in the United States even when most Americans were aware of their sinful natures as individuals but now it has infected the minds of most Americans, and probably most in the West, so that we now have lost sight of our inadequacies as individuals. Our idea of tragedy is not a disaster which comes from an effort to live up to, or directly violate, an objectively valid law. Our idea of tragedy is the failure at times to satisfy our desires. Our idea of comedy is not a direct recognition of the humor of the human condition through pain and suffering as well as through good times. Our idea of comedy is cheap laughs.

We are morally unstructured. We could not be otherwise because we believe that we make laws ourselves, limited only by our subjective feelings, our squeamishness. We can make laws because we are autonomous agents, constrained only by our own decisions as to the desires we will try to satisfy and our decisions as to the prices we are willing to pay to satisfy those desires. Without objectively valid laws, there are no purposes and thus no true narratives, no novels, and certainly no epic poems.

We are not a people capable of even reading *Don Quixote*, let alone producing a modern answer to that great work of art, a work which could explore true moral structures, in our insides and in the world, through a seemingly undisciplined romp through early modern Spain. We are not a people capable of reading Captain Ahab's confession that he was competent in practical matters and insane in moral matters because we can't understand how moral matters could lie beyond and outside practical matters. A cowardly form of prudence is our only virtue.

No longer practiced in the arts of forming and exploring purposes, we have become slaves of our own practical genius (at a time when it has decayed into a state of senility) and our moral views are formed by what is possible. We no longer believe, or can even state, that the greatest art of a mortal creature is the living of a good life directed towards a good death. We will corrupt ourselves, even scavenging parts from unborn babies, in order to extend our purpose-less lives for a few short years.

It is very hard to even open people's minds to the greater possibilities of moral nobility because one of our greatest tools for moral exploration, the novel, lies beyond the understanding of all but a few readers.

# 347 Principalities, Powers, Invisible Hands, and the Modern Author

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=10>. It was finished and uploaded on 2006/12/04.]

We live in a weird world. And one very difficult for a writer to deal with if he has ambitions to speak truly about the story I call the world. We modern human beings literalize metaphorical and even mathematical ways of speaking while we're incapable of exercising the imagination that would allow the formation and understanding of new metaphors. For now, mathematicians and other scientists seem to be able to exercise their peculiar, and very important imaginations, though some popular-level books written even by serious scientists would lead me to fear that scientists are just the other side of the same coin on which we find the Biblical Literalists and so-called Creation Scientists. We might be seeing the end of a major phase of creative scientific thinking as literalization continues to strangle the modern imagination.

As far as I can see, an author can speak about demons and angels and ghosts, gods for that matter, and risk being taken as a believer in those entities. Or that author can be openly skeptical so that he loses many valuable ways of speaking about complex events and about the moral meanings which inhere in even the most geophysical of events. I'm assuming in my fictional and non-fictional writings that this dilemma is not simply a passing phase but is rather a sign that God is forcing us to grow up in some important ways. We are to leave our pagan ways behind, or else we risk falling back into a world dimly lit by pagan thought. Even Christian-

ity would be re-paganized to a dangerous extent—though Christianity has never been fully de-paganized.

In some of my novels, especially *A Man for Every Purpose* – available for free download at <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/aman.pdf>, I try to point out the sheer reasonableness of our environments and the magic which comes in as a man tries to make sense of it, seeing first a universe and then a world if he's able to bring a sense of moral order to that universe. The true magic of literature lies in those processes of seeing a universe and then trying to bring a sense of moral order to the universe. This is no less true of philosophy, science, mathematics, and any theology which tries to understand God through His Creation.

What has this to do with Principalities, Powers, and Invisible Hands. Simple. They are ways of speaking, as I noted in *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41] with respect to the Invisible Hand of Adam Smith. Some modern scholars have even claimed that nearly all (maybe all?) of St. Paul's references to Principalities and Powers are references to pseudo-entities such as the invisible hand, which is really a way of speaking about the way that a society informally organizes itself when the members of that society share a system of moral beliefs and behaviors with that particular mix of moral order and disorder. (I'll speak only to the order in this sort of a mixture.)

In my first published book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], I discussed the true nature of the Invisible Hand and also emphasized that we see invisible-hand effects not only because of the moral order but also because that moral order is shared by a high percentage of the members of that society. It's quite possible that the United States was doomed, that our moral order would have decayed, even if we hadn't so many home-grown exploiters destroying moral order for fun and profit. We don't share a moral order across all regions and across all ethnic groups and across all levels of society. This is not to imply that any particular region or ethnic group or level of society has a greater degree of moral order; it is only to say that we don't share the same view of moral order.

As I discussed in *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41] and in some of my entries on my two blogs, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* at <http://loydf.wordpress.com/> and *Acts of Being* at <http://loydfueston.com/>, I have seen Satan in the genial faces of the modern middle-class, nice and empty of thoughts. There is still the problem of depicting the working of this Satan in the world. This Satan does not appear directly, a warrior of

evil, who confronts us face-to-face. In fact, this Satan does not appear at all in causes but in the effects of his invisible hand. This is to say that this saint is a pseudo-daemon in the same way that centrifugal force is a pseudo-force. There is no daemon (force) but only the appearance of a daemon (force) because of some effects. We feel centrifugal force as if there were really a force pushing us outward when we ride a merry-go-round—in fact, the inertial efforts of our bodies to continue moving in a straight line causes this illusion of an outward-pressing force. We think to perceive Satan, personalized evil in general, when we see the results of a particular social mammal species—man, as individuals interact in a way that is not morally structured in a proper way.

That's a mouthful but anyone who has even the most intuitive—but not superstitious—idea of Adam Smith's Invisible Hand or St. Paul's Principalities and Powers will understand the general concept. The problem seems to be that we have no good ways to speak of the evil, or other effects, that results when real-world entities chaotically interact and produce seemingly simple effects. In the cases that concern me now, we see morally ill-structured, unthinking human beings interacting and thinking themselves innocent of the results. Unthinking human beings do not foresee the evil possibilities in, say, the restructuring of human dependencies that comes with the adoption of something like the Social Security system in the United States. Soon enough, people are dependent upon the central powers and not upon families. When families begin to break up and, as an example of one specific effect, young people are disordered in their sexual behavior, we think that Satan must be behind it because we are nice people taking care of our legitimate needs and desires.

And the problem of a modern author is made more clear. How do we speak in such a way as to tie the large-scale evils of the modern age back to the unthinking actions of human beings acting as atoms in social collectives? We are willing to accept the good effects of our social collectives but we are blind to our responsibility in the evil effects our collective actions.

I've just about said as much as I wish to say in this blog-entry but I'll make a couple historical comments to help my readers understand what I'm saying.

Without giving many details, I'll claim that an important part of the process by which the Roman Plebeians were pauperized and made politically impotent was the construction of a large welfare system and the growth of a large body of civil servants that would be labeled 'social-workers' in the

modern world. The overall process was made possible by the destruction of the normal, flesh-and-blood dependent relationships of those Plebeians (ultimately of the Patrician families as well), and the construction of those welfare systems was made possible by a conversion of a stable economy into a highly liquid economy which could be exploited by financial speculators and politicians in the central government wishing to collect large taxes to fund both their welfare and military expenditures. (This should be sounding familiar at this point.)

Franz Jaggerstatter was a man executed by the German Army during World War II because he refused to serve in the Austrian Army, telling his judges that God would not approve of his fighting for an evil government, or words to that effect. Gordon Zahn, an American who taught at the University of Chicago, wrote a book about Jaggerstatter – *In Solitary Witness*. In that book, we learn that, following the Nazi take-over of Austria, Jaggerstatter dropped his involvement with fraternal and charitable movements because they had become fronts for the Nazi efforts to make people dependent upon them. He refused to participate in the sorts of charity which forged bonds of dependency between the Nazis and his fellow-citizens.

## 348 My Ends are Mad and Now I'm Also Stupid

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=51>. It was finished and uploaded on 2006/12/16.]

In *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], I noted that Melville thought Emerson and Thoreau to be morally insane – Hawthorne and Henry James, Sr. agreed. Melville noted in one place that the morality of those Cambridge sages was a spiritualized materialism that masked a total lack of charity, a total lack of love of others. Captain Ahab was seemingly intended to be a more courageous and more consistent Emerson: “My means are sane, it is my ends which are mad.” So said the prosperous captain of the Pequod.

Melville feared that Emerson and Thoreau were typical Americans, perhaps a bit more advanced than the ordinary citizen, but not much different in their hearts. In simple words, Melville feared that the Americans of his time were highly competent in pragmatic, worldly matters but morally insane.

Since Melville’s time, the American situation has developed in a very strange direction—though one predicted in a general way by clear-headed thinkers who knew history, such as Hannah Arendt. We were like Ahab, or gave a good impression that we were. We were competent sailors, whalers who brought back shiploads of whale-oil to light the great houses in Newport and Boston that the genteel amongst us might continue their gradual decay from the King James Bible and *Pilgrim’s Progress* and Shakespeare—however Bowdlerized—to our current state where those with doctorates are generally upset and confused by a sentence with more than one subordinate clause or so much as a single comma outside of a list of the starting rotation of their favorite baseball team. True it was that the construction of

many of those houses in New England and New York was actually funded by similar practical skills in the capture and transportation and selling of human beings—to his credit, Lincoln knew this and he really wanted to be merciful to the Southern states out of simple justice. He knew the Southern states had simply lost in a game of musical chairs where all the participants were evil in some substantial way.

Both industries played a role in the formation of the American character. Melville knew that well. He worked in the whaling industry and was an opponent of the slave-trading industry, though also strongly opposed to imposing the end of slavery on the South by means of external force of a legal or military sort. So far as I can tell, he felt this would do little good for the freed slaves or for the moral character of Americans.

No one who has intelligently read *Moby Dick* could believe that it was a modern discovery that the whaling industry was an immoral operation. As the scene of slaughter in the great whale nursery shows, Melville knew that it was an industry in which prosperity was had by those who were ruthless and unscrupulous. Perhaps they had not nurtured such vices before they set sail but circumstances can tempt us into corruption and we have to have the proper sorts of habits and attitudes and beliefs—moral character—to resist temptations or at least enough prudence to avoid it.

The sheer cruelty and ultimate stupidity of a hunting industry which rewards those who exterminate entire family lines of a species, entire regional populations, and maybe the entire species, isn't a discovery of the modern environmental activists. Nor was the evil nature of slavery a discovery of the generation of Lincoln and Garrison. Some Southern leaders, as I remember matters, had tried to end the slave trade by a provision in the Constitution and New Englanders and perhaps others in the northeast states had helped to kill the possibility—money was still to be made in the capture and selling of human beings. Lincoln himself later suspected the sudden surge of New Englander and New Yorker support for abolition in the 1850s was due to the new economic needs of the New Englanders and New Yorkers. They'd invested huge amounts of money in the upper Midwest and were afraid they'd not get proper returns if the Southerners were to control passage on the Mississippi River. It wasn't that New Englanders and New Yorkers had suddenly discovered the humanity of the slaves of Southern slaves so much as they'd discovered the importance of barges on the Mississippi River.

In any case, it's hard to imagine better cases than the whaling and

slave-trading industries of practical intelligence and moral insanity. And we are talking about two major industries of 19th century New England and New York, two industries which provided a lot of the money to build up the fledgling industries of those regions becoming so prosperous. It also spotlights that the shortsightedness of American leaders who are currently kicking the debt cans down the road are true descendants of the Founding Fathers who kicked the slavery can down the road, knowing full well they were building up a large population of peoples who would be very difficult to assimilate into European-American society.

After deciding how to make their livings on purely utilitarian grounds – what can bring in a good return on a modest amount of capital and a large investment of labor?—those New Englanders and New Yorkers then started the strangest sorts of moralistic dances. When the slave-trading industry became very dangerous because the British Navy was hanging officers on slave-trading ships and imprisoning the men at the same time that the mines and industries of Minneapolis and Chicago promised better and safer returns, those citizens of the Northeast of the United States changed. Oh they changed. The people of Boston had not only sought jobs in the slave-trading industry, they'd also tarred and feathered William Lloyd Garrison more than once for his opposition to the slave trade. All of a sudden, those in the northeast states looked South to see the suckers who were holding the hot potato and saw them as being the most evil human beings the world had seen. So far as I can tell, the transition took only a few years—at most. Morally insane and also wretchedly shallow. And the true evil of the Southern slave-owners, in the eyes of New Englanders and New Yorkers, was the power they might have to prevent high rates of return on investments in the upper Midwest.

One of the marks of our practical intelligence and moral insanity is the tendency to first decide how to make our livings to secure our comfort and safety and then to start thinking in a moralistic manner about our chosen situation. This can be difficult when you chose to make your living by the brutal and large-scale slaughter of species of animals known to be vulnerable to extermination. It can be even more difficult when you chose to make your living by capturing human beings, transporting them across the ocean under miserable conditions, and then selling them as if they were cattle. But those New Englanders and New Yorkers had good teachers in these mysterious arts of justifying evil by way of feeling good about yourself, Emerson and Thoreau among others. And maybe Emerson and

Thoreau were simply children of their times, not creators but expositors of commonly-held feelings and ideas. And maybe they were abolitionists but that was a matter of sentimentality and not a matter of good moral reasoning upon true moral principles.

Well, not we've advanced to a new stage. Not only are we morally insane, we are also stupid when it comes to the practical arts of making things. All those factories built by whale-blood and human-blood are being turned into condos or art coops. Our stores are filled with a vast array of goods carrying the inscription: "Made in China." Our colleges are dropping the standards for graduation even in such modern subjects such as computer science. We depend upon the Indonesians and the Taiwanese to do the difficult work of design and manufacture for our electronics industries. Our novels, magazines, and newspapers are written at a sixth-grade level and good readers retreat to earlier times or else read the latest novels from Chile or Columbia or even oft-maligned Portugal. I could go on, but I've spoken on these matters elsewhere and so have many others.

A people long insane in moral matters and more recently rendered stupid will be incapable of seeing their own situation. There have been a few maverick thinkers, such as Paul Craig Roberts—the supply-side theorist from the Reagan administration, who have been warning us for a while that we were selling off (cheap) or otherwise wasting our productive capabilities. More recently, I read an editorial in the Springfield Republican in which an economic journalist wrote of his realization that the great results on Wall Street are due to the speculators liquidating our productive capabilities to provide short-term gains. In some of my writings, I've been pointing out that this liquidation of a large economy provides the conditions for the development of a central, imperial government. Though it's far from clear that our corporations have made profits in many a year—the ones officially in the red are simply those who were not able to sell off enough assets at discount to the Asian entrepreneurs. And the politicians have a major stake in such a system where the huge cash flows in the marketplaces provide the taxes which power the growth of the welfare and military systems that define an empire.

Morally insane and now stupid in the ways of the world. Except for those scoundrels who work on Wall Street or in those massive buildings in Washington, DC. They're morally insane and stupid in the ways of doing things that increase true wealth but they're very smart when it comes to seizing control of assets build up by prior generations and liquidating those

assets to fund their schemes.



## 349 Morality and the Modern Novel

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=12>. It was finished and uploaded on 2006/12/21.]

A novel is a means of exploring human thoughts, feelings, and actions as set in specific environments. There is no other justification for the novel in its standard modern form, though many books labeled as novels are no such thing. Reading novels is now no more than a habit of barbarians living in the midst of the rubble and not even understanding the conflict between the very existence of narratives and the disordered social, political, and economic activities of our modern lives. Narratives are the unfolding in time of some sort of order. The most interesting novels deal with struggles for order. This is true also of such narratives as the tales of the physical order which emerges in the form of galaxies, indicating some underlying truth about the narrative nature of this universe.

Even at his most tendentious, Tolstoy managed to stir up our interest in his characters. This is because Tolstoy understood one thing and he understood it well: in an unsettled world, moral integrity is always a matter of conversion where there is a conflict between inside and outside. Whether we speak of a conversion to a state of virtuous paganism, such as the one that was fostered in the Patrician youth of the Roman Republic, or a conversion to a God-centered state such as that which intensifies upon entry to a monastery, that conversion process is extended over time. But there may well be moments when the outside world relaxes its pressures and often, in the case of a novel, that is when the end should come.

An alert reader can disagree with all of Tolstoy's strange theories of history and with his unorthodox interpretation of Christianity, but it doesn't

matter so much because Tolstoy understood that one truth about the nature of moral integrity in an unsettled world. He understood, in too pessimistic a way, what Robert Louis Stevenson dealt with explicitly in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*: by itself, underneath the best behaved of human beings lie deeply disordered parts.

What can we say about those modern middle-class people as described by Hannah Arendt in her analyses of the holocaust and other horrors of the modern world: nice and having no real moral integrity? She hit the nail on its ugly head when she said that Adolf Eichmann was a nice man who would have fit in quite well in an American suburb. Eichmann was the career bureaucrat who was in charge of rounding up the Jews and transporting them to the death-camps. He didn't hate Jews and did what he could to help them escape until the regulations were tightened up. Then. . . Well, he had his career to worry about and he had a strange sort of moral integrity in which obeying the laws of modern nation-states and the regulations of modern bureaucracies is so important as to justify work in support of truly evil actions.

Every nice middle-class person of the modern world knows that morality starts with paying your mortgage and your taxes. And there are children to educate that they too might have good careers. I've written elsewhere about this situation. For now, I'll only add that such a people can no longer recognize the reality of moral struggle. To admit that morality is a struggle and not a simple obedience of the law is to admit discomfort and potential disruption of a life of well-planned comfort and security. A true novel becomes a painful reminder that the modern middle-class live in a fragile oasis. And that oasis is nearly destroyed, though few there are who have eyes to see.

To his credit, Philip Jose Farmer in his otherwise over-rated *Riverworld* series (but I'm not an admirer of the sci-fi genre), played up the moral conflicts in the 'resurrected' Hermann Goering. Human life, despite the idiocies of the modern glorification of absolute evil, has to have some sort of moral order. Evil is not an alternative moral order but rather disorder of the sort which puts us on the path to non-existence.

And what about that strange character of history and *Riverworld*: Hermann Goering? He was a legitimate hero of World War I, a brave pilot of the Flying Circus commanded by the Red Baron made famous to Americans by Snoopy. Goering was in some serious sense a military man wishing to have good order in his life. And yet he found himself as one of the major

protagonists in a tale of horror and disorder. He collapsed into a state of drug-addiction and mental disease. He was heading towards a state of total disorder, that is, a collapse into non-existence. He was not happy with his work or his life but he seemingly had nothing in the way of moral gumption. So, he injected narcotics in his efforts to mask the conflicts he couldn't deal with.

People who are morally well-ordered, or at least wish to be, know the fear of non-existence. As a Christian, I would claim that worldly moral order by itself is only a temporary and inadequate resting-ground on the path towards non-existence. In any case, the novel's strong point is what some literary critics and scholars seek to deny. The novel is not a form of narrative oriented to exploring conflicts within some set scheme of moral in conflict with a hostile world. That is a tragic, or fatalistic, view that is in deep conflict with the Christian view that the price of redemption has been paid and salvation is available to those who would accept God's offer of friendship.

Fatalism is a part of many Christian heresies and is also part of the beliefs of various sect-like branches of Christianity. But Christian moral beliefs have no part of fatalism and thus making our way in the world is a matter of exploration and not a matter of following some sort of guide we can pull out of our pockets whenever we have to make a decision. Christians have rules to be sure, but even those rules aren't fully describable in terms of positive law or bureaucratic regulation. Christian rules help to make some sense of this messy world which is still being born; they do not help us to pretend to impose an unrealistic order upon that world. Christians, or others with the courage for moral exploration, consider it interesting to behold a novelistic display of the imperfect inner order of a man and the imperfect outer order of his environments or world, not in the way of passive entertainment but rather in the same way that we take a more concrete interest in the moral struggles of our parents and children and friends.

In fact, in the greatest of novels—even those concentrating upon external actions—the main struggle is between the inner and outer man. Can Lord Jim reconcile his feelings of being a brave and competent man with his actions the one time he was in a position—or so he'd thought at the time—to be a hero? Can Emma learn to see her actions in the light of the high moral standards she holds internally? Is Ishmael to die with the heroic and morally insane Ahab? Is he to share in the fears and death of the pagan

harpooners? Is he to join with the mates in less meaningful fears or perhaps a fearlessness founded upon ignorance of the humanly legitimate reasons for Ahab seeking death in defiance of what-is and the pagans accepting death in great fear? Ishmael's means of salvation seems to be one of the most profound jokes in all of literature for salvation of a sort comes by way of a coffin intended for the corpse of a barely reformed cannibal.

With this sort of overview, we can perhaps begin to understand a point raised by Lionel Trilling, one of the last of the morally sane liberals of the Modern Age. Professor Trilling noted that all great modern writers shared one feeling—dislike of the modern world. We can understand both that dislike and the dislike reciprocated by the middle-classes of the modern world—when they bother to read a worthwhile novel and find out how it attacks their delusions. Serious modern writers, even non-novelists, sense the disconnect between the assumptions of modern middle-class life and those of the vocation of a serious writer. The first disconnect is between a dream-world created to shelter the cowardly against real storms and the confused and multifarious world being explored by the honest writer, Christian or non-Christian, Marxist or Catholic traditionalist, wealthy writer of good-selling books or impoverished and unpublished scribbler.

Even those like Melville, or myself, who delude themselves into thinking the world will accept their criticisms, quickly find they've crossed some sort of a divide that separates them from people unwilling to consider life as a moral adventure of sorts. Oddly enough, Christian novelists, such as Flannery O'Connor, or those hoping to find a reason to accept Christianity, such as Hermann Melville, find themselves in the company of willfully perverse moral explorers such as the French Symbolists of the 1800s. Together, they look back across that divide upon people whose virtues are those necessary to secure their prosperity. When that need seemed to match up with Christian moral values, there was at least a possibility of some pretense of true morality. When the marketplace frenzies more recently reached a very high level, there is a need to encourage any or all activities that generate cash-flow.

Because of this need to keep the cash flowing, we've found ourselves in a very strange position: even those who have chosen to live in perverse ways, homosexuals first of all, demand the right to be nice middle-class human beings with all the benefits of prosperity. Mr. and Mr. Middle American. Wherever she is, Gertrude Stein must be laughing so hard as to hurt. Moral rebellion domesticated to the needs of American prosperity. Soon, S&M

parlors will be found in the best of shopping centers.

I guess that those nice, middle-class homosexuals must also be allergic to the moral explorations of true novels. If they read Andre Gidé, it must be in a strange mood analogical to the nostalgia that wannabee moral conservatives feel when they read Jane Austen. I don't know if the mass of respectable American homosexuals, married or not, have yet discovered that novelists are their enemies. They will be feeling the need to short-circuit this process of moral exploration because of what might be found. Like other nice middle-class Eichmanns, they will be pretending to read books pretending to be true novels, even pretending to be courageous and creative novels. And the novel will continue to decay into strange forms which are uninteresting to those with spiritual or moral courage—check the new novel shelves of your local barn of books.

I'll propose an answer to the question implied by Professor Trilling's observation that serious writers dislike the modern world. Serious writers are, pretty much by definition, sensitive to moral order no matter what their personal lives or sexual tastes might be. Some might be better labeled as miner's vultures rather than miner's canaries, but they're all sensitive to those poison gases given off by the presence of millions, perhaps billions, of Dr. Jekylls. Using Biblical imagery, we modern people are white-washed sepulchers, clean and bright on the outside and full of filth inside. Even those who pretend to be Christians have followed the revival-tent model of spiritual conversion: proclaim the Lord's name and you've already got your ticket to Heaven. You can then return immediately and blindly to enjoying a prosperous life.

But we're too nice to think of ourselves as morally gutless. We feel good about ourselves. We're exactly the people Hannah Arendt described when she spoke of all those nice middle-class people who actually did the work for Hitler and Stalin and even that lesser devil, Cecil Rhodes. We're nice on the outside and have no moral integrity, no moral order on the inside. As I've pointed out several times, and many of the things I say bear much repeating, Adam Smith feared that a prosperous commercial society would weaken its citizens until they would become exactly what Professor Arendt would see two centuries later: genial people with no moral guts.

And that leads to my current explanation of the decay of the modern novel: we modern people shy away from moral explorations the way a vampire shies away from the sun. Our human selves would not necessarily melt away under the light of self-examination, but our illusions and

self-righteousness would melt away and we would be as naked as Job. It's mystifying that so many claim to be Christians, even Biblical Christians, and yet fail to see the nakedness which is a part of being a creature.

To open our eyes and to see more truly would bring pain. We would learn the truth of the unique evil of Americans discussed by Solzhenitsyn in his introduction to the abridged version of *The Gulag Archipelago*: we commit fewer crimes than other powerful peoples but we walk away from those we do commit and immediately forget them, pronouncing ourselves to be pure. He was wrong but only in thinking it to be unique to Americans. It is unique to modern middle-class human beings. Our prosperity has made us into wretched, spineless creatures. We seduced ourselves into the delusion that we could be moral simply by adopting the virtues which are useful in sustaining that prosperity. And, thus, it's strange from a wider perspective but makes sense in the modern perspective that defiantly active homosexuals can be as virtuous as anyone else. After all, they can pay their mortgages and taxes, they can pursue their careers in a dedicated and professional manner. They can buy lots of goods. [Apparently, Solzhenitsyn's introduction is no longer published, at least not in American editions. Only the Soviets are evil in the latest version of history according to the American publishing industry, a branch of the propaganda ministry for Oceania. It's good that we're such a free, and well-trained, people that we don't even have to be told what to do by our masters. As we sit at our desks in publishing firms or local newspapers, as we teach in schools or write popular history books, we are mature enough to censor inconvenient truths from our own works.]

When the German middle-class found they could sustain their life of safety and comfort only by collaborating with the Nazis, they quickly accepted their situation. After all, serving Hitler didn't present any real conflict with the primary moral values of the modern middle-class life. They could still pursue success in their careers or their simpler jobs. They could pay their mortgages and their taxes. They could encourage their sons to go off to fight bravely in the German Army. They could dress up nicely and go to church on Sunday.

For fifteen years, I've been writing novels that explore various aspects of this moral confusion of modern human beings. Not a one of those novels has been published and now I can understand why. The modern advocates of 'do anything so long as you don't hurt anyone else' are really no different from the moralistic middle-class Christians who did so much damage to Melville's

literary career. They think to protect their delusions by pretending their beliefs and behaviors are beyond questioning. All moral problems have been solved – aren't we a prosperous people? We can just settle down to enjoy prosperity knowing we've earned it by hard-work and a deep-down goodness.



## 350 What is a Conservative?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=54>. It was finished and uploaded on 2006/12/29.]

This will be a short one and necessary only because there are so few who really care about ideas nowadays. We think in terms of policies, of immediate flows of cash and the resources which cash can buy in the modern world. And so it makes some limited sense in the context of our times that most people are called conservatives if they favor the policies of the liberals of yesterday.

Admittedly, many of them have the good intention of trying to return to a period when moral order seemed to be better-established. Few of them, including the professional commentators know enough (reliable) history to even realize, as one example, that the suburb which seemed a stronghold of moral order in the 1950s was invented as a desperate move to protect children and their mothers from the marketplaces of the industrial age. I tell this story in my first book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41]. I won't tell it again here. Marketplaces are necessary and good but we should not be living in them. When we do, those marketplaces will grow at the expense of the human institutions which are the foundation of morally well-structured societies. Extended families and local communities and communities of worship will be perverted into supports for the marketplaces.

The term 'conservative' means only one who conserves. It can be allied to the 'radical' cause of returning to the roots, of religious belief or moral traditions, or it can be allied to yesterday's liberalism. Most who call themselves conservatives are nothing more than old-fashioned liberals who want to crawl back up the slippery ramp. Then the next three generations can live through a replay of the 20th century. I hope we have better options than either staying at the bottom of the ramp or trying to crawl back up

that particular slope.

## 351 Literacy, Context, the Bible, and Modern News-media

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=18>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/01/11.]

It takes sophisticated reading skills to properly deal with the Bible – Old Testament and New Testament alike. And it's important to deal with the Bible, even for non-Christians and non-Jews, because it's a very fundamental part of Western Civilization in all its aspects. Unfortunately, the Bible demands still higher reading skills than even complex novels such as *Moby Dick* or *The Life and Times of Tristram Shandy*. And few nowadays can read those novels even as a difficult task, let alone for pleasure.

For example, many modern readers and writers believe that a story should be told from one point-of-view. This isn't really a belief as much as it's a cover for our low-levels of reading and narrating skills. The man with one eye convinces himself that those with no eyes and those with two eyes are both freaks. In this case, the partial blindness is induced and nurtured by our upbringings and poor educations in a deteriorating culture.

In many of the psalms, the point-of-view switches from the psalmist to God to omniscient observer and then to whatever. In *Moby Dick*, the first-person point-of-view dominates. Ishmael is telling the story, but there are some weird shifts, such as the transition to what I call locally omniscient point-of-view during the night watches on the deck. The observer is not truly omniscient but he is able to hear the words of the mates and Captain Ahab as each is alone on deck.

To read the Bible properly requires high reading skills and a flexibility of mind which can be nurtured by those skills. In recent centuries, the Bible has typically been read with a certain inflexibility of mind that can also be

found in many evolutionary theorists, philosophers, and physicists.

Despite the primitive origin of certain parts of the Bible, it's a literary masterpiece which is complex beyond the writing skills of any human being. This is not to say that God wrote it or even dictated it. It's better to consider the bible to have been a conversation involving many authors and God. This isn't to say that any of those human beings necessarily spoke with God in the way of two human beings sitting on facing chairs. In line with my Thomistic form of existentialism, I would say that we hear God in a different way: we learn to both speak and listen with God. We hear God by participating in His act of speaking to us, so to speak.

The book of Genesis can only be read intelligently if you realize that it is itself a critical work, a meta-book if you will. The so-called Creation stories play games with pagan views of the Cosmos, often turning them upside-down to make the point that all human beings are called to worship God, even to set aside a day of worship.

The writers of the books of the Bible give fairly clear signals when they were switching point-of-view or when they were switching from, say, myth to history. Even when a modern reader admits to the value of these different styles, he might well have some sort of belief that myths teach—at best—general truths while historical narratives give us a stream of snippets which can be fairly labeled as 'facts'. Skeptics, including some evolutionary biologists and philosophers, agree that texts can be read only in that limited way, as myths or facts, and then go on to deny that the Bible teaches us any useful truths not found in the general literature of our race. At this point, the public discourse about the Bible sometimes breaks down into simple assertions that the Bible is literally true or that it is not really true at all.

The uses of different literary style are not pre-defined. We sometimes try to think in ways that are caricatures of forms for presenting legal arguments or techniques for presenting mathematical proofs. Lawyers and mathematicians themselves don't think that way in their primary or creative work. They do research and they develop their lines of thought the same way that the rest of us do, which often reduces to muddling through by trial-and-error until something feels right. A legal argument or a mathematical proof is what's written after the answer is already established.

Exploration and experimentation. And context. There is no such thing as a legal argument free-standing and independent of a particular tradition of justice. There is no such thing as a mathematical proof that is free-standing and can be directly read using only basic mathematical skills—a

huge volume of proofs provide the foundation for each other.

Let me give an example of a textual problem: Are the birth-narratives in Luke historical or mythical? Read Luke 1–3:22. Now read John 1:1–34. You arrive at the same scene where a seemingly ordinary man has been revealed as the Beloved Son from God. How are we to understand this at least well enough to make some narrative sense of the mission of this Jesus of Nazareth? I'm not talking about reaching conclusions about any claims He was both God and man. Just to make sense of the stories of His miracles and His refusal to triumph over His earthly enemies by earthly means presents a difficult problem. Those stories need some context and, for right or wrong, the authors, editors, and redactors Luke and John decided to provide prologues before telling us about the earthly mission of Jesus. The stories of that mission are 'raw' in a way that indicates historicity.

The prologues? John's prologue is a theological and spiritual poem. Luke's prologue is formed of narratives of the conceptions and births of John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth. They serve the same purpose. This is a complex matter where more than casual speculation is needed, but my point stands: these are very complex texts assembled from different sorts of texts and, often, the meaning comes from the entire assembly. In nearly all cases, the small pieces of Biblical text, even the clearest of revelations, are still enriched by the greater context.

Human beings with low levels of reading skills and under-developed conceptual thinking skills don't understand, perhaps couldn't even guess, that there is such a thing as meta-narratives. The books of the Bible are mostly such rather than being straightforward narratives. Primitive texts can be assembled into those meta-narratives the way that most of us assemble words or phrases into sentences of greater or lesser complexity. Some of the texts in the Bible give clear signals, sometimes 'rawness', that they are historical but even those are assembled so that the meaning is explained or enriched by relationships to other texts, sometimes historical but sometimes didactic or poetic or mythical.

We should be aware of the sinister aspect of this sort of insight into the nature of texts. When seemingly plain sentences are assembled into large blocks of text, they can also develop higher meanings—or lower meanings in the sense that they are immoral. We should look for more sophisticated ways of reading the great books, especially the Bible, but we should be aware that a sophisticated reader will begin to see frightening meta-meanings in some texts.

For example, read the articles and editorials expressing the moral outrage of the Western press against the brutality of the Chinese government in 1989—the massacre in Tienanmen Square, Beijing. The context is provided by reading the Western newspapers, or watching the television news, over a number of years. The Western news-media had generally done their best to justify or ignore the murder of tens of millions of Chinese peasants by the Maoists especially during the 1960s. Then the Maoists were overthrown by some tough men, capable of brutality, who had sometimes suffered in the same slave-labor camps as those peasants. In an effort to secure their hold on China, those men gave orders that resulted in the murder of about 100 Western-style intellectuals.

A few years after the massacre in Tienanmen Square, we watched as innocent people were burned to death in Waco—as a result of a full-scale military assault on a civilian compound. That assault was ordered by President Clinton and Attorney-general Reno. The victims this time were human beings with strange religious beliefs and leaders who were seemingly unlikeable and very possibly dangerous to their followers and perhaps their neighbors.

There was no moral outrage on the part of the media about Waco, though the American government used flame-throwing tanks upon men and women and children, far beyond the brutality of the Chinese government. Apparently, the editors of the New York Times and the Washington Post and the talking-heads on television think Western-style intellectuals are true human beings to whom all others have moral responsibilities but they have their doubts about Chinese pig-farmers or village shop-keepers and also about religious nuts in Texas. Or maybe they no longer even have doubts.

There are no clearly-defined borders between our various problems: political, religious, moral, cultural. We don't even understand our problems because we can no longer read the greater and lesser texts which provide meaning and context for those events and groupings of people we call 'Western Civilization'. We can't even read the news in today's newspaper in the context of what was printed last week. And we read the Bible and our histories in such a strange way that we don't see the truth in Tertullian's assessment: Christians multiply when they accept martyrdom. The opposite message is also taught: the population of God-centered human beings shrink when they try to triumph by earthly means or when they try to fit into an increasingly hostile nation.

## 352 Chaim Potok and Moral Courage

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=20>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/01/17.]

Chaim Potok wrote interesting and substantial books, and there are few such books published in recent decades. I've only read the two novels *My Name is Asher Lev* and *The Gift of Asher Lev*, and I confess to having read them four or five years ago. That length of time won't be a problem so far as this discussion goes. It was, in fact, a time necessary for contemplation on the moral meaning of those novels.

In those books, Ascher Lev begins life as a quiet fellow, seemingly little different from the other Hasidic youth of his community – until he shows a talent for art and also shows the genius that draws him on to greater and greater risks with his art. If you read those novels, pay attention to the conversations between Asher Lev and the Rebbe. There are strong hints that these two men, one a dedicated artist who rejected much of his Hasidic tradition and the other a leader and founder of a major Hasidic community, are great-souled folk little understood by those around them. One is a man who rejected the comfortable and secure path of remaining in his community and leading the life he'd been raised to live. The other took great risks in gathering a folk and coming to a new land decades prior to the setting of these novels.

But the question that these novels raised in my mind, and a question raised by many other works and personal observations is: why is moral courage so rare in the modern world?

I think it interesting that there are those two seemingly so-different characters in these novels who show the courage to break away from the

path upon which life set them. Lev Asher has a soul set on fire by artistic visions and the Rebbe and leader of the Lev family's Hasidic community has a soul set on fire by visions of God. The Rebbe is from an earlier generation, raising the question in my mind: Did moral courage disappear amongst religious leaders during an earlier generation? How long will it be before it disappears in the artistic and scientific and literary communities? (I think we've passed that point for the most part but form your own opinion.)

By the end of the second novel, there are hints that the Hasidim in this community are going the way of other Americans and Europeans, those of Christian or 'mainstream' Jewish descent. This is to say they are becoming creatures of the marketplaces, men who live to buy and sell goods rather than Jews who engage in trade to allow them, or their sons, the freedom to study the Torah. They're men of lukewarm souls rather than the other two sorts of men: those who have a greatness coming from a personal courage and those who develop a significant amount of courage and greatness when inspired by the likes of the Rebbe. Sometimes courage can be inspired by God or can even result from someone being led into a life he didn't foresee. Don't underestimate the number of Jeremiahs amongst the courageous creative personalities of history.

You duped me, Lord. You tricked me into taking on this dangerous life of a prophet.

Perhaps I'm reading too much into these novels but great novels deserve to be stretched just as we stretch what we know of history in our efforts to understand those failures of courage on the part of so many nice human beings who proved willing to serve Hitler. I've spoken in my book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], of Hannah Arendt's discussion of the nice, middle-class Germans who filled the Nazi bureaucracy but she also had some harsh comments about nice Jewish leaders. She claimed in her books on the Nazis (the third volume of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and *Eichmann in Jerusalem*) that many Jewish leaders turned entire communities of their followers over to the Nazis in return for safe passage out of Nazi territory for themselves, their families, some of their friends, and sometimes their money. Those Jewish leaders were probably not much like the Rebbe of the Asher Lev novels and probably a bit like the retailers who are prominent in that Hasidic community by the end of those novels. And a bit like the

members of Lyndon Johnson's cabinet as described by Robert McNamara in the book he co-authored with Brian VanDeMark: *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam*.

In fact, if there had been more men like the Rebbe amongst those Jewish leaders of the 1930s, or amongst the Christian leaders of that period, Hitler's schemes to corrupt the Germans into carrying out his morally insane programs would have simply fizzled. Similar statements can be made about the bloody mess in Vietnam and probably similar statements will seem appropriate about the bloody mess in Iraq once we know more details.

Such lines of thought lead me to see a danger in the modern democratic movement, actually the dangers of modern marketplaces—commercial and political. Modern history indicates that a mass of human beings will choose leaders who flatter that mass of men and pander to its desires for safety and security, also pander to its desires to see geniality as moral integrity. There seems to be no chance we will choose a man who will make moral demands upon us and raise us to at least the possibilities of a true moral integrity.

In my opinion, the United States has had only one great president: George Washington, but he's not an exception to the rule we prefer scoundrels as our leaders because he wasn't really chosen by the American citizens. He had the courage to risk life and fortune for political independence and was already in a position of leadership before those citizens first voted. And he showed enough courage in office to, among other efforts, make a serious attempt to help the Amerinds form their own nation in the lower Mississippi River Valley. He was beaten back and came to be despised for that stand and other moral stands. Greed has never been a weak force in the American soul. Washington left office as one of the most unpopular men in American history and regained his popularity only when he had no power to make moral demands upon the American people. It's interesting that George Washington was himself a greedy man, but he was quite capable of suppressing his own greed when it came into direct conflict with his moral principles.

So, why is moral courage so rare in human history? I think the answer is simple. Morally unformed human beings tend to be genial. We genial men like to see ourselves as having true moral integrity, of being able to pay a price to live up to our principles. The fact is that human beings are not born with moral integrity. It's hard-won by enduring great hardships in the

right way or by being subjected to the proper training over a good number of years. Some are able to win moral integrity by persistently acting as if they have it. The inspiration of artistic visions or the hunger to live in the Presence of God can motivate a man to set out on a path where he'll pay prices he's not prepared to pay as yet. So far as I know, the Rebbe took on his mission knowing the prices he would pay and the rewards he might reap. It's Asher Lev, on the human level, who plays the part of the duped prophet, Jeremiah. Various societies of virtuous pagans, the Romans of the Republic and the Apache who vainly sought to defend their land against American imperialism, are just two examples of societies which knew how to toughen up their young men.

Americans had it good for too long and we didn't have the sort of morally well-structured society which would have encouraged the formation of strong moral characters in young men and young women, but especially young men. If the maternal natures of young women are properly nurtured, the experiences of child-bearing and child-raising will complete the formation of their moral characters. It'd be nice to have more authors who can depict moral struggles in a way that might inspire the youth of our day, but we also need readers who can realize the Asher Lev novels are not just some sort of National Geographic tour of Brooklyn. There are serious moral dramas being played out in the pages of those books.

## 353 Poverty and the Christian Life

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=63>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/01/22.]

The Bible makes it clear: we must be poor in spirit. Poverty of this sort, the true poverty which can be found in the lives of some who are poor and also in some who are prosperous, doesn't dictate some sort of extreme asceticism, voluntary or forced upon us. Our Lord Jesus Christ lived in a state of poverty which apparently allowed good food and good drink—at least for His followers though He might not have had much to drink Himself.

I suspect a certain poverty, allied to a humble spirit, is necessary for true family life, for true community life of any sort. In that sort of a spirit, the individual is more likely to realize he's an individual in a strongly qualified way. In particular, all members of a well-ordered extended family, including even the patriarch and matriarch, will recognize their dependencies upon each other and may well become comfortable with those dependencies.

A proper and balanced poverty of spirit is intertwined with closeness to one's immediate social groups and physical environments so far as I can tell. This would be hardly surprising that we would be at our human best when we live the way that God's evolutionary processes prepared us to live. And our best is not at some super-human level. We are at our best when we fill our proper role in our communities, as St. Paul taught the Corinthians and Romans. If our role is to serve others in need, then we should be cheerful in doing so. If we have the role of teaching, then we should sacrifice our own projects if that is necessary to help our students advance.

If we would be poor in spirit, we must recognize our dependency upon God, upon our fellow human beings, and also upon the non-human creatures

and trees and soil of our environments. We also must be willing to pour out what we have for those who are dependent upon us and also for those who need to be dependent upon us.

A modern individual can't be poor in spirit because he's raised to seek independence of an impossible and undesirable sort. He tries to be free of dependencies upon other flesh-and-blood human beings. This forces him to accumulate wealth in ways that are harmful to him and to human communities. Instead of being dependent upon relatives and friends and neighbors, he'll accumulate retirement accounts and other investments. He'll seek, by his votes and other political means, to obtain promises of government benefits. These efforts won't truly free him from dependencies. He'll merely become a center of desires dependent upon various corporate and governmental agencies. In Biblical terms, he'll become dependent upon the Principalities and Powers of the world. Rather than a humble dependent creature, he'll become a prideful slave.

# 354 Satan and Other Fictitious Moral Forces: Part 1

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=21>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/01/30.]

I'm interested in the literary representation of evil, in the Bible and in great novels or poems and in political writings such as those of Karl Marx from the upside-down Hegelian left or Eric Voegelin from some sort of Neoplatonic right. Sophisticated or playful representations of evil have largely disappeared from our more serious literature, except for the writings of a few thinkers such as the political philosophers Eric Voegelin and Bertrand de Jouvenel or the novelists Flannery O'Connor or Graham Greene. Most modern writers who recognize the existence of evil are lacking in the fullness of imagination that shows a deeper understanding of the nature of evil – William Faulkner and Stephen King are two radically different examples. I'm concerned about this because I think that a lack of realistic representations of evil makes it hard for us modern men to understand evil.

Before I speak of literary matters, I'll have to divert to discuss some aspects of the human imagination, specifically—the need to develop it. The richness or poverty of the imagination, also its development in purely visual forms at the expense of abstract thought, plays a major role in how we represent of evil and consequently how we see or fail to see the potential for evil in our own actions. For all the books and movies and documentaries about the Nazi genocidal programs, few human beings seem to understand what Hannah Arendt called the banality of evil—the nice, middle-class Germans were the ones who executed the nightmarish schemes of the rather stupid Nazis. A similar claim can be made about the war which the United States waged in Vietnam and about other important events in this modern

age. We are blind to the evil which comes from the ordinary activities of our business and political lives and we tend to see that evil as concentrated in super-human entities, whether Satan or Hitler.

How did this happen? With a little imaginative effort and some knowledge of history and evolutionary science, a plausible story can be told to explain the moral failings of modern men and to even give hints of paths out of our bloody morass.

Man evolved as a social being, hence as a moral being, in small-scale societies where actions nearly always had a direct and discernible moral meaning. Somehow, man developed some brain regions that allowed him to keep in mind objects which were not present, to plan out actions, to see possible patterns in events or things which are not immediately related to each other. Man became an abstract thinker though he had evolved as a creature suited for foraging and likely traveled as much as 40-50 miles on a typical day. But we can't just sit around most days and then go out and move 40 miles over difficult terrain when the mood strikes us.

In the same way, our mental abilities must be exercised for us to develop the higher-level abilities of abstract thought. We have to develop the disciplined ways of thought which allow us to categorize our own actions in terms of their direct moral implications but we also have to develop the higher-levels of imagination that allow us to see how our seemingly moral actions can work to evil purposes when we unite in various sorts of masses. It can even be surprisingly difficult to see the long-range impacts of allowing ourselves or our children to be addicted to various substances, such as tobacco or excessive amounts of sugar or salt. It's still more difficult to foresee the results of activities or what we might call passivities.

We should not have needed doctors to tell us that smoking damaged lungs and other organs. Observations of the sorts which underly much pre-modern knowledge should have been sufficient. We shouldn't need brain-scientists to tell us that watching television is an addictive activity that is learned by way of pain and horror—watch the face of a child seeing a violent television program for the first time, where violence can simply be a fast-moving and noisy show. The addictive process for television-viewing isn't so much different from the one where children learn to enjoy breathing hot tars and nictines into their tender lungs.

The brain is an organ just as the heart and the skeletal muscles are. Specific mental skills require development, often full development can only happen when the proper stimuli are received during periods usually labeled

windows of opportunity. Certain basic language skills must be developed when the child is young or else those skills will never develop properly—if they develop at all. There have been some spectacular cases where life in the wilderness or isolation as a result of deliberate abuse have resulted in young children not being exposed to rich human language. The best of medical care and remedial teaching can't raise some of those children above the type of language used by chimpanzees and gorillas in laboratory environments—though some creativity sometimes appears spontaneously, language is no more than a set of signs.

So far as I can tell, from the historical evidence and from observing children who are exploited to become consumers of elaborate entertainment, imagination needs nurturing at crucial times of development as much as basic language skills. I don't know how narrow those windows of opportunity are. Nor do I know if remedial stimulation of the imagination can revive some potential in a human being who spent much of his life in the wasteland of modern American culture—watching television, listening to pre-recorded music, and getting exercise only in little-leagues or other activities organized and run by adults. I also don't know if there are many human beings who simply don't have any potential imagination to develop. I doubt if there are, but I don't know.

I do know this: bereft of imagination, human beings inhabit local environments and struggle to make even the slightest sense of streams of events, or even of rumored things, that lie beyond direct observation and description in concrete terms. Even vast amounts of knowledge will not allow a human being to see human history or the physical universe or the possibilities of moral order which would make a true world of that physical universe, if that human being has no well-developed imagination.

It's passingly odd that a creature evolved for life in simple environments and small groups has any capability of living in a cosmopolitan society, of envisioning even multiple environments at once let alone a universe or a world or a stream of events we call history. Given the necessary flexibility of complex language and imagination, it's hardly surprising that language skills and imaginative skills are both only potential in a newborn and need to be developed into specific bundles of capabilities.



# 355 Satan and Other Fictitious Moral Forces: Part 2

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=23>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/02/09.]

By the term ‘fictitious’, I mean something similar to the ‘fictitious’ organizing force that Adam Smith called the invisible hand. The phenomena are real but the term is not an explanation. It’s a description which allows concise reference to some very complex events. We are social creatures and tend to interact in such ways that higher-level organizations form without our consciously willing this to happen and certainly without our being able to plan on specific forms of such organization.

To speak of these higher-level organizations as if they were independent of the actions of the individual human beings can be dangerous in allowing us to pretend that the invisible hand or Satan is responsible for the good or evil that’s done by us working together in specific ways and as if for a specific purpose. The satans of an age are a reflection of the particular forms of moral disorder found in that age just as the moral structures which arise are a reflection of the more benevolent invisible hands of an age. In general, the principalities and powers are the particular forms of moral order and disorder found in that age. There are no equations that tell us how the Presbyterian moral behavior of the residents of Glasgow organized into the morally well-ordered economy observed by Adam Smith but it’s not just coincidence that such an economy resulted from the interactions of human beings under strong social pressure to conform to certain standards of behavior.

To be sure, it’s not only the actions of men but also events in our physical environments, such as volcanoes, that cause the large-scale flows of events

that we call history. History follows some cycles though the patterns are complex and overlapping so that prediction is still less possible than it is for a hurricane season. There is interplay and always some disruption due to new factors, such as the mobility that destroyed local societies and made possible world wars in modern times. One of the patterns in history since the invention of writing is cyclical changes in quality of reading skills and the tightly related quality of abstract thought.

From my sparse knowledge of the Bible, Old and New Testament, I think there was a sustained era of high-quality thought and high-quality literacy from the period in which the Torah was assembled and redacted (perhaps 500BC) and the fall of Rome. A period of low quality of literacy and abstract thought followed. There was then a rise towards the high point that was the 13th century and a rapid descent to the century of stupidity and disease and warfare that ended the Middle Ages and which colors the entire period in the thoughts of many poorly-educated human beings. This horrible century was about 1350 to 1450. A new cycle of higher-quality literacy and abstract thought followed and—according to some historians—peaked quickly in the 17th century. We've been on a slow decline since then. The pattern is erratic enough to be seen in its particulars only in the past, but rises and falls seem very likely though we can hope they're not inevitable.

It's during low-points that human beings fall prey to pagan images of personalized evil or to irrational understandings of invisible hands, not even noticing that the evil of their age is caused by their frenzies and their willingness to unite into evil mobs—no matter how nice and gentle they might be as individuals. It most certainly doesn't matter that the modern form of mobs is well-organized bureaucratic hierarchies. In an era that can literalize forces which act to evil purposes, an era which can personalize those forces, Hitler can play the role of Satan. In most eras, he would have been no more than a crank unknown outside his own neighborhood.

If Hannah Arendt is right in her analysis of that Holocaust, it might be that Hitler's right-hand man, Heinrich Himmler, was the true genius of Nazism because he consciously used the unconsciously self-organizing middle-class masses of Germany to carry out Hitler's schemes. Under this way of looking at matters, Himmler was a good political entrepreneur nudging the invisible hand in a certain direction. Without that nudging, Hitler would have quickly failed and would have been labeled a mediocrity who simply was sucked into a moral vacuum at the top of German politics. We

might not have even learned he was serious about the evil schemes he wrote about in *Mein Kampf*.

The only useful positive lesson I can see from the so-called Enlightenment is:

Individuals can look beyond their immediate horizons and gain an understanding of the larger-scale political and social and economic ‘forces’ of their day, an understanding which might allow them to move those forces in a better way.

True it is that the Philosophes of France had not only wrongful ideas of human nature but also an exaggerated idea of what can be changed in society but those Deistic Philosophes who were the majority of Founding Fathers of the United States were more realistic about the need to conserve social and political structures in order to bring about any useful changes. A small group of men of more than ordinary moral integrity offered their fellow-citizens a better future. Unfortunately, those citizens chose a different path, trying to sell their freedom back to their own government in return for promises of financial security—as Nathaniel Hawthorne told us in the forward to the first edition of *The Scarlett Letter*. It was a reprimand and a warning that we ignored.

In his evil way, Himmler was much like those Founding Fathers. At the risk of his own life, he ignored Hitler’s orders to give the good government jobs to the true-believers amongst the Nazis. Himmler instead did what he could to conserve the short-sighted and self-centered moral and social structures of the German middle-class, allowing them to pursue their careers and pay their bills while serving Hitler. Of course, few of those nice middle-class lawyers or house-builders saw the horrors which resulted from their little acts of competence. Those lawyers and house-builders acted to organize themselves so that they nearly reached one of the most evil goals in human history.

How can we avoid the blindness, how can we overcome the self-centeredness, which allowed the German middle-class to serve Hitler while thinking they were acting in a proper way? I’ll suggest one part of the solution: we can pay attention to the world around us and we can learn how to pay attention by trying to improve the quality of our literacy and our thinking skills.

Literature does far more than provide a few moments of diversion. It nurtures those higher-level skills of perception and cognition which can help us to understand the larger-scale forces which currently threaten us, threaten to kill us or to use us as tools towards some evil purpose. With some understanding, we can maybe nudge these forces in a direction that will make our societies a little better, if only far in the future. So far as I can tell from the books and movies of our age, we have fallen into a fatalistic attitude that is little different from an outright belief in the dark and ancient vision of warfare between gods and demons, with human beings as no more than pawns. Read the *Iliad* for a powerful description of such a world. It's a horrible and false view of God's world. Neither pagans nor Christians should wish to return to such a world but we continue to let our literature decay, allowing our minds and souls to follow.

As local populations of human beings, or even as an entire race, we can be overwhelmed by climate changes or an incoming meteor. We can sometimes be overwhelmed by social changes which we couldn't foresee clearly. But we have a responsibility and a duty, to God and to future generations and to ourselves, to pay attention to the world around us, including the social forces which can destroy social and moral structures.

Paying attention to our world means, first of all to live up to our immediate moral obligations but also to learn how to correctly perceive the larger-scale forces which we could label as 'principalities and powers' or 'invisible hands' or 'social and political movements' or even 'Satan'. These are fictitious forces but they are real phenomena, large-scale phenomena which are the result of the efforts of all of us. Though individual moral actions can be overwhelmed by volcanoes or wars, we can sometimes nudge our societies in a slightly different direction. But we can't carry out our moral responsibilities unless we take care to develop our minds and souls, our imaginative and moral capabilities, to the point where we can perceive and understand these large-scale forces.

## 356 Moral Order is a Story and Not a Legal Code

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=24>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/02/19.]

About ten years ago, I read a book which frightened me a bit: Jane Healy's *Why Johnny Can't Think*. Professor Healy, who was a junior-high school teacher as well as a college professor, spoke about the dangers of our ways of life, based upon teaching experience—her own and that of others, based also upon her readings in neurosciences and interviews with developmental specialists in that field. She tells a story which perhaps reaches a climax in her printing of pages from national achievement tests for elementary students, two tests about 20 years apart—mid-1960s and early 1980s from my memory. In the earlier test, students were expected to draw conclusions, largely from contextual clues, about Vincent van Gogh's philosophy of art, about the relationship between the color of a star and its surface temperature. In the later test, students were expected to order food from the menu of a 'prehistoric' fast-food restaurant. Dino-burgers or whatever.

She spoke of ill-behaved students, illiterate in a deeper sense, and difficult to the point of impossible to educate. Professor Healy discussed the usual causes. Modern children watch television or play little-league baseball under adult supervision rather than engaging in imaginative free-play or heading out to organize their own games of capture-the-flag or pick-up baseball. They listen to pre-recorded music instead of singing along as Mom or Aunt Millie plays the piano. Education has too much visual glitz of the sort which distracts the attention, activating visual systems in the brain and shutting down the regions of higher thought. This problem is aggra-

vated by fast action, such as you find in *Sesame Street* and other so-called educational shows.

There are other problems but one that interests me here is the lack of a context for the lives of these children. Professor Healy spoke, in the early 1990s, of children who knew all about the characters of the television show *Roseanne* but didn't even know what country their grandparents came from; nor did they know a bit of the history of their own community. I can speak more graphically than Professor Healy did. Modern children inhabit an alien region of stories about sophisticated cannibals and robot-men and drug-addicts rather than a world shaped by stories of family and local community and religious tradition. I admit that some families, even during the best of times, will have drug-addicts and alcoholics. Those sad stories have to be folded into the honest stories which we adults use to shape our moral lives and to view God's world, but children don't need to hear about either psychiatrist-cannibals or Uncle Tom who drank himself to death at 40. It's impossible to protect them from all rumors, and perhaps undesirable, but children don't need to know the details of those sorts of adult problems.

They do need to know about Grandpa coming over from Poland, not knowing a word of English. But he picked up a shovel and went to work as a common laborer and ended up owning a paving company. They need to hear about the heroic struggles of the Polish people to preserve their identity though they inhabited a great flatland open to invasion. They should hear about Great-uncle Stan dying at Guadalcanal or Dad taking a bullet during the Tet Offensive. They should learn of George Washington and Nathaniel Greene, Abraham Lincoln and Ulysses Grant, FDR and George Patton. Most of all, Catholic children should learn about Jesus Christ and St. Paul and St. Faustina and Pope John Paul II. Protestant Christians or Unitarians or Jews or others can supply their own list.

I've made it clear in various writings that I'm not a big believer in the understanding modern human beings have of recent histories nor am I a fan of Lincoln or FDR. Yet, children should receive the idealistic version of history before they learn the harsh realities. Why would we think those children would be able to eventually understand failure to meet moral standards if they'd not first been taught those standards in terms of stories? We have to be careful, of course, and not to overdo matters. The deification of Lincoln has likely caused as much moral decay as Hollywood has caused in recent years.

When I was growing up, my beliefs of the world were formed by a reading of a large collection of idealistic biographies of great Americans written for children in fourth-grade through sixth-grade. Short and usually consisting of one story from the childhood of those men and women, they gave a flavor for nobility of character even if it was sometimes mostly in the imagination of the writers of that series. I can remember reading of the young Thomas Jefferson taking slabs of bread and ham to an escaped slave hiding in a nearby cave. Israel Putnam had a great time sledding during a Connecticut winter. Dolly Madison prepared in some unremembered way to one day risk her life to save the contents of the White House as the British soldiers were approaching with the intent of burning it to the ground.

I moved on to read somewhat more complete and more realistic biographies and histories as well. There was a great feast in the Hubbard Memorial Library waiting for a hungry mind and soul. There were novels about the Colonial Era in North America, about mountain-men and great explorers. There were histories of Amerind nations and of the westward expansion of the European immigrants. There were stories of war and disease. Some of that was disturbing to an unguided youth first confronting the realities of human nature but it was exhilarating in its own way, and I would later learn that most of those mainstream works were still whitewashed versions of history.

I was in somewhat better shape, intellectually, than most children in more recent years but I was morally ill-formed, or perhaps softly formed. There were some fragments of stories in which my life, my story, was embedded, but there was no overall story to make sense of things. Not only was there no strong story of Christian salvation through the Blood of the Cross, there was not even the sort of family or community story which helped virtuous pagans, such as the Romans or the Apache, to form their children into strong and noble men and women.

Systematic discussions of morality or ethics are important in an advanced society but they are meaningful only if they build upon deeply-held stories which give meaning to the life of the individual and to the life of his communities. Book-knowledge isn't enough, especially when it isn't a part of the child's blood and flesh, and that includes both inheritance and experience. But book-knowledge provides a background and a context for Grandpa's heroic life. All of this should come together in communities of human beings who share stories and live according to those stories as best as they can.

The overall structure of our moral lives is formed by the stories we accept, that we tell ourselves, that we live as individuals and as members of communities. All of the pieces have to be in place, that is—we must have individual stories which make sense in the light of our communal stories. But the process is recursive and those communal stories make sense of the individual stories which are lives and the lives of those we love and even those we live with even if we find it hard to love them.

## 357 Where are the Conservatives Nowadays?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=79>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/02/28.]

I want to speak about a claim in Chapter 350, *What is a Conservative?:* Most modern politicians or thinkers who call themselves ‘conservative’ are better described as ‘right-wing liberals’.

By definition, conservatives conserve, but those—Rush Limbaugh is a good example—who call themselves conservatives are mostly concerned with the marketplaces. The marketplaces don’t conserve and we shouldn’t want them to do so. Marketplaces innovate, sometimes by bringing the products of one continent to the residents of another and sometimes by encouraging the development of new products. This is good, but marketplace forces are also dangerous and shouldn’t be unleashed without constraints. We modern human beings often try to put constraints on the marketplaces, especially with the bureaucracies of the central governments but that often makes matters worse. We fight various large and abstract institutions by pitting them against each other and often that merely makes the surviving institutions stronger. In my terminology, governments operate in the political marketplaces which are still more dangerous regions than the economic marketplaces.

Conservatives, if the term is to mean anything, must conserve specific flesh-and-blood traditions. There are obvious exceptions in intellectual and artistic traditions where some of the traditions are in the form of abstractions, but those are few. Even the Christian Church, in Her Roman center and other branches alike, is held together by liturgical and other practices as well as by more concrete manifestations of belief. Good theological and

philosophical systems are necessary to keep the Church healthy but simple beliefs and concrete activities as mundane as church picnics are the mortar for the imposing edifice.

In politics and economics, social systems in general, big institutions with abstracted moral duties are more often the enemy than the friend of truer forms of human intercourse and human freedoms within those legitimate forms of intercourse. This may be especially true in the case of capitalism because of the very strength of this system: it innovates more rapidly than any other known system. Innovation is not always good. Innovation brought us the polio vaccine but it also brought us electronic entertainment which seems as addictive as heroin and arguably as destructive though the damage might be more subtle. On the hand, the damage is to the mind and soul and, by definition, human beings whose minds and souls are badly damaged may not be much aware of their own state—or they might try to suppress their awareness of their damaged state. They certainly can be more easily exploited by the gods of the marketplaces.

Capitalism itself is not a problem so long as ownership laws are such that the property and other productive assets are not fully fungible, not convertible into a form of ownership where those properties and assets are owned by abstracted entities like our modern corporations. At least not all of them. Moral structures will be dissolved so long as a large percentage of our productive assets are controlled by abstract entities, corporations and central governments, rather than being owned by flesh-and-blood human beings who are morally responsible for their actions, flesh-and-blood human beings who have not the desire and maybe not the legal power to sell what came from their ancestors and should go to their descendants.

There are better possibilities in a layered system in which most productive assets, and the corresponding owners and workers, are enmeshed in local economies and a handful of companies interact with companies from other local marketplaces. There could be multiple layers going up to a continental or cross-oceanic scale. The idea would be similar to the layered risk-sharing in insurance or mortgage banking but the goods rather than risk would be distributed.

In any case, I don't see how anyone can delude themselves or others in thinking someone a conservative for fighting to preserve corporate capitalism, a form of economic organization which has proven itself better able to chew up local communities, extended families, and religious communities than Stalinism or Maoism. Corporate capitalism has proved itself to be

more effectively corrosive and anti-traditional in practice than communism was.

Recently, a traditionalist American rabbi noted that moral corruption can be worse than genocide: destroying someone's soul [and mind] is still worse than killing them. I would go further than the implications of such statements. Moral corruption is not a disease of corporate capitalism, it is the essence of corporate capitalism. Moral structures have to be destroyed for the market to continue advancing into ever more extreme products and services. Else, how can the flows of cash, to tax-collectors as well as corporate investors, continue to rise? Human beings must be turned into fanatic consumers if the Gross National Product is to continue rising.

There aren't very many conservatives in the modern world outside of Hasidic or Amish communities. Rush Limbaugh and George W. Bush are most certainly not conservatives if the term is to retain any rational definition.

Am I a conservative? Not really. There are no true conservatives today, outside of members of some small ethnic communities, because there are no social or moral structures worth conserving. There are foundations and there are building materials and those can be best used by radicals who see the value in those foundations and have the courage to experiment with the building materials.



## 358 All that We Deserve, But We Can Do Better

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=39>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/03/05.]

It's considered to be something of a truism in certain intellectual circles that a nation will get the government and the leaders which its citizens deserve. To take a shot at both left-wing and right-wing liberals, this would mean we Americans deserve both Bill Clinton and George W. Bush.

We could also say our literature including history and popular science, our journalism, our popular music is also what we deserve. This is not a compliment, but we shouldn't either take insult at honest evaluations nor should we get depressed about it. We should do something about it.

Start the easy way. It'll be more pleasant. Listen to some easy jazz, maybe some Louis Armstrong or Ella Fitzgerald. If you feel close to some sort of ethnic group, listen to some folk-music from that group. Some easy-listening classical music might also be good – Mozart or Haydn or maybe Bach. Then move on to singing along or singing by yourself. Did you once play an instrument? It's time to start again or maybe just pick up a recorder or check out piano lessons for adults.

Read a good book. Start with some that are relatively easy to read. I was a typical college graduate in the early 1980s when I decided to rebuild my mental strength and I went right to Melville's novels and serious works of history and philosophy. And the Bible. My brain hurt a lot. Most should probably take it easy and get hold of some serious but pleasant reading, similar to the way you should start a physical exercise program. *A Confederacy of Dunces* by John Kennedy Toole is an easy read. So are the various humorous novels by Evelyn Waugh. I'm not a mystery fan, I enjoyed

the novels of Dashiell Hammett—though they are a bit dark and depressing. Raymond Chandler's novels are also supposed to be more meaty than the run-of-the mill detective books, though those who know literary folk will realize they often read the simple sorts of detective books as mind-candy of a sort. There are a multitude of novels of various sorts in the typical public library including some of the middle-brow classics of earlier decades.

Try some serious but easy-reading history books or biographies but I'd advise skipping most newer ones. The literacy level of American newspapers is said to average out at about fourth-grade level and the histories and biographies I've checked on new-book tables don't seem much higher than that. I would recommend a visit to your public library where you should be able to find biographies of great Americans by Freeman and Flexner, histories and biographies by Page Smith, histories by Barzun and Lukacs and Boorstin and more than one Grant. The intellectual histories by Berlin and Arendt and Toulmin are also quite rewarding to the reader with a strong or strengthening mind.

Do we deserve better than our current politics and literature? Only if we act as if we deserve better and to act in this way will require a sustained effort. So far as I can reconstruct the years of my personal intellectual revival: it took about five years before I could read a sophisticated book and reach the true depths and riches. This was just as true of the Bible as it was of *Moby Dick* or Freeman's biography of George Washington. We need to decide if our minds, and the cultures they form, are worth saving, if we will put out so much effort as we're willing to put out to buy a bigger house or a more luxurious car.

## 359 Problems in Environmental Ethics

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=76>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/05/22.]

In one of his essays, Wendell Berry—farmer and poet and social critic, told us: if we find moral ways to make our livings, our environmental problems will also be solved. We should order our lives first before worrying about technical problems. Our technical problems aren't even real in the sense that they wouldn't exist if we were living morally well-ordered lives in morally well-ordered societies. For example, let's take the automobile and truck component of our pollution, which we now worry about in regards to global-warming.

We err greatly in thinking we should deal with this specific problem of pollution from internal combustion engines as a problem in engine design or maybe as a problem in new sorts of fuel. In fact, the excessive use of these vehicles has destroyed many of the natural familial and communal ties between human beings. Our love affair with cars and our moral problems are tightly connected and those moral problems include our high crime rates as a mere symptom. If large-scale use of automobiles is a problem, we should step back and try to imagine, and then to build, lives where the automobile is less prominent. The excessive use of motor vehicles has allowed us to escape our human ties whenever the urge hits us or whenever a problem arises. By letting the engineers and policy-wonks turn this problem entirely into one of developing 'better' technology, we turn ourselves into playthings of bureaucrats and ambitious politicians.

Modern liberal political systems have grown largely by taking advantage of the inevitable problems in human families and local communities. King

Louis XIV of France, one of the most competent despots in modern history, specifically increased the power of his central government by helping free citizens from problems which arise in a certain percentage of natural human groups—that percentage might well be different in a morally well-ordered society than it is in a disordered society. Conquest by attrition. And it doesn't save us in the end to allow ourselves to be turned into modern-style individuals who, with a few interesting exceptions, merely enter the mobs of modern life to be herded by one group of exploiters or another, eventually to be herded into the slaughterhouse.

When we think of our relationship with our fellow-humans, our fellow-animals of other species, and the earth itself as being a series of technical problems to be solved by scientists and engineers and government bureaucrats, we give up any claims to be morally well-ordered creatures. There are two errors in moral thinking we make when we do this:

1. We think of morality as being something pure, something which comes from another realm than that of our needs for housing and nutrition and good health.
2. We think of morality as being something that merely places a few constraints upon us as we live our chosen lives.

In fact, human moral order is very particular to our specific species with our ways of reproducing and forming families, our ways of forming larger-scale communities, our ways of learning, our inclinations to make tools, our musical and poetical skills. We form certain types of societies and certain types of individual relationships, but those societies can be reshaped by techniques which are honored above traditional ways of life, above the respect for the future which is proper for a mortal creature.

Our respect for the past, our realization that we hold property and ways of life in trust for the future, should hold us back from doing much we would do. Moreover, it should render us willingly dependent upon particular human beings: parents and children and neighbors. We prefer the illusory freedom which comes when we transfer our dependencies to centralized governments (social security programs) and to corporations (providers of jobs and products and services). Again, Louis XIV in a brilliant and conscious manner, other modern leaders more or less responding to short-term needs, have played on that desire to be free of concrete, flesh-and-blood ties.

We must remember that, even in the best of times, some human beings are being abused in one way or another inside of their natural relationships. When those problems are solved by ceding local authority and local power to even the most benevolent of public officials, a centralization of power will result. Power, like any other weapon, exists to be used. And it will attract exactly the sorts of ambitious human beings we should most fear.

So, we have gained an illusory freedom, which our grandchildren—if not us—will discover to be slavery. That illusory freedom has come at a huge cost even in the short-term. The sorts of governments which provide large-scale welfare programs (and the allied military programs) and the sorts of corporations which provide cash-paying jobs and ever-growing selections of goods work only in cash-flow economies. Home economies are the enemies of the gods of the marketplaces because the services a mother provides to her children can be replaced by services provided by a public, profit-seeking corporation. The same is true of the favors traded by friends or brothers. Neighbors and brothers who trade favors, one does the plumbing and the other the carpentry, are also enemies of a government needing to maximize tax revenues.

We have destroyed the moral order of our societies by destroying the natural structures of human life. We have also paid huge costs in terms of our physical environments. Traditional societies have also damaged their environments to be sure, but not to the extent of a society which has given up direct moral constraints to pursue economic growth. This is not a new situation. Until I read Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, I'd thought that the farmers of New England had stripped the land of forests. While farmers had taken out many, it turns out the government of Massachusetts had aggressively finished the job in the early 1800s by requiring local towns and cities to clear forests and burn the trees to make potash for exportation. Even before that, our politicians had developed a hunger for cash and were anxious to turn those farmers from their efforts to largely feed themselves and to then use barter to get most of what they otherwise needed. And so it was that farmland was taxed at levels that led in the short-term to the rebellion led by Daniel Shays and in the long-term to the farmers being forced to turn to cash crops. All the while, the state government of Massachusetts was destroying the forests to gain cash that they might 'modernize' and start providing more services. Now that government is more likely to pass regulations restricting freedom in an alleged effort to protect the environment; the one constant goal is for the further concentration of power and

wealth at the political centers.

More recently but nearly a century ago, the Supreme Court of the United States awarded human rights to corporations. The sorts of right-wing liberals who call themselves ‘conservative’ also apply that label to the revolutionaries of that 1920s Supreme Court. Still more recently, while the US was flush with war-loot under a different name, the Eisenhower regime began to pave this country so that weapons and soldiers could be moved around in the event of a nuclear war. All those highways also allowed corporations to consolidate production, to buy-out smaller local firms or drive them out of business. Soon, Americans were jumping into cars each morning during the work-week to head off to the factories or office-buildings, jumping into those same cars each week-end to head off to the beach or the mall. A generation more and everyone was driving their children to and from little league and birthday parties at special children’s playground.

If we had enough moral integrity to return to a moral human life, our use of cars would no longer be excessive. Of course, there’s a major problem: we’ve sold productive assets to the corporations and allowed the government to grow into a monstrous bloated beast. They need us to be dependent upon them. They need us to be holding onto our corporate jobs. They need us to be paying taxes to support our wars and our highway systems and our own pensions and medical benefits. If we were to try to return to a better moral-order, one which would solve our most serious environmental problems as a side-effect, we would go bankrupt as a society. We can’t grow our own food. Even most of our local farmers are dependent upon chemical companies and the the seed subsidiaries of agri-corporations and tractor manufacturers. We can’t build houses without those tools which are more and more often made in China or other Asian countries and then imported by our corporations. We don’t even produce our lumber locally—we need to buy from behemoth corporations which have tree plantations as large as our smaller states. We can’t make our own clothes and we have allowed ourselves to grow dependent upon international pharmaceutical companies. To a shocking extent, we can’t even amuse ourselves without a DVD player or a \$200 trip to a ballpark.

To truly solve our environmental problems, we would have to put some moral order in our lives and here’s the real catch: moral order is something that develops. Often, it can then be nurtured and kept alive for many generations—with some inevitable adjustments to changing circumstances and just to allow for human freedom and creativity. Moral order, like the

higher cultures of which it is a basic aspect, can be destroyed quickly but it takes a number of generations, and the proper circumstances, to re-develop. That period of redevelopment can involve pain, sweat, and sacrifices for the benefit of future generations. We aren't the sort of creatures who are willing to do such a thing. We're barbaric children who specialize in looting from the civilization we inherited.

We can avoid facing up to our need for self-discipline and sacrifice to restore moral order, and other aspects of culture by telling ourselves there are technical fixes to everything. There are human beings who want to smoke and eat high-fat foods and expect doctors to provide drugs and operations to clear their arteries and fight off diabetes. There are others who want to sit and watch TV all evening and seem to figure the ensuing dullness verging on stupidity might lead to Alzheimer's but that's the job of drug-companies and doctors to cure them.

We're inherently disordered creatures, though not inherently immoral. We don't wish to make the sacrifices to order our lives, by either noble pagan standards or Christian standards. We wish to pursue comfort and safety and pleasures. We wish to sit in front of the television set all evening, to give up our church membership and our close ties to family and childhood friends, to consume whatever glitzy product is displayed for our monkey-like pleasure on television. If our families are destroyed, we expect social workers and policemen and other civil servants to cure the damage. We wish to have unnatural lawns of the sort seen at country clubs and office campuses. We wish to grow our food with machines on huge fields using huge quantities of fertilizer produced from petroleum. If our waterways and soils are poisoned, we expect engineers to clean the waters and to develop milder forms of poison for maintaining the turfs on our lawns and golf-courses and playgrounds.

We want to talk about ourselves as if we are responsible, moral adults, but we don't really want to order our lives to make that talk a reality. We want to live disordered lives when disorder appeals to us, and then we want some technician with magical powers to fix the problems we bring upon ourselves and our world.

Moral structure isn't a decoration on a society organized to the demands of political ambition or wealth acquisition or bureaucratic rationalism or technical quality. Moral structure in a society, and the corresponding moral integrity in the citizens, comes first. Since moral structure brings also the habits and attitudes conducive to proper economic development—

punctuality and discipline and obedience to true authorities—then, all else being equal, prosperity and technical advancement and other good things will follow.

## 360 Problems in Medical Ethics

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=77>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/06/01.]

If we are to be moral, then we must give first place to the demands of our moral beliefs. If someone claims to be moral but acts according to his professed beliefs only if there is no price to be paid, the best you could say is: “He’s a nice man.” Not a man of strong moral character, a nice man.

Hannah Arendt, the Jewish philosopher and analyst of modern totalitarianism including that political system which built Auschwitz, made the claim that modern middle-class human beings are nice and not moral. Flannery O’Connor, the American novelist, was getting at pretty much the same point when she said that Americans are not moral nor compassionate but only squeamish. Two centuries ago, Adam Smith interrupted his boosterism for modern liberalism to express the concern that a commerce-centered society might tend to produce citizens who were genial without having much moral integrity. We show the truth of these claims in our actions in recent decades the medical field. I don’t make this claim about only Americans but about most modern human beings.

We’re generous with our spare cash, sending lots of it to tsunami victims in southeast Asia or to starving children in Africa. There’s certainly nothing wrong with that, except that our cash flow economy is sustained by a liquidation of the productive assets for which we were only stewards and not true owners. We risk poverty and slavery for our children and grandchildren in order to have nice houses and to be able to contribute a few bucks to a charitable cause. I’ll pass over that for now and speak of the more basic problem: we talk a good talk about being a moral people but we’re always willing to take the moral short-cuts when we would have to pay a price.

What would it take to overcome our niceness and to develop a truer moral integrity? Right now, it seems to me that we have to make at least two changes in our ways of thinking and in our general attitudes:

1. We should overcome our squeamishness, develop a detachment to our own troubles and the troubles of others.
2. Second of all, we'd have to re-member that we are mortal creatures. We should live a good life that is conducive to a good death and the good death we envision should tell us much about how to live during our few years in this world.

As terrible as pain is, our primary goal should not be to avoid pain, our own or that of others, nor to end pain. Our primary goal should be to live a good life and die a good death. We should also teach our children and others those fine arts. And they are arts, not matters of technique. Proper health and proper deaths are not a matter of the right drugs or the latest surgical techniques just as leading an ecologically responsible life isn't a matter of having the right techniques for removing nitrous oxide from our engine emissions.

When we turn over control of our ways of life to engineers and bureaucrats of private or public institutions, we concede our power to live morally responsible lives and to think and feel in morally responsible ways. The same is true when we turn over control of our bodies and those of our children to doctors and nurses, technicians and hospital administrators.

# 361 Technology is a Two-edged Sword

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=78>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/06/08.]

In recent days, we've learned that scientists have managed to trick skin cells of adult mice into returning to the state of embryonic stem-cells. The full report for experts was published in the inaugural issue of the journal *Cell: Stem Cell* on June 7, 2007. The work was discussed in an interview, *We Can Get Cells That Perfectly Resemble Embryonic Stem Cells* with the lead author, Kathrin Plath. Here's the first question and her answer:

What is this new technique?

We take fibroblasts which are basically skin cells, put on four factors, which are transcription factors, bound to specific science [sic, presumably is supposed to be sites] in the genome (DNA) and turn off their expression. If we put these four factors on fibroblasts, the skin cells, then we can get cells that perfectly resemble mouse embryonic stem cells.

We have been very amazed that we can put these four factors and reverse the phenotype of a skin cell to that of a mouse embryonic stem cell. We're now going to try and work on human cells. We'll try to understand the mechanism. This is very exciting. I think it opens up a new field of research.

There is that important technical matter which Professor Plath discusses in the second paragraph of her response: the technique is proven to work for mice and not yet for human beings though I have little doubt that it will. It may take some time to perfect the technique for human beings. There are

also some background technical issues which I'll discuss very briefly though I'm not an expert.

From Wikipedia article on *transcription factors* at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transcription\\_factors](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transcription_factors) :

In molecular biology, a transcription factor is a protein that works in concert with other proteins to either promote or suppress the transcription of genes. Hence transcription factors control when and where genes (and the proteins encoded by those genes) are expressed.

There is not a strict one-to-one relationship between our DNA in total and our own beings. A human being's DNA holds the possibilities for a lot of different particular cells and even a lot of different and only potential human beings. Transcription factors are involved in the process of regulating genes—shutting them down or toning down their effect or the opposite. But even a 'fully configured' human being develops partly as guided by his or her mother through the egg-cell and through various interactions in the womb. Any given human being also develops in response to his or her environment and as a result of his or her specific responses. Still, our DNA provides our possibilities and puts many constraints upon us. For example, intelligence needs to be nurtured and many potential geniuses in all fields never develop, but the best of environments won't allow most of us to catch up with someone like Einstein whose brain had a capacity for extraordinarily rich connections between the higher regions of the brain.

Our DNA has a huge number of genes, not all of which are expressed or active. Manipulation of transcription factors allows changes in the population of expressed genes and also allows changes in some details of expression. Manipulation of an embryos transcription factors can basically allow manipulation of the attributes of that embryo, such as intelligence or strength. To be sure, it would be easier to make a potential Einstein dumb than it would be to turn the average embryo into an Einstein.

And so scientists are a bit closer to the goal of manipulating the expression of genes. In this case, the goal is to produce cells with all the properties of embryonic stem-cells and to produce them from cells in the body of the patient. In a morally well-ordered society, this would be good news. If similar techniques can work on human beings, doctors could produce healthy stem-cells from our own bodies to replace cancerous blood or bone-marrow.

Transplanting embryonic cells derived by moral methods could be unqualified goods in treating Parkinson's and other diseases where such cells can be implanted in damaged regions. Not all diseased organs can readily use those types of cells to replace damaged cells, but I've been following these medical research programs at a casual level and it seems to me that brains show signs of being able to do so. There are techniques for growing certain 'body-parts' including heart-valves and probably blood-vessels and the production of embryonic stem-cells from the patients own body would reduce rejection risk among other benefits.. Undoubtedly, embryonic stem-cells derived from cells in our own bodies could be used to treat many medical problems.

The techniques themselves would seem valuable as the reader could gather from my discussion above. If the activity of specific genes could be modified or even shut-down, a condition like Huntington's could be better treated. The mutated genes (so-called stutters or dangerous repeats in the case of Huntington's) could possibly be shut down and healthy genes perhaps inserted. Possibly the mutated genes could even be altered to a healthy state. Maybe immune cells could be grown from those embryonic cells to fight specific pathogens—we all have immune systems which are weak against some bacteria and viruses and strong against others.

This is where bells and whistles should be going off in our heads. The technology that manipulates genes to ease or heal diseases is the technology that manipulates embryonic human beings to produce creatures more useful to the powerful. Complacent masses of stupid and strong human beings could be produced for going down into the mines or out into the fields. Human beings with high levels of talent could be produced in states where they would be wholly dependent upon their masters or unlikely to rebel because of physical or emotional crippling.

There are two kinds of technology: that which is inherently evil and that which is potentially evil. This is, of course, looking at the glass as being half-empty but we need to start looking at the potential for evil in the best of our technology. The potential for evil in any technology is clearly high when society is not morally well-ordered. If we are to have a moral society, we have to put moral order, what is right, first. We have to be willing to forgo the short-term benefits of some potential technologies, to delay the implementation of other technologies if we're unsure of their moral status, and to simply constrain ourselves to the appropriate use of all technologies.

And don't accept the self-praise of scientists who claim they're more

moral than other ‘classes’ of human beings. As I pointed out in my book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], the actual behavior of scientists, and engineers, in modern times have shown they’re willing to develop dangerous or even evil technology so long as they’re well-paid and sometimes so long as their more favored research is funded. Let the wealthy and powerful throw gold coins in the much of the sty and scientists and engineers will be there alongside MBAs and lawyers to get what they can. This is true of all of us. There are factories dedicated to the production of chemicals useful only for burning human beings alive. It took the combined efforts of scientists, engineers, financiers, government regulators, plumbers, electricians, common laborers, and many others to build and operate those plants. And some in each of those categories have the integrity to refuse to work on projects with evil goals or even evil side-effects.

Right now, scientific and technological research has become a loose gun from a moral viewpoint. Morality doesn’t rule—the chance to make a financial killing draws scientists and engineers onward as it also draws politicians and businessmen and lawyers and those who play the lottery. We’ve become the Americans described all too well by the novelist Wallace Stegner: we’re rootless in a profound way and will spend our lives moving towards some illusory big deal, some big rock candy mountain. Right now, stem cell technologies seem to be awfully big and sweet. It’s likely many huge fortunes will be made and we no longer even have a way of speaking about right and wrong in our public discourse.

## 362 What to Do About Our Wrongful Priorities?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=79>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/06/19.]

In terms of the Christian worldview I've developed, our duty can be stated clearly: we must learn how to move with the grain of Creation. We can't do so by way of simple recipes, but there are some guidelines, though there is one major problem that few recognize and for which there is no proposed solution. I'll discuss that last.

First, we have to re-gain a proper Christian perspective of our own minds. We have to develop those minds, not just use them to recycle prejudices which were once plausible but no longer are in light of modern empirical knowledge. By advocating systems in which revealed truths are mixed with ancient and no longer valid forms of knowledge, we cast doubt upon those revealed truths. We most certainly don't want to pick up the newer and quite impious prejudices which are held by the modern secularists who have all the intellectual and spiritual vices and few of the virtues of their Enlightenment fathers, but we can't let ourselves be chased out of God's world into some sort of illusory supernatural world which doesn't really exist. We have to learn how to think creatively and how to think in a properly disciplined manner. We have to be willing to honestly confront the new knowledge coming from quantum mechanics and astrophysics, evolutionary biology and neurobiology, history and economics. We have to remember that these are modern developments within the very sciences which St. Augustine of Hippo and St. Thomas Aquinas—among others—tried to integrate within what I call a worldview. There is no special piety attached to fifth century biology or thirteenth century astronomy nor even

to the speculations based on those ‘specific sciences’ as Aquinas labeled them. There is great value even in the world-oriented speculations of Augustine, Aquinas, and other Fathers and Doctors of the Church as there is in the similar speculations of the great Hellenistic philosophy.

We have to remember that faith is necessary for understanding, but we must make that effort to understand Creation as well as God’s self-revelations. Otherwise our faith will leave us strangers in God’s world. We will be disoriented ourselves and our children may well drift away. We claim to have a special relationship with a God we proclaim as the Creator of this world and then we’re indifferent to that world, but more and more we’re also indifferent to God Himself. We care little about science, history, mathematics, and other forms of human knowledge which have expanded so much in recent centuries. We expound systems of theology based upon ancient systems of thought which aren’t wrong so much as they’re far too small to be useful in describing God’s Creation as we can now see it.

A Christian worldview is made up of empirical knowledge and speculative knowledge as well as revealed knowledge and it’s speculative knowledge (including metaphysics) which binds the system together however much revealed knowledge is the most important of all. A worldview gives us a concrete and human way of understanding God’s purposes and of understanding how we must live to play our role in meeting those purposes. It’s somewhat amazing at first to discover that a Catholic theology which utilizes modern empirical and speculative knowledge leads to a ‘proof’ (that is, a successful test of the consistency) of the revealed truths of Christianity. Theologies, such as those of Augustine or Anselm or Aquinas, which utilize older and now discredited empirical and speculative knowledge provided equally valid ‘proofs’ within the context of those earlier systems of knowledge of Creation.

We can ascend through Creation, considering empirical knowledge as being natural revelations of God acting freely and contingently as Creator, and we reach the Transcendent God revealed in the Bible inside of stories and then systematized and clarified in the Creeds and other core teachings of the Church. We must always be careful to protect our understanding of God’s freedom, of His necessary Being, of His all-powerfulness, by recognizing that He didn’t have to create anything. Given that He did create, He didn’t have to create any specific Creation nor did He have to shape this particular world.

Second, with our revived minds including our better stock of knowledge,

we have to make the effort to truly think our situation through and to foresee possible problems. Somewhere I read about a warning made by a radical secularist in the early 1800s when marriage was first becoming a matter of civil law. He warned his Christian friends that when the state regulated marriage, it would regulate it to its own purposes and not to Christian moral purposes. It took 200 years for that warning to really hit home and... It still hasn't. We Christians are expending a great effort to return a non-Christian society to Christian standards of behavior at a time when Catholic requests for annulments are swamping the diocesan bureaucracies and divorced Protestant ministers are far from a rarity. Under these conditions, Catholics fighting for a married priesthood are effectively fighting for a divorced priesthood.

Western societies are no longer Christian in any true sense and this has occurred at least partly because Christian leaders have been stupid and cowardly and have sold out their Lord for short-term advantages. Christian leaders are not unique in this: union leaders made their peace with large corporations which then turned around and began selling jobs overseas to fund their bloated executive pay packages and to allow the Wall Street investors to cash out all those productive assets which belonged to our children. But the union members who held their jobs and those on retirement plans also did well—the union retirement funds were very large investors in those firms which sold the jobs of young and unborn workers—and more than a few gray-haired workers a little too young to have benefited from the fraud.

Third, we have to stop being hypocrites. We claim to be carrying our crosses when we bear natural ills of the sort born nobly by many dogs. Far too often, we claim to be carrying our crosses even when we're accepting the benefits of a medical system which is increasingly evil by Christian moral standards. We truly carry crosses when we voluntarily take on sufferings or hardships for the sake of God and God's children. And we're not preparing ourselves for the likelihood that we're entering a new period of martyrdom, but one unlike any yet seen. We'll have to be willing to accept a proper Christian death rather than to enter the buildings of a medical system already heavily compromised by abortion and research on embryos or parts torn from embryos, by gratuitous levels of painful and degrading research on our fellow-animals. Whether we are morally corrupting ourselves by torturing monkeys or rats to ease our own pains is an open question but I suspect that such experimentation trained doctors and scientists to ex-

periment on human embryos which don't seem so much different from the embryos of those monkeys and rats.

Fourth, we have to deal with a moral problem which isn't new so much as it's intensified seemingly beyond solution by modern technology, communication and transportation, and the political and economic systems which that modern technology has made possible, nation-states and industrial capitalism. Arguably, these systems developed by inevitable processes because of our gigantic moral problem:

We are creatures whose moral natures are adjusted to families and tribes and other small groups and yet we live in political and economic marketplaces which span nearly the entire globe. We don't know how to organize the institutions of those marketplaces to meet moral goals and our 'best and brightest' experts say it's immoral to impose moral structures on agencies which they favor.

Right-wing liberals wish to place constraints upon the political gods of the marketplaces and left-wing liberals wish to force the commercial gods of the marketplaces to act towards certain goals which are often noble in themselves. Each one thinks it wrong, even immoral, to place moral demands upon their favored gods, and an absolute necessity to place moral demands, of abstinence or directed activity, upon the gods they don't like so well.

We've lost control of our lives because we live in environments to which we're not suited. We've shown little capacity for organizing large-scale institutions, governmental or private, which retain moral structure as they grow. And, as they grow, as money and power accumulate, our governments and corporations start attracting men and women who place a high priority on money and power. This is why I call those institutions 'gods'. They are formed as if by the magic of an invisible hand but actually by man's social interactions. The trouble is that our ways of interacting are proper to the formation of moral communities at a level where nearly all members are in flesh-and-blood contact.

I don't know how to deal with this fourth problem, even in theory. I speak of re-establishing local communities and that is necessary. We need to rebuild truly moral human lives and those have to take place in environments in which the normal human being can live a moral life. Few

of us have the moral courage or strength of Cato or George Washington, Dorothy Day or Pope John Paul II. And, yet, our populations are huge and currently are being fed only by the beast itself. I don't know what suggestion to make to turn us towards some sort of a society where most of us live normal human lives and no one is allowed to live at levels of power or wealth which allow them to treat others, or the earth, as mere objects to be manipulated for political or financial goals.

Over the course of my remaining years, I'll try to deal with this problem, among other interesting and important problems. Prayer will be as important as study.



## 363 Rules of Life

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=80>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/06/29.]

Catholics and others interested in the history of European culture know that religious orders are governed by rules of life which are devoted mostly to practical aspects of regulating our lives that we might better serve God and our local communities. For example, St. Benedict, who'd set out to be a hermit, couldn't drive away the men who wanted him to be their leader and he was forced to produce a rule of life for the first community of monks in the tradition named after him—the Benedictines. Yes, the liqueur is named after the religious order because they invented it amongst many other foods, drinks, and technological items in pre-modern European history. Despite the prejudices that tell us those Medieval monks were superstitious men, they were actually the ones who safeguarded and enriched and passed on much of the Roman culture during some difficult years of political, economic, and social breakdown.

*The Rule of St. Benedictine* was the key to forming men into monks who were parts of communities which functioned like well-disciplined military units. It wasn't like the modern age where those who accomplish much can assume fame as a reward—we know few of the names of those who accomplished so much in the various Benedictine institutions. There were other orders which had rules of life to help them carry out their duties to God and man, including many in the Eastern tradition whose rules actually preceded that of St. Benedict. In fact, St. Benedict wouldn't have claimed either to be shaping the future nor to be original—he borrowed much from the Desert Fathers of the East and put together an eminently practical rule to allow men to live properly ordered lives. And women had started to form communities under the same rule even during St. Benedict's lifetime.

I emphasize the word ‘practical’. The *Rule of St. Benedict* contained rules for advancing the spiritual life, rules very similar to the 12 rules of modern programs to help alcoholics and other addicts. They’re not the same, but very similar, making us wonder if the path towards holiness might involve the breaking of habits of mind and body as dangerous as those of alcoholism. But St. Benedict wasn’t a teetotaler, even though he wouldn’t have encouraged excessive drink. How do we know he wasn’t a teetotaler? One of the concerns of the *Rule of St. Benedict* is the fair sharing of the wine: brothers who do the physical work should get the greater share rather than the abbot and the cellarer (manager of provisions).

Practical. We all need practical guidelines to become God-centered human beings and we modern human beings are trained to think in ‘spiritual’ terms when it comes to our duties to God and to our fellow-men as children of God. Vague claims of deep love don’t feed our neighbors as we were told in the James and those vague claims don’t discipline our prayer-life or rebuild our ties to family members, neighbors, or friends. Sometimes, raising some aspects of life to a spiritual level is a good strategy for making them irrelevant. This seems to have been the case in recent centuries for those aspects of life which ground the more complete God-centered life.

I’m working out my thoughts as I write but I’m going to publish this right away because I think there are no rules that cover all needs but I think there’s a need for each human being who wishes to be a Christian to pray hard on this issue:

How should I be living to better serve God and neighbor?

A Christian life should be balanced between:

1. Meeting practical needs;
2. Prayer and worship;
3. Serving our fellow-men, perhaps mostly our own children especially when they’re young; and
4. Enjoying God’s Creation.

All Christian religious orders, which usually have some sort of lay membership, have tried to balance our duties to worship God, our practical

needs and those of our dependents, and a proper human desire to enjoy life. Benedictine monks try to develop lives centered around the worship of God but often they've done that partly by serving God's people as teachers or lawyers or engineers or benevolent land-owners. Some monastic orders have harsh ways of life, but that's a special calling and not one to be undertaken without careful discernment.

We are finite human beings and we need to learn the wisdom that is part and parcel of the ways of formation and of ongoing life in the stable religious orders, even those which are currently troubled to some extent—sometimes a great extent. Each of us, not just those of us who are Christian, needs to sit down quietly when we come to feel our lives are out of control. We need to think as if we were discerning a call to some form of religious or missionary life. That's not far from the truth because any sort of Christian life will share some aspects of eremitical life, some aspects of monastic life, and some aspects of active religious life (such as the life of teachers or medical missionaries). I don't think that Jewish life is much different in this regard, nor Buddhist life, nor the life of a virtuous pagan—of whom there seem to be few in the modern world outside of military organizations.

Originally, I'd intended to give some specific guidelines for rules of life. I decided to hold back mostly because I'm not yet confident I can recommend any guidelines for establishing a rule of life appropriate to anyone—even myself. In some ways, I've isolated myself from mainstream life because I don't have a normal job or a family of my own and yet I'm not a vowed celibate or member of a lay community. There are reasons for my somewhat strange situation and I suspect there to be many men and women in similar situations in this day and age though most are probably forced to hold a conventional job and to live as if they truly feel a part of this Promethean world in which men think they can make laws rather than obeying either God's few directly revealed laws nor that greater body of laws which can be read—with much difficulty—from His world. Somewhere, I believe in a book by Bertrand de Jouvenel, I read that Rousseau once warned that when men come to think they can truly make laws rather than interpreting the laws of God's nature, then hell will break out on earth.

The only way to return this man-made hell to a truly natural state is to turn to God, open our ears to the sounds of His world, and start to live according to His natural and scriptural revelations, most especially those revelations which came to us in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I would encourage any who read this to think about modest but serious

changes to their daily and weekly schedules. Don't think about your ultimate fate beyond this world. Don't even get excited about noble ideas or feelings. Think practically. How should we regulate our eating habits, our working habits, our reading habits, our athletic and music habits? Wendell Berry, farmer and Christian thinker and environmental essayist and poet and novelist, has told us we'd solve our ecological problems more or less automatically if we could find moral ways to make our livings. I think the same could be said of our moral and spiritual problems and I suspect Farmer Berry would agree.

I realize there are various third-orders, laymen's associations, and local clubs which try to help various men and women and children to live Christian lives in the midst of a world which is increasingly disordered. I don't think they're up to the task, but I'm open to good arguments to the contrary and I certainly would encourage anyone to join these various prayer groups and social action groups and others with noble goals. Mostly, I'd like to encourage all of us to start thinking towards the specific goal of organizing our lives to be as Christian as possible given our circumstances. If that's not good enough, then we start thinking in the terms given us by Farmer Berry: how can we make our livings so that we can live God-centered lives? I suspect we're going to be driven to that because it is that 'practical' question of making our living that will drive our lives and our moral problems, and ecological problems, seem to indicate we're not making our livings in moral ways. We can't just accept jobs and careers offered us by the gods of the marketplaces and then think we can organize our family lives, our worship, and our recreation in moral ways.

In other words, if you feel the need to re-orient your life and the lives of those dependent upon you, don't think of spiritual goals or ethereal landscapes: think of your day to day lives and how you make your living, how you shop, how you enjoy your leisure time.

# 364 Human Rights Should be Restricted to Human Beings

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=91>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/08/27.]

I'm not arguing against proper treatment of animals and, in fact, I'm not arguing about animals at all. I'm arguing against the extension of human rights to corporations which began at least in spirit as long ago as Abraham Lincoln's successful arguments before the Illinois Supreme Court when they decided that state-chartered corporations were not bound by local laws and ordinances if those restricted the 'rights' of corporations under their charters. Since both local political entities and state-chartered corporations are creatures of the state government, this wasn't an illogical decision, and it may have been the right technical decision. If so, a legislature dedicated to a democratic republic should have changed the law.

Somewhere, Bertrand de Jouvenel, a classical liberal himself, points out: when General Motors have the same rights as you, they have more rights than you. And the use of plural pronouns for General Motors isn't just a European eccentricity, it's a recognition of the true nature of a corporation. It's a gathering of human beings for a common purpose. In the United States, such gatherings are usually chartered by a state government or the national government. Far too often, corporations are no longer gatherings so much as they're shields to allow morally irresponsible investors and executives to benefit from amoral behavior punctuated by increasingly common acts which are downright despicable.

In *From Cottage to Workstation* [17], Allan C. Carlson presents evidence that various sorts of cooperative arrangements worked as well in the early years of the Industrial Revolution as industrial and financial corporations.

It's not clear why corporations overwhelmed other arrangements, though some partnerships survive and even prosper in some parts of the American economy. It's not clear, but I hold the theory that corporations have one major advantage over other sorts of ownership arrangements: individual decision-makers and passive investors are shielded from personal moral responsibility for their actions. In many cases, they're shielded from personal legal responsibility.

I don't believe that either corporate executives or government officials are smart enough to be running a conspiracy but it has worked out just as well as if it were a managed conspiracy—call it the sinister invisible hand if you wish. That 'unconscious conspiracy' reached its plateau with the New Deal of the Roosevelt administration which made the United States safe for large corporations by making individuals dependent upon the Federal government, 'freeing' Americans from dependencies upon family, neighborhoods, church communities, fraternal associations, and so forth. Americans were 'free' to move wherever a corporation moved the jobs to. Without Social Security, they would have remained close to the families they depended upon, but we have all decided we'd prefer to be dependent upon the Federal government rather than our families and neighbors and church communities.

Pat Buchanan, a moral man dedicated to the defense of the American middle-class and working-class, has written a good discussion of the dismantling of the US corporate economy—see <http://www.chroniclesmagazine.org/?p=294>. As Mr. Buchanan points out, we Americans enjoyed some very pleasant decades as an alliance of corporate interests with our national government produced prosperity without taking away the freedoms Americans truly desired and without acting aggressively to destroy families and local communities. We seem to have reached the end of the line in this regard as corporate decision-makers are finding it hard to generate the profits to satisfy Wall Street and to pay themselves huge bonuses – for a while, they've been generating false profits by selling American productive assets and jobs to countries with cheaper labor costs. They may have now reached the point where they have to outsource all professional jobs and all but their own management jobs to keep the scheme going. They may have also reached the point where many of these companies are only nominally American. If all the work, including management, is being done in Shanghai, formal incorporation in Delaware may be about as meaningful as formal incorporation in Aruba by an American

insurance company or bank. Let the government of Aruba try to tighten up regulations or increase taxes and we would see how meaningful corporate domicile is when assets and workers are somewhere else.

Many of us Americans have realized in recent years that our country is about to hit some sort of bottom. I suspect we're in a situation more analogous to the collapse of the Roman Republic into the Empire rather than the collapse of the Roman Empire 500 years or so later. This sort of a collapse from a democratic republic into an empire was made possible by the conversion of American privately held assets into corporate assets and to the corresponding conversion of all economic activities into public activities. These conversions exposed all American economic activities to taxation even services once provided by mothers to their children, by adult children to their parents, by neighbors (perhaps in exchange for a couple beers or a bag of home-grown peaches), and so forth.

In any case, this has all become possible because of the extension of hard-won human rights to corporations. There are some who call themselves conservatives while being right-wing liberals and those often glorify the Supreme Court of the 1920s for making it official that corporations have human rights in the U.S. The left-wing liberals prefer to glorify the next period of government activism, the New Deal. In fact, the Judicial activism of the 1920s on behalf of corporations and the Executive/Legislative activism of the 1930s on the behalf of the welfare state were two wings in a single movement, however unconscious on the part of those who led the herd forward.

I doubt if Americans have the heart or the guts to force any true reforms upon our country. Given that our productive assets have moved overseas and the government has all the powers of a police state, there probably is little we can do to stop our final collapse to a full-fledged empire. To refuse to accept our roles as citizens of the American Empire would be the same as accepting our role as impoverished creatures unable to feed ourselves or to supply ourselves with clothing or good shelter. But we can be happy to know the number of millionaires and even billionaires has exploded in the United States and in the world as a whole.

Maybe we can't do much to save ourselves or our children from either proletariat status in an empire or from extreme poverty—the natural resources of this country are great but few there are who can grow food or butcher animals or make soap or make clothing. I'm not advocating each household return to some primitive self-sufficiency but rather a certain sort

of regional self-sufficiency expanded from the current recommendations of the 'eat local' movements.

Our parents and grandparents shouldn't have allowed corporations to grab hard-won human rights. Seeing the early stages of decay into an empire, we should have had the guts to fight the situation when we could have won that battle. And, yet, those were pleasant years as we slid down the slippery slope. True it was that even the most decent of Doris Day movies was enticing us to live a life-style a little better than was healthy for us and our children and the Cleavers lived oddly apart from any relatives in a town that seemed to have been manufactured rather than being a result of some human history. But we didn't have enough money to harm ourselves too much and extended families and other local communities were dissolving slowly and mostly in the interests of a better climate in California or a good job in Westchester County. That didn't seem so evil.

As they were helping us to free ourselves from some drudgery of a more locally sufficient life, the American governments, the corporations, and the unions were working hard to grab assets from families and local partnerships that they might be used more efficiently. Several generations of Americans benefited though it now seems that we were selling future generations of Americans into slavery or poverty, or both.

Few are the commentators or public leaders ready to acknowledge that a moral economy is dependent upon the decision-makers being morally responsible for their actions. We shouldn't have granted those hard-won human rights to corporations.

# 365 Crises in the History of Christianity

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=106>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/08/30.]

There are actually three crises which concern me:

1. The attacks upon Christianity as being the cause of the decay of the Roman Empire—which Gibbon and some other modern scholars revived. I believe these attacks in their original form peaked sometime before the theological career of St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo in North Africa, but they remained largely unanswered when Augustine took on that task. The charges against Christianity were closely related to a general pagan assault upon Christian beliefs which portrayed Christianity as a dark religion which taught the world is evil. Some cultured pagans thought of Christianity as being an enemy of human civilization. St. Augustine wrote *The City of God* to counter this attack. This counterattack had more positive content than the ways of thought defended by Celsus and the other pagans and that Augustinian synthesis of the Bible and the best of pagan thought provided much of the form and content of Christian thought in the centuries since.
2. The loss of respect for the mind in Christian thought which occurred, oddly enough, at the end of the High Middle Ages, approximately 1050-1250. This is odd because that age was one of the intellectual high-points of human history—philosophy and theology were thriving and so were optics and statics and even evolutionary biology to some small extent—St. Albert the Great, the teacher of Aquinas, was

overly enthusiastic in seeing the transformation of one species into another [24].

St. Thomas Aquinas mounted an effort to make sense of Creation in the light of God's revelations—though he was, to be sure, more concerned with God's revelations. This effort was partially directed against the advocates of the view that preachers needed only to be 'spirit-filled'. Well-developed minds were at best optional if not actually harmful to evangelical and preaching duties. Some scholars think that Aquinas wrote *Summa Contra Gentiles* to foster respect for Christianity among non-Christians who apparently thought of Christianity as a collection of superstitions.

3. The fragmentation of knowledge in the modern world where Christian thinkers and spiritual leaders have shown themselves incapable of providing a unified account of God's Creation in light of His revelations. The best most can do is to wave their hands weakly and say, "There is no contradiction between the first verses of the book of *Genesis* and modern physics, no contradiction between the story of Adam and Eve in the book of *Genesis* and evolutionary biology."

In fact, we modern Christians live in a world of multiple systems of truth which is impossible if the God of Jesus Christ exists. Mere assertions by the shepherds that those worlds are ultimately one or weakly compatible seem meaningless to many of those sheep who are wandering away, including all those young men and women who watch documentaries on our apish ancestors without having a way of seeing a story which includes both those knuckle-dragging creatures and Moses in front of the burning bush.

Take an intelligent young woman, well-formed in her faith, whether Reformed or Lutheran, Catholic or Orthodox. Put the Bible in front of her along with a pile of popular science books, pre-selected to screen out those with ideological biases. Let's assume there's a book on the so-called paradoxes of quantum mechanics, one on the evolution of human morality, one on cosmological physics. Let's see if she can readily see those science books as being compatible with the Bible.

This fragmentation is at least partly, I think—almost entirely, the result of that loss of respect for the mind on the part of Christians as Christians, even those who have minds well-developed to the needs of their vocations in the sciences or literature or business or other fields. And then there

are the specialists in theology or pastoral care who seem mostly indifferent to the empirical knowledge of God's Creation except when it's put into sound-bytes on a televised documentary with lots of colorful images.

I've tried to address this need for a story of empirical reality in light of Christian truths, starting with my first published book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], and going on to many postings on my blogs. In Chapter 567, I write about my motivations in this effort. Only time will tell if I've made a serious contribution to filling this need for a Christian worldview, but I hope I've at least asked a few of the right questions.

I'll wrap up by talking very briefly about what happened with the earlier two crises:

1. St. Augustine of Hippo successfully provided a story of human history (including the physical and biological sciences of his day). This led into the formation of Christendom during the Middle Ages. Whatever one might think of a triumphalist Christian politics, there's no denying the accomplishments of the Medieval Church, starting with the saving of Roman technology and various bodies of ancient knowledge and moving on to the formation of uniquely Christian cultures that were as rich and accomplished as any in history.
2. The efforts of Aquinas to salvage the Christian mind failed. So far as his thought goes, two of the greatest of the modern Thomists, Etienne Gilson and Alasdair MacIntyre have both claimed that Thomistic thought was misunderstood or deliberately deformed for the years between John of St. Thomas, 1589-1644, and the late 1800s, but I don't see much evidence Aquinas was understood by many in those early centuries after his death in 1274. Franciscans at Oxford, such as Duns Scotus and William Occam, used powerful intellects to attack the idea that mind was important in Christian life and they seemed to have won then and now.



## 366 Creation and Freedom

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=109>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/09/22.]

Henri Bergson tells us [10]:

Why, in other words, is not everything given at once, as on the film of a cinematograph? The more I consider this point, the more it seems to me that, if the future is bound to *succeed* the present instead of given alongside of it, it is because the future is not altogether determined at the present moment, and that if the number taken up by this success is something other than a number, if it has for the consciousness that is installed in it absolute value and reality, it is because there is unceasingly being created in it, not indeed in any such artificially isolated system as a glass of sugared water, but in the concrete whole of which every such system forms part, something unforeseeable and new. This duration may not be the fact of matter itself, but that of the life which reascends the course of matter; the two movements are none the less mutually dependent upon each other. [page 339]

I've tried to restore the Biblical sense that this world is a story being told by God and that leads me to be sympathetic with what Bergson is saying, at least what I think he's saying, though he frames the point in dualistic terms. As I understand him, he's claiming that there are two ways at looking at the one being of this universe, both looking at the same phenomena, one from a materialistic viewpoint and one from an 'immaterial' viewpoint, but his stronger claim is that time would occur 'all at once' in a fully determined

universe. I think his point is analogous to the claim made by some quantum physicists:

If there were 1,000 particles exactly the same, they would be the same particle.

Some sort of freedom of individual ‘things’ and also of individuals points of space and time seems to be part of a universe of development, a universe of stories. There’s a specific phenomena, not yet fully understood, which may provide an example of this. A press release from the National Institute of Standards and the University of Colorado (1995/07/13) starts out:

Physicists in Boulder, Colo., have achieved a temperature far lower than has ever been produced before and created an entirely new state of matter predicted decades ago by Albert Einstein and Indian physicist Satyendra Nath Bose.

Cooling rubidium atoms to less than 170 billionths of a degree above absolute zero caused the individual atoms to condense into a “superatom” behaving as a single entity, said Eric Cornell and Carl Wieman of JILA, a joint program of the Commerce Department’s National Institute of Standards and Technology and the University of Colorado at Boulder. [see *NIST/University of Colorado Researchers Create Bose-Einstein “Super Molecule”* found at [http://www.nist.gov/public\\_affairs/releases/super\\_molecule.cfm](http://www.nist.gov/public_affairs/releases/super_molecule.cfm). In the original blog essay, I relied on a press release no longer on the Internet. This reference is to a later article updating to later events.]

What’s happening, by some interpretations, is that those nearby rubidium atoms are put into the same physical state and become one atom in some important ways. It’s as if nature herself can no longer distinguish between these atoms in the same state. Also, for the benefit of those who had never followed these experiments: those scientists ‘froze’ those atoms by hitting them with lasers to hold them in place. An absolutely motionless atom would be at a temperature of absolute zero.

Returning to Bergson, I read that quote from *Creative Evolution* as a claim that a fully-determined world would happen all at once. The true state of the universe would be like a fully recorded movie – to use Bergson’s

own example. The universe, from a creaturely viewpoint, would be complete in the same way that a reel of film is a complete movie. Time is an illusion when a movie is shown to creatures such as us—each and every frame in a reel of a movie exists before you see the lion roar. A fully-determined world would be in a radically different state from that of an open world moving through time with some freedom—even if the formal laws of motion (such as those of Newton or Einstein) were the same in both of those worlds.

I think this is an interesting and fruitful attempt to explain why and how time is different from space though modern physics tell us they're part of one structure. Independent existence is important to each atom and to each point of space for our universe to be what it is, but time as we know it introduces freedom and openness of a special sort. It's not just a fourth dimension of space though it's a fourth dimension of a structure, the other three dimensions being space. There are speculative theories in modern physics which strongly imply that our world may have been created from something which has no time and no spatial dimensions as we know them. This universe may well be shaped from some strange stuff that I call the Primordial Universe. In the worldview I'm constructing, this Primordial Universe is a manifestation of the truths God chose for Creation, though there might actually be any number of phases between that Primordial Universe and the beginning of the expansionary phase which is this universe. That beginning is, of course, often called the Big Bang.

I'm circling around the immediate problem: why is time different from space? Einstein taught us that space and time are intertwined even to the point that current cosmological physics, based upon the general theory of relativity, ties together time and the expansion of space. Even if time were somehow created by that expansion of space, time is still very much different.

Our freedom lies in time. It would perhaps be useful, though ultimately wrong to say we are enslaved in our spatial dimensions. Our better understanding, intuitive and scientific, of space relative to our understanding of time is perhaps one reason for our difficulties in believing in our own freedom when we think in cause-and-effect terms, rationally thinking through our relationships to other things or living beings and even our relationships to physical forces. There might be lifetimes of philosophical contemplation in this problem, but I'll move on for now.

Time, at least in this universe, is tied up with entropy, a measure of the relative mix of order and disorder defined in terms of information science

or statistical physics—those two different approaches provide pretty much the same definition. Our freedom might be tied up with entropy, but that creates a problem for Christian thinkers, one I discuss in Chapter 191, *What are the Thermodynamic Properties of Heaven?* Actually, it points to a number of interesting problems we should welcome if we really value freedom, which has to include freedom of the mind in empirical matters.

This is not to advocate the false freedom of atheism or even agnosticism. It's not mind but a sense of gratitude and a sense of justice which determine if we believe in God in at least a provisional sense. A human being with a creative mind and a sense of gratitude will enjoy exploring God's Creation and his own relationship to God without feeling a need to be creative at the price of ingratitude. Nor will that creative thinker feel his faith threatened with the discovery of nasty parasites or poorly understood phenomena in deep-space.

As I try to move more deeply into the issues I've been exploring in my various writings, I'll be writing about open problems more than solutions. In many cases, I may not even have speculative solutions though I may have some to at least start off the process of thinking towards solutions.

If we were to do our best to open ourselves to God and His Creation, we'd accept problems, even welcome them instead of fearing them. The world is mostly a story being told by God, a morally ordered narrative, but we face puzzles often. It might well be that such a situation is necessary for creatures such as human beings to be free. Our freedom is maybe a set of learned skills rather than some sort of metaphysical attribute. If so, the learning takes place during evolutionary and developmental processes. In fact, we know that confronting difficult moral choices is a part of growing up—even in a well-ordered society where most questions are answered by a constrained set of options.

If freedom is for real, we should expect new problems to emerge, problems which deny solutions by our established ways of thought and behavior. John Henry Newman told us that even the most absolute of truths have to be continually restated because those truths are necessarily expressed in human words and concepts which are continually changing. I'm saying that our need to deal with changes in our concepts and language represent a still deeper need to deal with changes in our understanding of Creation. Moreover, I suspect that our difficulties in understanding Creation might point to a certain freedom in even the most frozen of physical entities in Creation. It's possible that our freedom lies in our interactions with our

environments just as much of our thought seems to lie in those interactions. (See Chapter 78, *A Review of Adaptive Thinking, Part I...* and the three succeeding chapters which contain the parts of a review of Gerd Gigerenzer's important book.)



## 367 Of One Mind

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=106>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/11/24.]

In *The City of Man* [92], Pierre Manent tells us:

The experience of modern democracy puts before us a strange contradiction: democratic man is the freest man to have ever lived and at the same time the most domesticated. It will be said that the difficulty is quickly clarified: he can only be granted, he can only give himself, so much liberty because he is so domesticated. One has to ask how, since the dog whose contentment the wolf envies is not unaware of the collar to which it is tethered, modern man is so sure of being ever more free if in reality he is ever more subjected. [page 181]

The situation is still worse than we might first think. This domestication of modern, democratic man is related to the fact that he values a peace that can be obtained only by a uniformity of opinion. Manent discusses this problem elsewhere in his book. To my knowledge, the strong tendency of modern, democratic man to brainwash himself in the interests of mainstream views was first noted by Tocqueville in *Democracy in America* which was published back in the 1830s.

Roughly speaking, Manent's complex analysis boils down to the sad fact that the modern democratic system can hold together only if we are all tolerant of other's beliefs in such a way that we end up compromising our understanding of the 'good'. Effectively, we throw away the very concept of truth in order to live in peace with neighbors who hold a radically different idea of a good life.

Modern democratic man doesn't seem capable of the true tolerance which can allow the growth of Bohemias. That is, any Bohemias, existing or developing, will be turned into tourist centers complete with coffee-shops and T-shirt booths. Sexual perversion is domesticated so that Oscar Wilde becomes one half of Mr. and Mr. Middle-class America. Creative efforts which might be legitimate but are certainly dangerous, such as avant-garde music or literature, became subjects for grant applications to various sorts of suits who commute from exclusive suburbs to their comfie offices at the NEA or the Ford Foundation.

This ongoing and relentless effort to homogenize all thoughts and all ways of behavior results in minds and hearts of mush. After all, we're very particular creatures even in the way that we think about and live out the most absolute and transcendental of truths—for example, each cultural realization of any form of Christianity has different ways of submitting to the Creator. Even with the Mass to unite Catholics, Orthodox, and some other ancient traditional forms of Christianity, Roman Catholics who are Italian have different ways of praying from Polish Roman Catholics. The Coptic churches, Catholic or Orthodox or independent, are different from all other Christian churches in many of their ways. Benedictines have different ways of life from cloistered Dominicans and Calvinists find both ways to be strange.

What is the common ground for all of these manifestations of some understanding of Christianity? A sort of abstraction which requires no serious effort to be turned to easy-to-digest goop. Things get worse when we Christians try to talk to Jews as if we don't really believe Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God. The goop becomes still more bland when we try to find common ground with Buddhists and Hindus and animist pagans.

This isn't an argument against tolerance. In fact, I'd favor an open-mindedness which doesn't turn Puerto Ricans into wannabe middle-class white Americans who dress in funny and colorful clothes a few times a year. Aren't those spicy foods so interesting? And that music has such a good beat.

Me? I listen to so-called World Music radio shows every so often and I can appreciate music from Puerto Rico and Senegal and the various tribal lands of South Africa partly because it's so exotic and partly because of the similarities which often show with an ethnic form of music to which I have truer attachments—Celtic music. Some of the revivers of Celtic traditional music learned how to play percussion instruments with bare hands from

Africans or Jamaicans.

All forms of ethnic music, all forms of literature are in danger in our world. Democratic man would turn them all into mass-merchandized products. All ways of life which are interesting and rich are in danger of becoming villages at some theme park.



# 368 Good and Evil: Simpler Than We Pretend

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=118>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/11/30.]

More than 1500 years ago, St. Augustine of Hippo told us that evil was not a positive force but rather a privation in being. He reasoned that all being comes from God and has to be good. He had, so to speak, a devil of a time justifying the existence of Satan, a being who was totally evil because Satan's substantial being couldn't be evil because it comes from God but Satan could will to be evil because his will comes from. . . Never mind.

It's quite true that being comes from God and has to be good. What we Christians haven't yet learned from St. Thomas Aquinas and from the subsequent explosion in empirical knowledge is:

Substantial being in this universe is not immutable. At any given time, it exists in a specific state but that state evolves through time—to better or worse states. And most complex things or living creatures are born in rather vague states where they are bundles of potential more than particular entities.

A human being isn't born with a sturdy moral backbone. He develops one through proper exercise just as he strengthens the bones of his legs by stressful exercise such as running or playing tennis. I wish I had a much stronger moral backbone and I fear that I'm nearly an invertebrate in some ways. I was raised in the United States, the great Melting Pot—where boys are melted down so they can flow into the mainstream so good a target of profiteers—political and commercial alike. You shouldn't expect those boys to emerge from that pot as men with sturdy spines. What you

get are the sorts of creatures which Adam Smith feared might emerge in a prosperous society centered on commercial activities—men genial and having little moral integrity.

Is it so bad to be living in a society of genial men and women? Ask the Jews who survived the Holocaust. In a series of frightening books, Hannah Arendt, the Jewish philosopher and historian, was forced to the conclusion that most of the evil of the modern world was carried out by nice, middle-class men. The dedicated Nazis were too stupid to carry out such a complex operation as the Final Solution. Heinrich Himmler quietly disobeyed Hitler's orders to fill the good jobs with true Nazis and instead provided good careers and benefits packages for the likes of Adolf Eichmann, a man that Professor Arendt described as one of the nicest men she'd ever met. It was his misfortune to be in a job where he had to round up Jews and transport them east. He felt sorry for them and, when it had been possible, did his best to allow them to escape the roundups. Eichmann truly couldn't understand why so many Jews, and others, hated him so much that they hunted him down in South America, kidnapped him, and transported him to Israel for trial. By the time, he was hung, those prosecutors and interrogators who had worked on his case, as well as those few like Hannah Arendt who'd been allowed to talk for him, had to face some difficult questions. How could such a nice man have done so much evil? How could he have so efficiently and so energetically applied his logistical and bureaucratic genius to an evil cause which had actually disgusted him?

Perhaps being nice and genial isn't enough? Perhaps it takes a bit of backbone, some guts, and a bit of stuffing in the chest to do what's right when a price is to be paid? Perhaps we should be raising boys to have the courage appropriate to men and girls to have the maternally directed courage appropriate to women? Females are probably in better shape, all else being equal, because experiments have shown that the hormonal flows after giving birth will reshape the brains of females of other species of mammals and there is general evidence that human mothers also go through drastic changes of this sort. A modern mother might well go against her upbringing and defend her children to the death long after the modern father has cut and run, perhaps to go overseas in uniform to defend the interests of his masters.

We aren't born saints and we aren't born with moral integrity. The virtuous pagans of the Roman Republic worked hard to toughen up their sons as did other pagans such as the Apaches. I could imagine Geronimo

converting and becoming a martyr for Christ while I have trouble thinking of the typical Christian priest or minister accepting the sufferings inflicted on the early martyrs. I can imagine Geronimo telling Hitler to go to hell while so many clergymen and other baptized Christians collaborated with the Nazis to keep alive their careers, to be able to pay their bills and take care of their children, to retain their social standing. Are children better off receiving toys and nice clothes through the paychecks of a Daddy who's a cowardly collaborator with evil?

Robert McNamara speaks in similar ways of genial men without moral integrity in his book about how bad things really were in the war of the American government against the Vietnamese: *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam*. He was allowed access to the Johnson and Kennedy libraries and found facts that confirmed his worst fears: he and the other top American officials had been conducting that war as if a business venture, worrying about to-do lists and career prospects, while forcing American soldiers to systematically wage a brutal and criminal war against the civilians of South Vietnam, the supposed beneficiaries of our fighting. The evidence that the war was being conducted in a criminal manner was in reports and memos sitting on the desks and conference-room tables of those nice men in Washington. I think we should worry a lot about the image of nice men conducting a criminal war from comfortable offices in the United States and then driving home in their nice cars to their nice houses in nice neighborhoods. And what nice meals they'd eat that evening as they gathered with their nice wives and nice children. Enough said.

And yet we follow that most modern of all theologians, Flip Wilson, in his pontifications upon the cause of the evil we do: "The Devil made me do it." The modern Devil, at least the one resident in Europe and North America, is a cowardly and spineless sort of demon who can be seen very easily: walk over to the mirror and look at the wretched coward you've become so that you can be a better citizen of the marketplaces of the modern world.

A traitor to your own children whose brains and souls are twisted and deformed by the entertainment industry and other exploiters while you're so willing to send young men off to take rifle in hand and go kill strangers on the other side of the globe when it suits your owners in Washington. A traitor to God, you serve the gods of the marketplace so enthusiastically in your work and your consumption while begrudging a little time and effort to your Creator. Still more a traitor to your children, you raise your sons

to be as spineless and as prone to violent desires as you sit and watch men brutalize each other on the football field or in Rambo movies.

We're born as bundles of possibilities, and each of us is shaped into a particular form by our responses to our environments. We're born as battlegrounds of order vs. disorder in a world which is a larger scale battleground of the same sort. It's our job, as pagans honoring Nature or—far better—Christian honoring Christ, to choose order, to order our internal being and, consequently, our future actions even when we are surrounded by disorder, even when that disordered environment extracts a great price from us. The same baby boy might grow into a coward prone to collaboration with evil or into a man with at least some excuse for a spine, a man who at least truly desires to do what is right even when a great price must be paid. Maybe that baby boy could even be raised to be a noble and virtuous pagan or—far better—a saint.

The world of God is naturally good in its substance but moral goodness has to be developed. We have to work to develop our moral integrity, our moral spine, the stuff in our chests as C.S. Lewis might have said. A morally evil human being is the result of a failure for moral goodness to develop in that human being. He is impoverished in his moral character. There is privation in his human being but he might well be as nice as Adolf Eichmann.

Moral goodness is not something we simply fall into so long as we don't murder or rape on a regular basis. Moral goodness has to be chosen as a goal. It has then to be nurtured with the realization that we might have to pay a big price to do what is right.

It's been said that all that's necessary for evil to conquer is for good men to do nothing. It would be far more accurate to say that all that's necessary for evil to conquer is for men to fail to pay the price to become good men. Goodness is a much deeper matter than the superficial signs of niceness and decency. It's not something we fall into but rather something we have to choose.

## 369 The Instability of Evil

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=120>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/12/05.]

In Chapter 368, *Good and Evil: Simpler Than We Pretend*, I noted that St. Augustine of Hippo taught that evil is a privation in being rather than a positive substance. I also noted that a creature in this universe, this phase of God's Creation, is not a firmly defined being of immutable substance but rather a series of states of being which necessarily change as that creature moves through time. We're not creatures formed once and for all at our conception, creatures who then move through God's story, dying as the same creatures we were at conception. We're creatures who are formed by our participation in God's story, by our responses to our environments, including our fellow-creatures, and by our responses to God.

If evil is a privation in a creature which doesn't have immutable substance but rather a past, present, and possible future consisting of states of being, then we would expect a creature who chooses evil to be unstable, moving through a biography which is a story of decreasing order and coherence, of dissipation of being. Death would seem to be the fate of all deprived being, the fate of all entities which are not their own act-of-being. A radical deprivation of being would seem to imply a relatively rapid death. A lesser deprivation of being would allow a more natural movement towards natural death, and a lesser deprivation is the condition of all creatures in this universe. Any possible fullness of being comes from Christ infusing Himself into us, from Christ making us part of His Body.

St. Augustine had a way of justifying the continuing existence of those who choose evil, during this mortal life and in a never-ending Hell on the other side of death. He speculated that Satan, and evil men, have good substance which comes from God but a free will which is somehow independent

of God as it chooses evil.

Unfortunately for that line of thought, modern brain research places the will, actually our entire moral nature, firmly in our biological substance. (See *How Brains Make Up Their Minds* [35] by Walter J. Freeman or my reviews of that book starting with Chapter 83, *Is Christian Morality a Natural Morality* and the ensuing chapters with the major title *What is Mind?*.) But clearheaded thought based on unbiased observation would have told us much about the real nature of human morality if we modern men were inclined to engage in such activities. Centuries before the discovery of the cell or the invention of brain-scanning devices, St. Thomas Aquinas understood the biological underpinnings of human nature and provided a framework for understanding human moral nature, a framework which Professor Freeman adopted for his understanding of his own research results and the research results from other brain scientists.

The moral will and other aspects of the moral nature of a creature are found in its substantial, God-given nature and not in some eerie entity which seems merely a hand-wave of an explanation for the mysterious freedom we have been granted by the Almighty. When a creature wills evil, when he wills moral disorder, he begins to nurture a cancer of sorts in his own nature, his own substantial being. He begins to empty himself of his partially ordered being.

Let me try saying this in somewhat different words. We aren't born as God wishes us to be but rather as potentially that which He wishes us to be. That which He wishes us to be is a creature in a state of being which is God-centered and hence good. Nature is good in its own lesser way but nature in this mortal realm is a battleground for a war between order and disorder which can't be won by any creature. To be God-centered is to say "Yes" to that grace which can perfect nature and bring us into a state of perfect order, the Peace of Christ. But even to say "Yes" to what is good in nature can bring a man to that state of being which we can call "noble". This is a state that calls to mind such great men as the Emperor Cyrus, Julius Caesar and his opponent Cato, Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce, and many others who can be found in the history books. When grace completes nature, we get St. Paul, St. Francis, Dorothy Day, and others.

Now think about the evil ones of history, remembering as a guiding insight the insanity of Nebuchadnezzar, his mental and emotional decay into a beast of the field after his efforts to claim divinity. Hitler began a rapid decay into insanity during his years in Vienna which began in a

conventional way for an artist with ambitions greater than his talent and eventually he entered a slide into hatred of Jews, perhaps because those who fed him during the tough years were charitable Jews. His decay was probably accelerated by abuse of the same sorts of amphetamines preferred by Skinheads and Neo-Nazis in our age. There's more than one way to damage your human stuff.

In the novel *The First Circle*, Solzhenitsyn speaks of stories he heard from fallen members of Stalin's government: Stalin was so ego-centric that he fell into a catatonic state from shock when Hitler beat him to the punch, that is, when Hitler betrayed Stalin while Stalin was still biding his time before betraying Hitler. (The real story is more complex but beyond the purposes of this blog entry.) And Stalin was a fairly conventional sadistic barbarian rather than one who worshiped evil in the way of Hitler. Still, a sadistic barbarian is evil enough to slide into insanity by way of moral decay.

To think rightly is to move with the grain of God's world, that is, to shape yourself to think the thoughts God wishes you to think. The virtuous pagans got this only partly right but they sometimes did as well as possible without the more direct revelations from the Transcendent God. (The truths in pagan philosophy come from their clear understanding of many of the aspects of God's contingent acts as Creator. That is, they saw God but only in His freely chosen role as Creator of this world.)

To choose evil is to move against the grain of God's world. To choose evil is to choose to think wrongly. Why do those who speak of God as all-powerful think that there are no immediate consequences to such disobedience to God's commands which are implicit in Creation or those which are explicit in His revelations? Why do they think that we have substantial existence apart from God so that we, or Satan, can continue to exist after pulling away from He who is the source of all being? To sin, to rebel against God in specific ways—perhaps misbehaving sexually, might leave us as no more than disobedient or spiteful children of a gracious Father. An ordinary sinner has not moved away from the source of being so much as he has allowed himself to be distracted by that which is not good. I speak not of such sinners but of those who choose a radical rebellion against God and against the natural good.

If being comes from God, if God-given being is itself good, then to choose a privation of being—evil—is to move away from being, to move towards oblivion. If Satan had existed as a creature of this universe, if he had chosen

evil over good—that is, oblivion over God-gifted being, he would have long since ceased to exist or at least would be a shadow not able to do much. At the risk of being redundant:

To choose evil is to reject the good, including God-given being.

To choose evil is to move towards wispiness and non-existence.

The logic of my argument forces me to speculate that we have only two choices: good or evil. To choose good is a more specific decision than we morally spineless modern men would think. To just set out to be passively good, to be a nice guy, is to choose evil, though a lesser sort of evil, but it's not to choose good. Adolf Eichmann, nice guy and logistical genius of the Holocaust, showed a great stupidity in not even understanding why so many hated him. He was on a more gradual incline towards non-being than Hitler, making him more useful to the more rapidly decaying Nazis, but Eichmann was following them at a slower pace.

We should be careful about literalizing apocalyptic pronouncements, but I think it meaningful that the cowardly and faithless are grouped with more active sinners such as murderers and fornicators in the condemnation found in Revelation 21:8. We should also remember that Holy Scripture gives credit to those with a more aggressive sort of courage, King David in the Old Testament and St. Stephan in the New Testament, but the main thrust is to advocate the courage which shows up as a quiet persistence in attending to God and His commands. If we persist in moving towards God, He will make up what still is lacking in us, whether it be courage or eloquence. We should persist in worshiping and obeying God and we should persist in seeking human moral good. To do otherwise, even when our environments allow us to relax, is to choose evil and the path of decay into total death—oblivion.

## 370 Good and Evil: Evil, Inc.

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=121>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/12/06.]

I've spoken about the nature of evil as related to the individual creature in Chapters 368, *Good and Evil: Simpler Than We Pretend*, and Chapter 369, *Good and Evil: The Instability of Evil*. But evil takes shape on a large scale far too often, especially in this modern age of genocidal wars, this age where slavery has once again become common, and this age which has been so creative in its forms of economic exploitation at the level of megacorporations and countries. Evil seems to be larger-than-life at times, but ancient literature tells us that this feeling has been around even during ages which had far smaller populations and institutions.

Even much of what I said about evil and the individual moral actor actually has to do with the mass movements of recent centuries. But mass movements are funny in that they both do and don't have a true reality. Moral actors are always individuals, despite our pretensions with such invitations to evil as limited-liability corporations. When we place too much weight upon the institutions, we collaborate in the dreams of those who are as greedy as Hitler and as cowardly as those who appeased Hitler. Those dreams are for power without responsibility, that is, decision-making power without individual moral responsibility. (I paraphrase Winston Churchill who said—and I quote from memory: “Journalists are like the harlots of every age. They seek power without responsibility.” Journalists have lots of company.)

But there are not just institutions out there. There are some vague forces, too readily seen as invisible spirits, good or evil. We don't have too much of a vocabulary or many concepts available for talking intelligently about what's really going on with these 'spirits of the age' or 'gods

of the marketplace' as I call them in imitation of Kipling. Mathematicians and other scientists are developing tools under research projects with key phrases like: complexity theory, chaos theory, self-organizing system theory, and so forth. There are a number of tools which are fairly mature and useful, at least from my outsider's viewpoint. They are useful in various sorts of studies of real-world systems which have a factuality and complexity that renders them unpredictable and generally beyond complete understanding, but substantial understanding can lead us to a clarification of various problems in, for example, communication between two systems (a country might be an example of a system for these purposes).

At the same time, mathematics can only model some of the aspects of real-world systems. Corresponding concepts, expressible in literary terms, need to be developed before we can really start talking intelligently with the development and operation of complex human systems. This is true of all such systems: social, political, and economic. We do have one conceptual tool which was expressed as a simile: human economic systems formed by men interacting as they satisfy their individual desires organize as if guided by an Invisible Hand.

This is a literary expression which has proved to be of great power in allowing some imaginative insight into the nature of what would now be called a self-organizing system. One of several mistakes made by Adam Smith has led to a lot of bad thinking over the years: he wrote as if a self-organizing human system was guaranteed to end in a morally stable form.

In anticipation of this discussion about complex human systems, I've already claimed that there are neutral pseudo-forces which operate when men interact, socially or politically or economically. When the underlying populations of men have morally well-structured characters, there is a high probability—not certainty as I may have implied in some places—that a morally well-ordered society or polity or economy will emerge. If the underlying populations of men are willfully evil (such as Nazis and some other perverse populations in history), no morally stable society or polity or economy can develop though that population of evil men might keep things going so long as they can conquer healthier human societies and live off the loot or the efforts of slaves. A population of men who are evil by being morally spineless will create systems that decay much more slowly than the systems of willfully evil men—to be good is a positive matter and not a mere 'absence' of evil.

The West has decayed because we rejected the concept of good as the goal of a worthwhile human life. We pretended that the neutrality of self-organizing systems somehow made it likely that morally well-ordered human systems would develop as liberal politics (right-wing as well as left-wing) and liberal economics (right-wing as well as left-wing) expanded by insulating decision-makers from moral responsibility for their decisions. Modern forms of ‘democracy’ and corporate capitalism are highly desirable from the viewpoint of both exploitive men and morally spineless men.

Depending upon our view of empirical reality, we could see these systems as being the result of the actions of angels and demons. This viewpoint is undeniably bad in at least one way: it allows us to protect ourselves from our moral responsibilities as individual citizens just as CEOs are protected by corporate laws from moral responsibility for their decisions and actions so long as it’s within the scope of their duties. (Why is it that so many self-labeled libertarians seem to think corporate forms of organization and the laws extending human rights to corporations are natural to human societies whereas the income tax laws are artificial and the result of one group of human beings imposing their desires on the general population? A little thought tells us that laws allowing the operation of General Motors are licenses for the transfer of income and power from one group to another—usually the general population to a small group defined by their ambition or their grandfather’s thefts.)

When we see angelic forces in the societies of men, we’re really seeing the self-organizing efforts of morally well-structured men as they go about their political and social and economic activities. When we see Satan, we’re seeing the self-organizing efforts of willfully evil or morally ill-structured men as they form Nazi states or societies that exploit children or deform those who try to choose family attachments over modern mobility and selfish ambition. (I confess that I was not one of those who chose the moral path. I entered the corporate life and am stilling paying for that non-decision made by default because of my lack of moral spine and moral consciousness.)

This is the moral problem of mankind, one which we can finally see in brutal clarity:

We have trouble even seeing the larger-scale movements which are the formations and movements of nations and markets and displaced human beings. These movements are not mystical or supernatural but are the result of self-organization driven by

the interactions of individual human beings who are the citizens and producers and consumers and migrants.

Am I making a claim that sin is to be found in social structures? No. In fact, I've already argued that the self-organizing forces are morally neutral. The moral content in societies and polities and economies which form comes from the moral natures of the individual citizens. There is a sense in which there is sin in social structures but it's a reflection of the sins of the men of that society.

The dominant form of sin in the modern age, and perhaps most ages, is the simple refusal to become even a virtuous pagan let alone a Christ-like man. To be good requires an effort, most especially in an age where life seems safe and comfortable so that men travel the wide and easy road unless they have the personal wisdom or the guiding wisdom of others to move off that road for at least a time of training in the tougher virtues. We don't feel the temptations to steal or kill in order to eat or to feed our children. Not tempted to the more obvious sins of this sort, we prepare ourselves for lives as well-fed bureaucrats and other workers in the marketplaces of our ages. Not having exercised our moral character, we modern men of the West occasionally face a morally difficult situation and find ourselves in the same position as those who try to run a marathon after spending a life on the couch. This was true of the ordinary German citizen in the 1930s and was also true of those Americans who managed the war in Vietnam.

A good man has a moral character that is gained by effort not by a lucky avoidance of temptation. A just society is formed by the interactions of good men. Jacques Barzun was persuaded to collect some of his essays, against his will if I recall correctly, and he chose for one of those collections this title: *The Culture We Deserve* [8]. The culture we deserve, the government we deserve, the economic system we deserve.

We're no better than our children who anger us so much when they try to claim the rights and privileges of adulthood before they're willing to even try to take on the responsibilities of adulthood. We want to be taken seriously as moral creatures but we don't take the initiative to form our own moral characters or the moral characters of our children and the others around us. When we live through periods of prosperity, we become soft in body and mind and moral nature, preferring to take it easy. If you value what is right and what is true, what is good, then you work to become a

good man or a good woman even if your environment leaves you the option of sitting back and taking it easy.

We're a sociable race. We cooperate with each other in the small in such a way that we form societies and political entities and economies in the large. Soft, genial human beings form societies which are gentle and charitable so long as things go well but those sorts of societies can be perverted by the iron will of a Hitler or a Lenin. Evil men form predatory, conquering nations. Good men form just societies.



# 371 John Howard Yoder: Discipleship as Political Responsibility

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=124>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/12/27.]

This essay is my response to a wonderful and important book, *Discipleship as Political Responsibility* [154] by the Mennonite thinker John Howard Yoder.

In speaking of the temptations which the crowds presented to Christ, to make Him King after He multiplied the bread on the mountainside and again after His triumphal entrance into Jerusalem, Yoder says:

[T]he political temptation is not yet over. What was his prayer all about when, in the night of temptation, he prayed, “If it be possible, let this cup pass from me” (Matt. 26:39). What would it have meant for him to want the cup to pass from him? What would have enabled him to sidestep the cross? “Edifying exegesis” has hardly ever asked the question. For “political exegesis” this question is central. How could he have avoided the cross? We do not know in detail what other way of acting he considered in that hour. But we can hardly be wrong in assuming it would have required a holy war. [page 56]

I can suggest another meaning to our Lord’s words—“If it be possible, let this cup pass from me”. As a human being, I will die one day, but I won’t truly know death because I’ll cease to exist at my death until God resurrects me—if He chooses to resurrect me. To die is to cease to exist

as a mortal creature and, by definition, we can't know death just as we can't truly imagine or think about something coming into existence from nothing. Whether something is coming to be from nothing or disappearing into nothing, we can't imagine non-existence and we can't experience it.

The Son of God knew the true horror of death because He, true God in His immortal nature, experienced the death of His human nature. In a sense, He experienced non-existence. It would be reasonable that He, in His human nature, was terrified by that upcoming experience. Only His love for the Father would have led the Son to accept His mission on earth and then to go through with it.

On the other hand, I'll agree with Yoder's instincts that the life and death of Christ was soaked with political meaning, just as it was soaked with moral and social meanings. The primary meaning came from the true nature of Christ's act of submission to the Father's will – this was the reason for which He came and not to save us or to teach us moral or political lessons. The world was created so that Christ could be crucified. I know of no other possibility consistent with the all-powerfulness of God who knew all that would happen before He created the world.

Jesus' cross was not some unexplainable and undeserved evil that came upon him accidentally, like a disease, a storm, or an earthquake. Jesus wasn't facing some inescapable suffering. On the contrary, Jesus' cross was a form of suffering that Jesus could very well have avoided. It was the cost of his obedience in the midst of a rebellious world. [page 60]

Almost. As I pointed out above, this act of obedience, this sacrifice of His holy self to the Father's will is the point of it all, of all Creation. The rebellious world was created so that Christ could be crucified, could sacrifice Himself in obedience to the Father.

I do wish more Christians would pay attention to the valid accusations that we speak cheaply of 'carrying our crosses' when we merely bear the natural ills of mortal life. As Yoder points out, to 'carry our crosses' means to willingly take on avoidable suffering and death in order to do our duty to God, which includes our political and other duties to our fellow-men.

The essence of following Jesus is not grasped if we view it primarily as a commandment to become the same as Jesus, or to

act the way Jesus did; rather following Jesus really means basing our action on our participation in Christ's very being. . . . Following Jesus is the result, not the means, of our fellowship with Christ. It is the form of our Christian freedom and not a new law. [page 61]

Also quite true and this is part of the reason I remain a Catholic though disenchanted with the oh-so human American Catholic Church. Our fellowship begins with giving ourselves over to Christ in the Eucharist, when we invite Him in. Once He's infused us, we can move on to become His disciples. He is truly and really here with us, offering us a true fellowship, and He is present on the altar in a special way.

The state represents human activity outside of faith; through its sword God acts. The church is the form of human action within the context of faith; through its cross God acts as well. Only the Christian cannot do both of them at the same time, as God can. The state is there for the sake of the church and not vice versa. [page 62]

I'm very uncomfortable with this conclusion, though my discomfort doesn't come from one aspect. My discomfort also, most certainly, doesn't mean Yoder is wrong because I believe he's right in part, but only in part.

I'm more optimistic about the possibilities of government than Yoder might be but I go beyond him in my discomfort with centralized governments, especially if they receive their power directly from submissive individuals. Local governments, though they can be abusive as well, have much potential for doing good at the human scale. And we have to remember that families and church communities can also be abusive and exploitive. We have to realize that those who call on a central power to handle a local problem might be suffering greatly but we also have to remember that they open the door and let them into our communities. Anything which grows beyond the human scale, government or business or even sports teams as we're learning, creates a pool of wealth or power which is guaranteed to attract the attention of the greedy and the overly ambitious.

I have a different way of viewing these problems than did Professor Yoder but my way of looking at political and social matters, a more Catholic and distributivist way, came into focus under the implicit criticism of Yoder

when I first read some of his key books about five years ago. At the very least, Yoder has put up a challenging analysis that can force all Christians to be honest with themselves and perhaps most especially Catholics who tend to be too optimistic about centralized power and centralized authority, though American Catholics tend to ignore authority when it speaks inconvenient words. More importantly, authority has its proper scope and a wise human authority leaves as much as possible to local authorities. Rome hasn't always been wise in this regard for sure, though Rome hasn't been nearly as abusive of her authority as some would think.

My current position, and still tentative, is that Yoder is more right about the state as we know it than he himself seems to believe, though I think, in later years, he came to question his own early teaching that a Christian could work in the welfare agencies, or other 'non-sword' agencies of the state. As the United States has been steadily mutating into an empire, the welfare systems and such programs as urban renewal have been of central importance in consolidating the power of the state over its own population while the sword has been rarely used internally. Dorothy Day was more consistent in seeing the State as the enemy whether it was sending soldiers overseas or sending out welfare checks. I don't know if she ever thought about the difference between centralized political power and distributed political power but she understood the evil that comes from centralized political power. (Though she was surprisingly submissive to her bishop's authority even on prudential matters.)

Evil typically grows along with piles of power or wealth, though it's present even when the stakes are small. Those piles of power and wealth attract the greedy and overly ambitious but the centralization of power draws our governments away from us, protecting decision-makers from moral responsibility of the sort that comes when you have to look into the face of those you've harmed or those you're taking money from. Idealists of various stripes might not like this but there is a look-in-the-face aspect to moral politics and moral business management. Tip O'Neil was not stating a fact so much as he was making a moral claim when he said all politics is local. (I'm not sure if he was aware of the truth of matter but I do know he was a con-man playing to a sentiment he didn't give a damn about when it came to his own life, living away from his legal residence when active in politics and moving to Cape Cod as soon as he retired.)

I'm inclined to think Yoder's position about the State and Christians in the New Testament was a little simplistic for a reason he admitted but

then dismissed: the State in the New Testament was the Roman Empire.

Let me digress. The Mongol Empire was a simple beast from political and economic viewpoints. You had one political genius, Genghis Khan, who had a particularly great talent for finding and developing military geniuses. You had mobile herdsman prepared to fight blitzkrieg style wars against empires and other sorts of states which weren't prepared to defend against such warriors.

The Roman Empire was a different beast. Starting out as a republic aching to be an empire, much like the United States, The Roman Republic won several wars that left all competitors prostrate. Gold and other fungible assets flowed into a society founded upon agriculture and some significant competence in various industries that produced tools and weapons and other practical goods. With a highly liquid economy, the central power was able to increase taxes, building welfare systems that secured them the direct loyalty of citizens as individuals. Speculators got to work liquefying all assets, even farmland and family businesses. The central power increased taxes, built up its police powers and established a large professional military class. By the time this had happened, the fascist state – adolescent empire, had gutted itself economically, having reduced much of its working class, tradesmen, and craftsmen to poverty. The state couldn't support either its welfare programs or its military and began to expand beyond its already distant defensive boundaries in order to find fresh sources of loot and steady streams of taxes. The Empire had matured and was now stealing what it could no longer make or grow.

Around 1970, in a manuscript she hadn't quiet finished, *Life of the Mind*—finished by the consciously light hand of Mary McCarthy, Hannah Arendt saw the U.S.A. as having largely completed such a process and predicted that early in the 21st century, Americans would have to choose between poverty or a conversion into a full-scale, brutal empire. Make of this what you will.

There aren't demons involved here nor is human government inherently evil. The problems are at the human level: greed and moral laziness and shortsightedness. Distributed government can be very good indeed, but liquid wealth will destabilize it. Local leaders, unless bound by very strong traditions such as those of the Amish or Mennonites, will sell out the future generations to get a share of the revenue generated by the greater taxing power of a central government. Parents will jump at the opportunity to better their situation in the short-term even if it means they're conceding

power over their children to public authorities and even if it means they're liquidating assets that future generations will need in order that the current adult generations might have more luxuries.

(For those who take life as a spectator sport, we're about to see one of the greatest shows in history: the United States, government and citizens, have sold off the future to get current revenue but many of those assets which hold the key to the future are being bought by another young, potential empire—China. The American State may have given China the power to make the US the shortest-lived great empire in history. China would then have a chance to storm onto the world's stage as perhaps the greatest power in history.)

We don't have to fear or fight demons. We have to fear our own laziness and lack of vision. We have to fight against the tendency towards moral decay when times are good. We have to develop our minds and our moral characters so that we can see and understand what's happening, what's been developing for decades, and then have the courage to do something about it.

The State as we know it in the modern world is a bloated and cancerous organ of the earthly Body of Christ but that organ, government, is a foreshadowing of an aspect of that Body when it's fully realized in the world of the resurrected. The Church (as opposed to Yoder's 'church') is a foreshadowing of the Body as a whole, to be sure. For various reasons, the Pilgrim Church isn't capable of carrying out all the functions of the Body of Christ—that's possible only when Christ Himself is heading the Body. He will take over as our one and true High Priest, leading us in worship and prayer, and He will also be King.

[As of 2011/04/20, I've developed a more complex understanding of the Body of Christ in which the Church is the most important organ, that of worship and direct communication with God, but other organs exist to serve other human needs. Our political and economic and artistic activities seem to me to be efforts to meet true human needs. I don't think God will take us into the world of the resurrected and then mutilate us. We're a certain type of creature because that's how He wants us, and grace will perfect and complete us, not change us into creatures without the needs met by political and economic and artistic activities.]

## 372 The Faster Christians Die...

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=116>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/01/02.]

Tertullian, a Father of the early Church, told us, and I quote from memory:

The faster Christians die, the faster grows the Christian Church.

Pope Benedict XVI spoke about this quote not too many months ago and it's returned to my attention every so often, returning strongly when I started writing a little about my situation as an impoverished artist, fed and housed by the generosity of my sister. I'm not a martyr though I feel it my duty as a Christian to paint myself into a corner of sorts, convincing myself that I will accept martyrdom if – God forbid—I'm ever in a position where I could only escape by denying my God or my duty to do justice to my God and my neighbor.

I've written in various places about our lack of responsibility when it comes to developing our own moral character or that of our children. When times get soft, we become just like an athlete who sits on a couch and drinks beer when the coach isn't around. In fact, most human beings in history have not shown the initiative to develop moral character unless forced to do so by hostile circumstances. Our pot-bellies and sagging biceps in this prosperous age should embarrass us but they don't. So long as our prosperity and our gentle circumstances have lasted, we've convinced ourselves that our lack of criminal activities is due to our moral qualities in the same way that the beer-drinking, TV-watching athlete could convince himself that his endurance is good because he hasn't yet collapsed on the way to the refrigerator.

Let us face up to the Gestapo when they come for our Jewish neighbors. Let that flabby athlete chase a deer through the woods when the grocery stores disappear.

Some there are who love so much that they can let themselves grow soft and will still accept suffering and death to do what's right by God and neighbor. Most of us aren't like that and we need to develop that love by way of doing our duty to God, charitable work and fasting and prayer. Even when it isn't fun. Most of all when it isn't fun. Good runners win their races by practicing on the days when they don't want to do it and when nothing is going right. Good Christians win their far more important race by training even it seems needless and even harmful.

I imagine that the form of modern martyrdom will be different from that of past ages, taking such mundane and humbling forms as the willingness to suffer from painful and degrading diseases when morally-tainted cures are available. "He who endures to the end will be saved." Matthew 24:13 He who endures to the end will probably reap a harvest of souls for the Lord Jesus. So Tertullian told us and he lived in an age when martyrs were not so rare and when souls were being won even amongst those who did the torturing and killing. Isn't it likely that the winning of Saul's soul began as he supervised the martyrdom of Stephen who prayed for the souls of Saul and the others who made him the first Christian martyr?

How many of us are prepared in body and mind to endure to the end? How many of us are prepared to win souls for the Lord Jesus?

How many of us are more concerned with social respectability than we are with serving God and neighbor, with rendering justice to our Maker?

I'm ready to admit I'm a coward who shies away from even the thought of suffering. I'm ready to admit I don't love God or neighbor nearly as much as I should. This cowardice and this lack of adequate love are just aspects of the sin that is us. We don't sin, we are sin. We don't commit cowardly acts, we are cowards. We don't fail to love, we are empty of love.

We passed through a long period in the West when those in power and those holding wealth seemed to respect Jesus Christ rather than hating Him, to respect His followers rather than hating them. But nothing had really changed and now we Christians are gradually and reluctantly learning that Christ was serious in His warning:

[Y]ou will be hated by all for my name's sake. [Luke 21:17]

This is not to say that the hatred will be at a constant level in all historical periods, nor does it say that the hatred will always be expressed in acts or even words. The period which is ending was one in which the enemies of God worshiped the State or other gods of the marketplaces, as did the Caesars and their retainers, but they formed pragmatic alliances with Christian churches and other Christian groups for much of this period. Those Christians were willing to let our Lord be turned into a moral teacher for factory workers who might otherwise suffer hangovers too often.

The situation has changed. Various empires, not just the American Empire, are toddling about or crawling about on hands and knees. This is serious business for those who seek wealth or power and Christians are often seen as nuisances, though sometimes Christians are still seen as allies useful for morally forming the ordinary citizens that they can better serve the modern Principalities and Powers, the gods of the marketplaces.

As a rule, the leaders of Christianity have not a clue what's going on and they continue to support legislative and social programs which feed the various beasts growing towards adulthood. Some of those beasts tend to be relatively tolerant of those living inside the boundaries of the core nation of that empire. Some of those beasts are rational and seem to be aiming for a prosperity that will support large tax revenues.

There are so many Christian clergymen with so many degrees: are all of them ignorant of the historical ties between the war-powers and welfare-powers of empires as they develop? We'll soon need our shepherds to be better formed for the coming hard times because none of the beasts will be overly tolerant of Christians who profess their faith and act accordingly.

Yet there is hope:

If we love God and neighbor, if we try to endure, the Lord Jesus Christ will supply what we need, even the courage to accept avoidable suffering and death for the sake of Christ.



## 373 Keep the Imagination Sane

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=118>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/01/04.]

About 15 years ago, I went for a ride with a friend who was searching for antique furniture in regions north of the Quabbin Reservoir. In one of the places we stopped, I found a loft filled with old books that were no longer easy to sell according to the proprietor. I bought a few early editions of works by Nathaniel Hawthorne including two 1870s editions titled the *American Notebooks* and the *English Notebooks*. The *American Notebooks* include various letters, one of particular interest was written while he was at Brook Farm, the commune established by some of the Transcendentalist preachers and intellectuals with whom Hawthorne was friendly. The letter of interest was dated September 25, 1841. In responding to some news of lectures and demonstrations of ‘magnetic miracles’ (hypnotism or actual use of magnets?—I don’t know), he had this to say:

Keep the imagination sane,—that is one of the truest conditions of communion with heaven.

In the years since Hawthorne walked the soils of New England, there has been a decay that would lead me to also advise: Nurse the imagination back to health. Much of what I try to do in my published nonfiction books, my blog entries, and my unpublished works—novels and nonfiction—revolves around the imagination. I worked hard to bring my own imagination back to life and I urge others to do the same. I try to offer materials that can help to nurture the imagination, by way of advice or motivation or substantive imaginative material.

Along with Nathaniel Hawthorne, I’ll advise all who will listen:

Keep the imagination sane,—that is one of the truest conditions of communion with heaven.

# 374 C.S. Lewis and the World God Didn't Create

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=119>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/01/08.]

Hermann Melville once noted that Ralph Waldo Emerson, the Sage of Cambridge, had some good things to say but gave the impression that he would have had some good advice for the Almighty if he'd been present at the moment of Creation. I get that same impression from the writings of C.S. Lewis—especially his fictional writings.

I can almost imagine Lewis saying:

Not bad, Lord, but you need to get rid of those bones in the sands of Africa and forget about this four-dimensional space-time business. Then you could add a few wise wizards who cast spells with literary style and a host of evil scientists scheming to corrupt all of Creation. A much better world it would be.

On the other hand, Lewis wasn't in rebellion against the most important of Christian truths as was Emerson. Lewis also didn't seem to be aware that he was in rebellion of a sort against God as Creator.

Before going on, I will say that I have few serious problems with Lewis' expressions of the revealed truths of Christianity though I don't consider him to be particularly profound in any aspects of theological or philosophical thought. He was a good popularizer of some difficult ideas, a good teacher. In fact, his appreciation of the goodness of the material world, of sacramentality, and the Sacraments, didn't really fit well with his pessimistic views of those fields of thought and research, physics and evolutionary biology, which have been so much more fruitful in modern times than the fields that

Lewis preferred. I don't celebrate that, being a novelist and a philosopher and theologian who specializes in studying the created world. I have a foot in each camp, that of Einstein and Darwin and also that of Lewis and Tolkien—more appropriately, that of Melville and Flannery O'Connor. I'll also say that Lewis was far from unique among Christians in rejecting the modern project of empirical knowledge-gathering and advocating a return to a magical view of reality, though most of those Christians are happy enough to accept the medical miracles and other wondrous technologies of this modern project.

Lewis was convinced that truth could not be embodied. (This was the issue in his debate with G.E.M. Anscombe, though I think she took an overly weak position on the embodiment of truth if she really was a Thomist—she really wasn't that much less in the truths-vs-things dualist camp than was Lewis.) In Lewis' view, the truths we know come to us from some better place than this physical world, Presumably, from inside his own mind formed by exposure to the insides of the heads of other men and recorded in classic literature. He seemed to view the world as a strange sort of place, itself having no direct part in truth but being a setting for stories populated by beings concerned with truth. This is certainly preferable to the modern skepticism about truth, but it isn't good enough for a Christian.

I'll side with Aquinas: things are true. They're true because they're manifestations of thoughts of God. I suspect Lewis, and perhaps Professor Anscombe as well, would be upset or at least mystified by my claim in various writings that not only are things true, but those statements that we consider absolute truths are thing-like—they're created by God. To understand this claim, at least as I understand it, requires enough knowledge of the expansion of mathematics in the modern world to push through to a parallel expansion of metaphysics. Hellenistic metaphysics and Hellenistic mathematics were Siamese twins of a sort, but our modern view of metaphysics hasn't expanded as our modern view of mathematics has. In fact, few there are who appreciate the great but still incomplete expansion of metaphysics to be found in the works of Aquinas. I'm not sure that Professor Anscombe even understood that this expansion had occurred in the works of that poet of the Eucharistic Presence.

In his fictional works, Lewis presented the empirical knowledge of physics, evolutionary biology, etc. as the evil magic practiced by demonic men while good men, and even Christ the Lion, used white magic. He couldn't deal with modern empirical knowledge. To be sure, it's hard to

re-form your mind and acquire radically different skills past the adolescent years. Faraday, one of the founders of modern electromagnetic theory, received most of his education as an adult and is said to have been incapable of following Maxwell's work in turning Faraday's most important results into a mathematical system. In any case, Lewis seems to have viewed the modern project of gathering empirical knowledge (sometimes excessive and to no clear purpose, to be sure) to be some sort of conspiracy by evil scientists, a conspiracy intended to devalue literary knowledge.

Modern empirical knowledge speaks of a world and implies possible ways to speak of the plenitude of Creation. These modern possibilities are disturbing to those who try to think in conventional terms, even terms developed by the greatest of pre-modern thinkers. Lewis preferred a magical world of his imagination to the universe of Einstein and Darwin, though this latter universe seems to be the physical aspects of the world God created. It isn't wise to prefer your own world over the one created by God, nor is it a sign of the truest sort of faith.

As Nathaniel Hawthorne said,

Keep the imagination sane,—this is one of the truest conditions  
of communion with heaven.

A sane imagination works with God's world rather than feverishly creating a world populated by fantastic creatures with natures not even consistent with what we know of God's world. This is not to say that fantasy is not a legitimate literary genre. It's a minor genre, but it's a legitimate genre with great power to teach moral lessons or to create playgrounds for the human imagination. Fantastic literature ceases to be legitimate when it becomes an effort to create a view of reality rather than just being a home for comments upon reality, perhaps on moral problems. (It's quite possible that Tolkien was operating within the legitimate domain of fantasy literature and not trying to provide a larger-scale understanding of the world in *Lord of the Rings*. He supposedly made claims to that effect, but I'll leave that discussion to others who might care about the topic more than I do.)

We Christians should choose to be sane and to develop our thinking abilities and our understanding of the story which is our world, a story which includes our apish ancestors as well as the evolution of stars and galaxies in the early years of the expansion of our universe. On the other hand, the most important part of that story is the life and death and resurrection

of Christ. Lewis appreciated this, even if he did try to turn Christ into a magical lion.

## 375 Looking for Creativity in All the Wrong Places

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=127>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/01/08.]

A news story about an international meeting of the Jesuits, <http://www.zenit.org/rssenglish-21429>, includes these paragraphs:

[Cardinal Rode, prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life at the Vatican] also mentioned the “feeling of ever growing separation between faith and culture, a separation which constitutes a great impediment for evangelization,” saying this is another phenomenon that worries him.

“A culture immersed with a true Christian spirit is an instrument which fosters the spreading of the Gospel, faith in God the creator of the heavens and of the earth,” he said. “The tradition of the Society [of Jesus—the Jesuits], from the first beginnings of the Collegio Romano always placed itself at the crossroads between Church and society, between faith and culture, between religion and secularism.”

“Recover these avant-garde positions which are so necessary to transmit the eternal truth to today’s world, in today’s language. Do not abandon this challenge. We know the task is difficult, uncomfortable and risky, and at times little appreciated and even misunderstood, but it is a necessary task for the Church.”

With all due respect, why would anyone expect creative thinkers to appear inside of an ossified human institution of any sort? The various cultural groups and other groups of the modern West are suffering the sort of rigidity that kills or isolates and starves true creativity.

When the members of a culture can no longer recognize good, creative thinking, they can always rely on the sorts of credentials that show well on a resumé. On the whole, Jesuits have shown no ability to deal with the problems facing Christian thinkers in this age, but they have plenty of degrees and awards. As a consequence, it's natural for the leaders of a troubled Catholic Church to look to them to do something creative in an age where Christianity desperately needs good creative works.

But, again: why would anyone expect such over-educated denizens of a textbook world to be good, creative thinkers? At the risk of sounding egotistical, those looking for a creative thinker working in those important and dangerous positions, at "the crossroads between Church and society, between faith and culture, between religion and secularism" should read my books and my blogs and not worry about Jesuits until they begin to respond to my efforts or those of other truly creative thinkers. The creative thought we need in this age will come from outsiders and lone-wolves and not from men formed to institutional standards and having minds formed to textbook standards. Once upon a time, Jesuits managed to be outsiders even as they were members of a vast army of scholarly priests. That time seems to have passed and the current members of the Society don't seem to be the ones who could make that time come again.

# 376 My Satan, My Tempter, My Opponent

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=120>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/01/11.]

Busyness.

I've tried to speak of the typical misdiagnosis that Christians make of our moral decay. We haven't decayed into materialists. I'll present just one common-sense test of my view vs. the standard view. Materialists necessarily recognize the objectivity, 'absoluteness' in a sense, of laws at least in a limited domain, the domain of physics – so to speak. Modern human beings don't recognize the objectivity of laws even when it comes to material objects, perhaps because of the very successes of modern technology that seems to promise to make matter do whatever we want it to do.

What modern human beings lust after is transactions, not things. Children don't place a materialistic value upon those piles of imagination-killing toys they get on birthdays and on Christmas. They follow their training and enjoy mostly the processes of getting gifts. The unwrapping of a gift is more important than its use. The gifts themselves are often beside the point and will be set aside to gather dust until given away to some charitable agency. An appreciation of things, of material objects, would be tied to some understanding of those things as intractable objects following laws which we can't change and would show in at least a sporadic care for and maintenance of those objects. We know that's not the general situation because parents are always complaining that children nowadays don't care for their belongings. In my generation—born 1955, you'd better oil and lightly sand your baseball bat at the end of the season. You better put it away someplace safe because you weren't like to get another unless you got

a paper-route or lined up to get on the buses going down to the tobacco farms.

It's busyness that we seek and busyness is a sign that the gods of the marketplaces are being served. One of the very bad aspects of the modern world is that busyness is being served by our church communities as well as by our political parties and our commercial entities. We judge our prosperity by the GNP which is a measurement of marketplace activity and we don't even have a concept of what a good, stable life might be. We measure, however vaguely, the health of a church community by its busyness. We measure the worth of our lives far too often by the busyness of those lives.

We deform political life so that it's no longer a way for the citizens and traditional institutions to shape certain aspects of their lives. Nope. Politics is a forum for the overly-active, a forum which generally excludes participation by those who consider politics important but not the main activity of their life. It's possible the main danger the public square presents to Christians is not the stripping of spaces once dominated by churches and crosses but rather the way in which the public square keeps us moving about so that we can't be at peace even when we return to our quiet places.

But it's not just the public squares that are that sort of a danger. Even our institutions which serve God, such as our churches, have become our satans, our tempters, our opponents. They serve the needs of the gods of the marketplaces and work to draw us out of our neighborhoods and our more organic relationships. They serve the needs of those gods by teaching us a worthwhile life is measured by the number of our transactions in the modern marketplaces.

# 377 A Necessary Requirement for Moral Self-government

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=122>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/01/22.]

If we are to govern ourselves, we must nurture a sense of self-responsibility that leads us to find out what our elected representatives are doing in our collective name. We must even be willing to write-in a candidate or to hand in a blank ballot when the political machines present us with the usual choices between scoundrels. Absent this sense of self-responsibility, self-government is doomed to failure. Those who vote do so under the influence of political propaganda and merely act to confirm the power of those who value politics in and of itself.

A pretense to self-government becomes a farce in which the culpably ignorant are used by cynical or conveniently ignorant politicians. This pretense to self-government also becomes a moral farce, allowing voters to ignore war-crimes and other crimes committed by our government in our names. We also don't examine the motives of those who push domestic programs known to be highly questionable or downright harmful. By the early 1960s, experts, such as Jane Jacobs, were writing of the damage done to already troubled neighborhoods by so-called urban renewal. Large chunks of important cities were converted from impoverished neighborhoods to instant concrete slums which were more congenial to pimps and drug-dealers than to couples trying to start families. Family and community ties were destroyed, lives shattered, and huge amounts of tax-payer funds wasted.

But, some would protest, most voters have not the time or the skills to make independent checks upon the words and actions of their leaders, most importantly upon the context of those words and actions. This is where we

need a return to local politics supplemented by some form of federalism or distributivism. What can be done locally should be done locally and that includes the development of a local political leadership which then selects the representatives of their communities in the next layer up of government and is responsible for checking on their actions. A similar sort of system in our economic activities would do wonders to avoid the horrors which we've inflicted upon ourselves by allowing investors and corporate managers to abstract away the moral responsibility of those who are the stewards of our productive capital.

## 378 The Foundations of a Successful Totalitarian Society

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=123>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/01/29.]

Recently, a short part of an interview with Ray Bradbury was quoted during a side-discussion on the nature of censorship on the newsgroup comp.lang.lisp. In that interview, Ray Bradbury pointed out the obvious about *Fahrenheit 451*: the totalitarian society in that book was built from the bottom up and not from the top down. (As I recall, the movie version was faithful to the book.) The populace, educated and not educated alike, had become a herd of creatures with very narrow perceptions and limited thinking skills and no moral will which could separate a human being from that herd when appropriate.

Television was the proximate cause of the decay in *Fahrenheit 451*, an implausible claim if taken too literally. As I've pointed out in the past, Jacques Barzun has documented in a plausible way that the past 500 years of history in the West is a tale of decay in our quality of literacy—which implies a corresponding decay in our quality of abstract intelligence. (See *From Dawn to Decadence* [9].)

We have to be careful in assigning too much direct power to television, but visual technology in general is dangerous to human beings because of the importance of our visual systems in seeking food and sex and in sensing danger—we're primed to look for interesting sights and rapid movements. The regions of our brain associated with abstract reasoning will shut down in favor of the visual regions. After all, you don't want to be gazing at the stars and pondering the meaning of life when you're waist-deep in alligators or when that blond two caves down is waving you towards her.

But the major fault lies in our moral characters, particularly our lack of initiative in taking responsibility for the formation of our own selves and the formation of our children. We're lazy, a desirable trait in a world where human beings have often had to work so hard as to die of exhaustion at young ages. Take advantage of chances to rest and recover from the effort to survive. When we live under easy circumstances, we often take it too easy. We modern men are hardworking in some ways, but we readily turn off our minds and souls and turn our eyes and bodies over to the gods of the modern marketplaces. We lust to be passively entertained. This is hardly a new insight into human nature.

Back in the 1830s, Tocqueville published *Democracy in America* in which he expressed the fear that Americans would form what we now call a totalitarian society because he saw that Americans ignored any facts or thoughts which were in conflict with the mainstream views in this country. We want to be able to simply go with the flow. Tocqueville also feared this would prove to be a trait of modern democratic human beings of any country. I'll leave it to the reader to think about this. I have modest goals in this posting.

I merely wish to suggest that Ray Bradbury was right about the decay of mind and moral will in the modern world but wrong about the violent repression of those who wish to publish or read good books. Tocqueville was right when he conjectured that Americans would need no censors or national police to collapse into a totalitarian society just because the vast majority of Americans could, and do, ignore any facts or thoughts which aren't in complete sympathy with the mainstream American views. Modern journalists and novelists and all other sorts of intellectual fluff-producers from our age are moving along with the American herd even if they occasionally lift their heads to bray out a discordant sound.

## 379 There Are Various Charisms in the Body of Christ

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=135>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/02/12.]

Why is it that Christian thinkers have failed to respond to the opportunities and problems presented by modern empirical knowledge? There have been a dearth of creative Christian thinkers over the past five centuries or so, perhaps because of the general cultural decay narrated so powerfully and elegantly by Jacques Barzun in *From Dawn to Decadence* [9], but Christian scholars and leaders in our modern world act as if unaware that we, as the earthly body of Christ, have suffered a severe failure of imagination.

We all have our own roles to play, our own charisms. I spent more than ten years writing creative fiction of the sort which has had few readers in recent centuries and nowadays has no publishers. Now I also write philosophy and theology in the style of a novelist who wants to say things that don't seem possible with the language of our age. Often I can't even think these things and can only grasp at vague and sometimes nightmarish images. The future, even as defined by the imaginative possibilities of the present, is never clear to men. More than that, I too am a child of my time, the product of modern American education and also the a resident of a time and place where shallow literacy is appreciated and glorified and any works demanding a deeper literacy are ignored in a way that should give good lessons to any future Stalins. [During 2010, I was reminded that both Alexis de Tocqueville (*Democracy in America*) and Ray Bradbury (*Fahrenheit 451*) had projected the possibility of the United States becoming a totalitarian country in response to demands of the citizens to suppress thought and creative activity. Bradbury came to feel, by at least 1950, that

television would play a key role in our decay into a totalitarian state.]

I try to speak directly about God's world but often find I can think and speak only in circumlocutions. It takes so many words to say something which seems a simple truth of this universe because I speak in terms of basic concepts better suited to a universe which doesn't exist, a universe men once imagined into existence because it was a good encapsulation of what was known in past generations. I speak modern American English and that's a language ill-suited to purposes of exploring and describing God's world as it objectively exists. American English is better suited to speaking of a fantasy world we prefer to God's world. Read *Moby Dick* and think of Captain Ahab as a man who didn't much like the world as God created it, but Ahab was too honest and courageous to lie to himself. Instead, he attacked God's Creation, trying to penetrate to God Himself, perhaps to drive a harpoon into the heart of the Almighty. Melville deliberately, in the 1850s, created an American with all the bad attitudes some conservatives think to have arisen in the 1960s. Besides hating Creation and the Creator, Ahab also intensely disliked the constraints on his individualistic self to the point of hating the family and local communities which would bind him,

To be sure, mortal men will never see this universe better than through a glass darkly, let alone the world which is the universe as seen in the light of God's purposes. Yet, we do have the duty to try to understand the world, however strong the guarantee of failure. After all, this world is the manifestation of certain thoughts of our Lord when He shaped this world from the underlying stuff of Creation, what I call the Primordial Universe. And, to be honest, it can be great fun though also horrifying and full of pain.

It's my calling to speak the circumlocutions that allow a narrative to be built from bits and pieces of modern empirical knowledge: history and physics and biology and literature. From this mess might coalesce a stream which would be a story, unified and coherent and complete in the context of this age, given our needs, which dictate what part of God's world we explore, and what we can discover during those explorations.

We need fresh ideas for dealing with the problems that God has thrown at us and our minds are not so inventive as to produce anything so disturbing to our rigidities of mind as knowledge of our environments and, in modern times, knowledge of vast expanses of time and space in this universe. A good understanding of the problems, such as those which quantum mechanics presents to our understanding of mundane reality, will itself pro-

vide the creative possibilities for resolving the problems. In other words, the problems God throws at us are the thoughts He wishes us to have as our own. We just hear God's messages as static because we'd prefer to listen to recapitulations of earlier messages as interpreted by our ancestors. Of course, I'm speaking about messages which are so-called 'natural revelations' such as those which came to the great pagan thinkers and which fill many pages of the works of St. Augustine of Hippo and St. Thomas Aquinas.

One reason for preferring modern empirical knowledge over the fantasy worlds oddly preferred by some Christians is:

As Creator of this world, God was more creative than J.R.R. Tolkien or C.S. Lewis could possibly be.

And that is the issue:

The 'weirdness' of quantum mechanics and the dark mysteries of biological evolution are the result of God's creativity and man is most creative when he remains true to what he knows of that divine creativity. That we have no poets and novelists up to the task of creating new forms of literature from this new knowledge, or more likely—no publishers or editors up to the task of evaluating truly creative efforts, says something about our culture and our inability to respond as better generations responded to new knowledge of God's world. (In fact, I consider *Moby Dick* to be a darned good critique of the modern mind and its dual attributes of moral insanity and instrumental competence though there are now serious doubts about that competence.)

As I've pointed out repeatedly and repetitively in various writings:

- Modern physics and mathematics have implied an expansion of metaphysical thought;
- Modern evolutionary biology and modern studies of human histories have implied a return to the Biblical view of God as a story-teller; and

- Some nastiness in human history explored by Hannah Arendt in her efforts to put the Nazi genocides in context has not yet been properly considered by moral theologians. (I refer to the ‘banality of evil’ which is really the tendency of ‘nice’ human beings to do the work of corporate evil while simply taking care of their day-to-day concerns. This isn’t necessarily an evil so much as it’s an incapacity of men to deal with the scales and complexities of human communities which have developed in the modern world. We need to consciously get to work to develop that capacity.)

If we are to break through the various barriers in our minds, we’ll need poets and novelists and musicians and painters to start bringing new ideas into the mainstreams of human cultures. Those artists may very well pick up ideas from philosophers or theologians or they may discover them on their own, though our current impasse would indicate we need philosophical theologians who can give us a good worldview to make some sense of modern empirical knowledge in light of Christian revelations. Even if the artists get their inspiration from philosophical thought, they’ll enrich that thought in the process of showing the beauty that lies in any valid way of looking at God’s Creation, no matter how abstract and austere the early statements of that way might be.

Those new ideas have first to be generated in the minds of those oriented towards experimental thought. And many of these experiments might be good and useful even if largely erroneous in their underlying ideas. Even if we assume some sort of good and useful Christian thought lies in the fantasies of Tolkien and Lewis, they don’t speak the truth so well as did Tolstoy in *War and Peace* despite the sheer wrongheadedness of his philosophy of human history. But he was apparently struggling with the problem I’ve discussed often in my writings—the relationship of men to the large-scale movements of our age, many of which have done great evil.

It’s the responsibility of creative thinkers to help both sheep and shepherds to see how the earth has been changed by a better understanding of God’s world, an understanding not yet integrated into our greater ways of thought. We need to look forward to better possibilities than those we’ve chosen in recent centuries. It’s not the world which has failed men, but men who have failed to do their duty by the Creator of the world. It’s not that empirical knowledge of that world is evil but rather the imaginations of men are proving to be inadequate to the task of making sense of that

knowledge in light of Christian revelation. We do evil with our eyes shut and our minds in self-induced comas.

But that doesn't have to be. Our imaginations and our minds can be exercised and strengthened. I still think I was right in the bibliographical essay of my first published book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41]. We should nurture our imaginations by reading the great creative fictions of the West, such as *Moby Dick* and *Don Quixote* and—to choose a more recent example—*One Hundred Years of Solitude*.



## 380 The Size of Human Freedom

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=136>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/02/19.]

Way back in the mid-1970s before the sexy term ‘chaos theory’ had ever driven books onto the best-seller lists, I took a course with a decidedly un-sexy title: *The Qualitative Analysis of Ordinary Differential Equations*. In that course, we learned how to analyze potentially unstable systems such as a planet orbiting the sun so that it never repeated the same path twice, as is true for the earth and its siblings. As it turns out, it’s possible—with a lot of simplifying assumptions—to make statements about the stability of the planet’s orbit given the mathematical techniques available to an undergraduate math or physics major. Ultimately, the field is very difficult and relies on techniques and disciplined attitudes beyond that of most undergraduates and certainly beyond the typical reader of gee-whiz pop-science books. Unfortunately, the field has acquired the title, *chaos theory*, as misleading a name as special or general relativity theory.

Chaos theory deals with imperfectly stable systems just as Einstein’s theories of relativity deal with absolute invariances, geometries of space-time, relationships between objects or even those relationships which define our universe.

Would you like to make a chaotic system in the lab, or in your basement workshop? Take two pendulums of different period, that is, different length of the wire or rod holding the bob. Connect them with a chain or rope and set one in motion. The movement of the two pendulums will be chaotic. It will be unpredictable by human techniques of mathematical physics though that movement will be well-determined so far as we know.

The unpredictability is seen only as shadows, if you will, against the backdrop of what can be rationally stated regarding these systems. If we

hadn't known the Law, we wouldn't have known (understood) sin. If we hadn't known the physical laws which give some ordered structure to physical reality, we wouldn't have understood the disorder studied in *chaos theory*. The term 'disorder' in the previous sentence is in the context of human mathematics. To say that we can't predict the future of even simple physical objects isn't the same as claiming that there is some sort of irrational or mystical elements entering into that future. It is to say that there are elements which don't fit into human mathematical and metaphysical structures as well as facts which are simply unknown to us.

To play off the example of the pendulums, there is a general principle advanced first, so far as I know, by the philosopher Stephen Toulmin in the early 1960s or thereabouts:

Apparent randomness will arise in the real-world when two well-determined and independent systems interact.

At the time he wrote, he was concerned about a simple model of evolution, one reduced to the interaction of two particular systems: the DNA of an organism and its external environment. This is a useful simplification for some analyses but—of course—the real world quickly gets more complicated and also more complex in basic ways. When we've dived into contemplations of this sort of situation, it does become surprising that order can be seen at all even when it has to be there.

In the mid-1960s, an interesting proposal was advanced independently by the great Russian mathematician, A.N. Kolmogorov, and the American high school student, Gregory Chaitin. They proposed to define a random number in terms of what is now called *algorithmic complexity theory* rather than just taking it as a naive concept which is typically treated as being some invasion from irrational realms. I had a very highly regarded mathematician as my professor for a year of probability theory and stochastic processes, a Professor Kempermann, and I remember him saying, circa 1975, that randomness is not necessary in mathematics but is useful mostly for pedagogical purposes. All of probability theory can be enfolded into a fully deterministic measure theory. Marc Kac, a highly regarded measure theorist at Cornell, reacted to the early work of Chaitin and Kolmogorov by saying: Now we know what a random number is, a fact.

A fact. Facts are scary in a way, but not because they're irrational. Anyone who's read my first published book, *To See a World in a Grain of*

*Sand* [41], and some of my subsequent writings on my blog might suspect that facts play a very important role in my understanding of God's Creation, far more important than axioms and basic truths, because those statements and things we regard as 'systematic' truths are drawn by God from an absolutely infinite realm of raw facts which would be so unorganized to us that we couldn't see them if God were to set us down in what I call the Primordial Universe. The Primordial Universe is my effort to speak rationally about some very complex questions raised by these mathematical issues and also by the meltdown of things into elementary particles and then the meltdown of those particles into some very strange and general sort of substance as we travel backwards in time towards and beyond the so-called Big Bang. I also came to feel we should speak rationally about the human ability to discover higher orders of infinity which seemingly can't be embodied directly in our physical universe—meaning they couldn't be embodied directly in any sorts of relationships between human brain-cells.

God is the Creator of that absolutely infinite ocean of facts, which I call the Primordial Universe, and God is also the only entity who can make a true random number or act in a truly random way just because such acts would require an absolutely infinite mind. God is the Master of Facts and the axiomatic systems of most systems of human thought are special sorts of facts. They're specially shaped rocks selected from a field of randomly shaped rocks. They fit together to form elegant structures but they're not the foundation of Creation – that absolutely infinite field packed with randomly shaped rocks is the source of the components of specific worlds within Creation.

Gregory Chaitin worked on defining randomness from his high school years in the mid-1960s until 1990 or so. The answer proves to be that a random number is all of them. That is, all of them in a measure theoretic sense.

So what does 'random number' mean?

Following standard mathematical procedures, I'll discuss only numbers between 0 and 1. A non-random number is one that has a pattern that allows a shorter encoding than a simple listing of all its digits. For example, 0.1111... can be encoded as either  $(1/9)$  or by the words: "An infinite number of 1s after the decimal point." Either encoding is clearly shorter than a listing of an infinite number of 1s. The number 0.1111... isn't random. It's somewhat amazing that all numbers with patterns, including those which can be 'built' from axiomatic systems, form a set which is infinitesimally

small compared to the set of random numbers, those without patterns.

Let's make a stab in the dark at the possible meaning beyond mathematics. What lies outside the realm of entities with elegant patterns? Our moral lives? Our creative lives, including our creative corporate lives by which we form useful collectives of various sorts? Our very lives? Maybe even life in general? Or at least the higher forms of life which exhibit some sort of moral and social characteristics?

Don't those aspects of our lives have the feel of factuality? To be sure, we don't operate with total freedom.

Only God can make a random number and only God can act in a truly random way.

The most random act we know of is the 'selection' of the extraordinarily unlikely initial conditions of our universe. I'm not sure if we can even try to describe God in His transcendent and necessary being which is His own Act-of-Being, the supreme Act-of-being. Because we can know God as Creator through His effects in Creation, we can come to some substantial understanding of God in this freely-chosen role, can even come to shape ourselves in imitation of Him. God in that role, God as Creator, acted randomly, factually and not according to any possible logic or axiomatic reasoning.

Factuality, metaphorically drawn from the set of numbers between 0 and 1 which have no pattern, may be our way of understanding and describing God's freedom as Creator. I'll provide a short outline of what might be involved in dealing with reality from this angle:

1. God, as Creator of this world, works in the domain of absolute infinity.
2. God, in His transcendence, is pure existence—His own Act-of-being—and it might not make sense to speak of such matters as infinity with respect to the transcendent Lord.
3. Creatures move around in domains restricted by the lesser infinities associated with that elegant realm of mathematics.

Factuality bursts into this creaturely realm. That is, freedom shows itself but we have trouble seeing it. After all, pure freedom doesn't belong to creatures, can't belong to us, and we shouldn't wish for it,

God can be absolutely free because He's pure existence. He has no structure as such, no substance or body parts. He is the source of all that we as creatures can reach by the efforts of our own minds: the truths of a philosopher and those of a mathematician, the substance of our bodies and that of the perfected bodies of the resurrected.

The movement from a view of Creation built from that elegant subset of the foundations of Creation to the entirety of the foundations would seem to me to be analogous to the movement from the Law as tabulated and elaborated by men to the Law who was a Person, the Son of God.

In that case discussed with such energy by St. Paul, there's a movement from line-drawings which help men to behave a little bit like God towards the concrete reality of Christ-like being. In the other case, there's a movement from the scaffolding necessary for elementary thought to the more complete realm of factuality which includes that scaffolding. When we make that latter transition, the possibility arises of seeing God's world, in principle, in a way similar to the way that He created it. We learn to imitate God in this way, just as a child watches her mother and then cares for her doll as she sees Mommy care for the new baby in the family.

In both cases, knowing the greater reality exists doesn't negate the value of the smaller reality. It doesn't even necessarily help us to see the greater reality with any clarity. In any case, grace still completes nature in this way of viewing our mortal world and the entirety of God's Creation. Grace completes the Mosaic Law into the Sermon on the Mount and grace completes the mortal bodies of those who belong to Christ into resurrected human beings with the same freedom as the resurrected Lord.



# 381 Open Borders in the United States and Tibet

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=137>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/04/17.]

I'm not an expert on immigration issues, but I've been trying to catch up on the issue as part of my duty to know what's really happening in the United States. Recently, I've also been trying to figure out what's going on in Tibet though I'm pretty well convinced it's not our business. I did learn about China's construction of a technological wonder, a railroad over the Himalayas, allowing a flood of immigrants into Tibet—mostly Han Chinese from what I've read.

One blog by a leftish sort of British lady clarified matters a little. She expressed great wonder at the railway line (far beyond the capacity of 'Big-dig' Americans) and she was surprised that even the tour guides at Tibetan temples seemed to be Han Chinese.

So far as I know, the recent problems began when individual members of an ethnic group, Han Chinese, migrated into Tibet in search of economic opportunities—seemingly at the expense of members of another ethnic group, Tibetans. There's a complex history behind all of this, and apparently Tibet has conquered and dominated major Chinese regions for longer periods than China has ruled Tibet. I've even read that the Dalai Lama during the conquest of China by Kublai Khan, the son of Genghis Khan, was the adviser to the Mongol emperor, helping him to set up political and legal systems in which Chinese were second-class citizens. I'll ignore this complex history and not try to enlarge my knowledge of it. After all, I am an American and I have a simple point to raise.

There are lots of protesters in the Western countries who are very upset

with the Chinese dominance of Tibet, but the current civil unrest which has broken into violence and threats of greater violence in Tibet seems to have a proximate cause—the influx of Chinese laborers and the threats to jobs and to local cultures. Aren't those the complaints of some Americans worried about the loss of their jobs to cheap immigrant labor from Mexico and other countries? Aren't those the complaints of some Americans worried about the damage done to American cultures by large numbers of unassimilated immigrants in our midst?

Tibetans should worry about threats to their ability to make a living, to feed their children and maybe offer them some opportunities in life. I'm willing to assume that Tibetan culture is rich and has great value just by knowing how long it's been developing at a high level.

I don't understand why there are some of an activist frame of mind who support the Tibetans in their struggle to survive economically and culturally while despising Americans who seem to be in a similar struggle.

## 382 I Wish I'd Said That

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=138>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/04/19.]

Actually, I have said some things very similar to some of Pope Benedict's gentle but firm admonitions on his visit to the United States. I don't get this kind of press coverage, but I don't expect to get as much notice as the Pope. I do have one advantage over the Pope, besides not being hemmed in by various political and diplomatic considerations. Let me provide a couple of quotes. A Catholic news-site, <http://www.cwznews.com/news/viewstory.cfm?recnum=57886>, quotes Pope Benedict, in his talk to the American Catholic bishops:

America's brand of secularism poses a particular problem: it allows for professing belief in God, and respects the public role of religion and the Churches, but at the same time it can subtly reduce religious belief to a lowest common denominator. Faith becomes a passive acceptance that certain things "out there" are true, but without practical relevance for everyday life. The result is a growing separation of faith from life.

and also:

Is it consistent to profess our beliefs in church on Sunday, and then during the week to promote business practices or medical procedures contrary to those beliefs? Is it consistent for practicing Catholics to ignore or exploit the poor and the marginalized, to promote sexual behavior contrary to Catholic moral teaching, or to adopt positions that contradict the right to life of every

human being from conception to natural death? Any tendency to treat religion as a private matter must be resisted.

I've made similar statements, but I've gone far beyond Pope Benedict in arguing, right or wrong, that a lot of the problem comes from inadequate Catholic responses to modern empirical knowledge and sheer Catholic ignorance about the simple fact that a human theological system, even when built to explain revealed truths, includes a lot of human speculation and also includes—implicitly or explicitly—a lot of the content of empirical knowledge during the time when that system was first built. Far too many Catholics, scholars and priests and laymen, are lazy even when hardworking. That is, they want to just coast on fundamental matters and not have to think hard about those fundamental matters. They want to believe that God created a world which was fully understood in all important ways by men who lived centuries ago. God's story ended a long time ago and we only have to finish off by celebrating the Sacraments for a few centuries longer. Such thinkers learn by way of textbooks the thoughts of St. Augustine and those of St. Thomas Aquinas. Such a way of reading profoundly creative thinkers distorts their thoughts so that even the word 'the' in those works becomes a lie. As a specific example, it has a way of converting complex human speculations, such as Augustine's understanding of man's sinful state, into 'revealed truths', such as the doctrine of 'original sin'.

How can an ordinary laymen, or even the ordinary priest, live his life in the secular aspects of his life when he can't make sense of that longer part of his life in terms of his Christian beliefs? If the Catholic Church and her separated sisters have no anthropological or moral teachings that make sense of our evolutionary heritage or our various genetic or cultural constraints, what is that ordinary layman or non-scholarly priest to do when he has to make sense of the pain of the good son who claims he feels like a woman? What sense can Satan-mongerers make of all that is known of the relationship between specific brain structures and addictions or even the plausible possibility that obsessions—including those to kill or rape – might involve brain-seizures? What is there in the talk from the pulpits or in those CCD books or those books by or about ancient saints that can make sense of a claim that a microscopic hunk of cells should be treated with the respect to a human being?

If we can't express our beliefs in the language we speak during our hours outside of churches and prayer-group meetings, then the domain of those

beliefs will begin to seem more like dreams or fairy-tales than reality.



## 383 Still Fighting Last Year's War

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=139>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/04/21.]

Let your minds be at rest. The battle to keep sexual predators out of Catholic seminaries is going well. Of course, the shepherds and moral guardians of the Catholic Church were apparently not up to the task of judging the moral integrity and sexual maturity of young men who applied to enter the seminaries—by all reports, the selection process had to be bureaucratized and modernized by retired FBI agents and other advisers. Apparently, there are few Father Browns (of Chesterton's mystery stories) who can see deeply inside a man by hearing even a false confession. Apparently, few have read G.E.M. Anscombe's warning that a society is in deep trouble indeed if it needs resumés (let alone lie-detector tests) to identify good men. A Church, or a church, is in far greater trouble in those circumstances given the role of clergymen even in a non-sacramental branch of Christianity.

We shouldn't worry. The bishops and their bureaucrats are honestly admitting that the selection of candidates for the priesthood was botched in past years and the American Catholic bishops sat quietly and humbly as Pope Benedict reminded them of this, as if they were likely to forget with all the days they spend with lawyers and victims advocates, not to mention the ongoing flow of money out the door.

But the battle is going well and now there are record numbers of Catholic baptisms in the United States and the pews aren't so empty as some would have feared even a year ago. What's that you say? Those who are baptized and catechized and confirmed rarely show up at Mass the Sunday after being

confirmed as adult members of the Catholic Church? They feel they've done their duty, having satisfied some sort of imaginary requirement for being married in a Catholic Church. Grandma handed them a nice card with a small wad of cash in it. The envelopes from aunts and uncles, family friends and Dad's business partner, have been opened and the cash spent or deposited. There doesn't seem to be much point in wasting part of a Sunday in Mass.

You want your children to grow up to be practicing Catholic Christians? Well, you increase the odds of that happening if you move to Mexico to raise them. You have a much better chance of seeing them as knowledgeable Catholic adults if you raise them as Evangelical Protestants and hope for a conversion process that will lead to a serious effort to educate themselves.

You don't really want your children to grow up to be serious Catholics knowledgeable about their own faith? It's easy enough to meet that goal as well. Just raise them in a typical American parish, send them to CCD, and coach them through their confirmation. By that time, they'll be well-inoculated against any idea that the Catholic faith has much to do with the real world or intelligent efforts to understand that world. Heck, even if you send them to Catholic schools, you don't have to be discouraged by any signs of faith when they're young. That will wash out very quickly with just a year of public school or, for that matter, a year of working in the real world. And, so, tomorrow's battle is already well under way and being lost with resounding success as those on the losing side gather regularly to pat each other on the back and give each other awards as Catholic educators and humanitarians.

The Catholic faith isn't being competently nurtured in young American Catholics nor are others being evangelized. There are a huge number of casualties in this war for minds and souls and the ordained hierarchy of the American Catholic Church is working hard to do what they did so well with the problem of sexual predators in the priesthood: they're covering up the problem as long as possible. They spoke to Pope Benedict publicly about the large number of baptisms and the need for more priests. The diocesan newspapers will soon be giving us tallies of young adults being confirmed. To be sure, outside of the Hispanic parishes, the number of adults who are baptized or received into the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil isn't so impressive and isn't so conducive to self-congratulation, but, all told, statistics can be quoted out of context to prove that the American Catholic Church isn't so moribund as rumor would have it. And no one in the pews

of a Catholic Church is reading the reports of the Pew Foundation which paint a very bleak picture of Catholic demographics and forecast even worse over the next generation or more.

Dare I think any bishops are honest enough and insightful enough to need to cover up the bad situation? “Guys, we might be lucky. We might make it to retirement before anyone notices we’re not very good at doing our primary work: teaching and evangelizing.”



## 384 Why We Shouldn't Explain Away 'Evil'

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=146>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/04/24.]

As my allergies ease and I get over a funk about the decrepit state of the 'Catholic mind' in recent centuries, I'm starting to clear out some old business and getting ready to move on to new business including regular commentary upon issues being raised by modern researchers in the various fields of empirical knowledge. In browsing my file of notes about interesting articles and comments on the Internet, I came to a quote I lifted from a collection on history as a field of study compiled by the historian Clyde Wilson:

History is a great drama beginning and ending in the mind of  
God. -Aquinas

Aquinas was sane in the strongest sense of the word, that is, he accepted—as the most natural of assents—the reality outside of himself. He never so much as flirted with epistemology (the legitimate areas of which are nowadays are part of neuroscience) and he never fell into the trap of creating theodicies—strange efforts to explain away God's responsibility for His own Creation. And, in his sanity, St. Thomas pointed us to a task for the Body of Christ – understanding that drama from a human viewpoint in such a way that we make sense of the best empirical knowledge available to us in light of Christian truths. All Christians have a duty to try to learn the best human telling of the story and to make it their own, but few there are who are driven to create a new telling to accord with changes in empirical knowledge.

The all-powerful God is in charge and we're characters in a story which began in His mind and will end in His mind. If we're creatures of sin, that's because God wished to tell a drama featuring such creatures and not because our ancestors had any power to 'rebel' and to change God's story. This doesn't release us from moral responsibility. If we're sinful creatures, that's what we are, but we're also moral creatures. We move with limited but real freedom within the context of this story God is telling, this story which is human history but is embedded in a story which includes stars and gas clouds and orcas. A more rational understanding of God's drama, an understanding that necessarily includes the best available empirical knowledge, is more important in telling us who we are than any long gazes into a mirror.

## 385 Is this evidence against free-will?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=147>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/04/25.]

Over the past decade or more, neuroscientists have found strong evidence that we start to act before we're consciously aware of our own actions. This is a problem to those who believe in free-will in the sense of a power of an autonomous agent. It isn't much of a problem to one who accepts the views about moral nature which were taught by St. Thomas Aquinas. I've discussed this Thomistic view of man as an intentional moral creature in various chapters in Part III, *The Human Mind as a Re-creation of God's Creation*, including my discussions of *How Brains Make Up Their Minds* by the brain-scientist Walter J. Freeman who has adopted much of Aquinas' teachings about human moral nature. Those discussions can be found in Chapter 83, *Is Christian Morality a Natural Morality?* and succeeding chapters.

There have been recent articles on various Internet science sites about a new set of experiments which haven't really introduced anything new but they did tighten up the acceptable results, making it a little more certain that we act as organisms and not as bodies under the control of an independent soul or free-will or whatever. It seems pretty clear that at least for those simple decisions which can be tested under laboratory conditions—such as decisions to move a finger—the regions of our brain associated with consciousness don't become active until the decision has been made by other brain regions and the action has started.

An article summarizing these recent experimental results can be found at *Brain-scanner Predicts Your Future Moves*

found at <http://www.newscientist.com/channel/being-human/dn13658-brain-scanner-predicts-your-future-moves.html>.

These new experimental results are important for technical reasons but don't really matter to those who have been following earlier experiments and the speculations based upon the results. Scientists are just tightening up results and closing possible loopholes. There are some interesting issues which need to be explored but a Thomistic intentionality can easily form a framework for such explorations and for the statement of rational understandings of human moral nature.

What good is consciousness when it doesn't control our actual physical actions? Some of the less rational sociobiologists had proposed many years ago that we're fooled by our 'selfish genes' into rationalizing our unconscious actions which are supposedly geared almost entirely to the reproduction of those 'selfish genes'. Professor Freeman provides the rational proposal that our consciousness can act as a censor upon our actions, being able to stop actions started by our unconscious selves. In addition, and in line with the Thomistic understanding of 'intentionality' (which is not that of modern subjectivists and feel-gooders), I would say our conscious selves play a major role in shaping our future selves, that is, our future actions. We can evaluate our own actions in context and work to change the way we act in that same context in the future. As a simple example: a young father might work to change the way he speaks when he's with his young children. I'm not writing mostly about eliminating obscenities but rather about the need to speak to young children in a way that nurtures their development, including their moral development.

Thomistic intention is less our vague goals of raising children to be competent and loving adults and more those first steps to discipline the relatively free behavior of a bachelor so that it becomes the self-sacrificing behavior of a father.

This leads to another good quote from the collections of quotes on history, as a field of study and contemplation, provided regularly by Clyde N. Wilson. See the *Chronicles Magazine website* found at <http://www.chroniclesmagazine.org> for Professor Wilson's blog entries.

The value of history... is that it teaches us what man has done  
and thus what man is. -R.G. Collingwood

History tells us what man is not by documenting his noble aspirations

or claims to noble feelings. History tells us what man is by telling us what man has done. At the same time, we have to remember:

Mere facts are meaningless. History becomes such when it facts are organized into a coherent story, a morally ordered narrative.

The moral order of a narrative might be defective, but it must be present for that narrative to make sense to the human mind and it makes sense by playing a part by helping to shape that mind. Such is true also of our understandings of our family and individual stories. We must learn what our ancestors once knew and what many still know if they're lucky enough to grow up with some intact traditions: our attachments to family and culture and language are not mere accidents but part of our moral beings. In knowing these various histories and biographies, and knowing them in a properly human way, we shape our minds and prepare the way to shape our future actions towards more clearly defined moral purposes.

Professor Collingwood was right. What man does tells us what he is. Moreover, that's true of human societies. We need our legends and sometimes even our idealized views of our past and our leaders but we must understand what we've actually done, as nations and as families and as individuals. Our honest but respectful understandings of our ancestors form perhaps the dominant part of our moral characters. We modern Americans are falling into moral disorder and one of the major reasons is our lack of concern for our histories which is a lack of concern for who we are and a corresponding lack of love for our ancestors and our own selves.



## 386 Finding Moral Ways to Make Our Livings

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=140>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/04/27.]

The farmer and poet Wendell Berry has told us we'd solve our environmental problems if we found moral ways to make our livings. I'm beginning to feel guilty because I've been thinking about this bit of advice for nigh onto ten years and haven't come up with much. It's not that I make my living in an immoral way. When my corporate career floundered, I decided to start studying and writing rather than rescuing that career or finding another way to make a high income. I've lived with a gradually decreasing standard of living since then, bottoming out only by the generosity of my late parents and my sister and some friends.

I'm also stuck. I'm not able to make the sorts of changes in my life I'd like. If it were up to me, I'd be studying and writing and gardening on a small plot with a small house somewhere in a rural area. I'd be trying to train myself to live on a daily diet which has little pre-processed food in it, to purchase fewer useless things of the sorts which fill American houses, to treasure and care for the things I do possess.

As it is, I am trying—with only partial success—to live more simply. It's a matter of attention as it always is for human beings who've gone astray. We're creatures of moral intention and that means we're creatures of moral actions, not of noble sentiments or grandiose plans of reform. In Thomistic terms, intention means not what it means to modern moral philosophers or psychologists but rather what it means to lawyers when our imperfect human systems of justice are functioning fairly well. If you drink and then get behind the wheel of a car, you act with (Thomistic) intent to kill. If

you discipline your children with insults or use of subjective guilt feelings, you act with the intent of crippling their moral development.

We modern human beings are sleepwalkers, moving through the marketplaces of our lives in a state akin to that of hypnosis. We need to wake up, to become aware of the world we and our parents have made, to understand our positions in that world and to live as much as possible as morally well-ordered creatures.

And we have a chicken-and-egg problem.

We can't just decide to pay attention and find ourselves suddenly awake and alert. In a sense, that sort of alertness is part of the goal, part of a state of being we can't achieve perfectly after a life of practice. I return to the Thomistic idea of intention.

Take a short time each day to just think about what you've done that day and what you plan to do the next day. Look around at the products you use and think of how much time it took to earn the money for those, to shop for them, to use them.

Just a small example: maybe you'd be better off using handkerchiefs and bandannas rather than running through boxes of disposable facial tissues? Certainly, disposable tissues can be useful to stop the spread of serious colds or other respiratory infections but would we be better off with washable cloth when we simply clear our noses after working in a dusty cellar or walking in the April clouds of pollen?

Pay attention to the little things. Think of it this way for now: we forge our own chains a little link at a time.

I'll leave matters there for a while. I'm not sure I'll come up with any answers to help me or others to actually form new ways of living. We need to feed and cloth and shelter ourselves, we need to provide ourselves with entertainment and some luxuries, but we need to do so in moral ways, ways that better reflect the sorts of creatures we are. We need to dare to change our lives and to start forming new ways of living. We need courageous experimenters and it'll probably be easier for some of us to adopt the spirit of innovation if our various crises continue to grow. We may soon have the painful benefit of courage born of desperation.

## 387 Modern Bioethics: They're At It Again

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=146>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/05/30.]

It's been a while since I've so much as mentioned cloning, stem-cell research, or like matters. Recently, some members of the English Parliament wanted to make it illegal to form a animal-human hybrid and also wanted to drop the fetal-age of abortion from 24 weeks to 20 or less. (See *Animal-Human Hybrids, Other Embryo Research Debated* at <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2008/05/080519-AP-hybrids.html>.) The would-be reformers failed to ban animal-human hybrids and are likely to fail to drop the age at which a fetus can be aborted.

I'm not going to bother to discuss the specifics of this news story. I'm going to try to make a pitch for moral sanity on a more general basis.

In my first book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], and in various other writings since, I pointed out that Adam Smith's optimism about moral self-organization of a complex human economy or society was based upon his observations of societies which had very rigorous public moral order: that of the Presbyterian Church and that of the Anglican Church in the mid-1700s.

Human beings acting towards similar goals, such as increasing material prosperity, will tend to organize and the results will definitely have some marks of moral order. After all, what is moral order if not the organized efforts of a community to meet some goal which is at least plausibly good? That good might be simple survival to be achieved by the clearing of farmland or the formation of organized hunting bands and foraging groups. It

might be the gathering of money-men and ships-owners at a coffee-shop to discuss the insurance of ships and cargoes. It might be a complex undertaking by bankers and lawyers, managers and engineers, real estate brokers and insurance brokers, employment placement firms and architects, to turn a new venture into a major manufacturing operation.

Or it might be a small community organizing to build a house of worship or to maybe organize a new town.

But there is also the defective moral order of men grouping together to form conquering armies that they might live off the work of others. There is also the moral order of a patrician clan of the Roman Republic which was based upon demanding codes but was far too lacking in charity by Christian standards and far too harsh modern post-Christian standards.

In the modern West, we've inherited a political and moral culture that we've largely dismantled because the various restrictions got in the way of our immediate desires. For example, we want safety and security of the sort not really to be found for long in this world. In an effort to gain this safety and security, we've adopted national welfare, retirement, and health-benefits schemes that transferred the dependencies, hence—the loyalties, of American citizens from families and local communities to the central governments. This also allowed corporations to 'rationally' organize the American economy to the purposes of those who truly hold power, the politicians and bureaucrats who can put you into jail or shoot you for not paying taxes of questionable constitutionality. A corporate economy of the American sort, converted even the activities of homemakers and mothers into taxable cash-flows, rendering the most personal of human transactions subject to taxation. As a side-benefit to those greedy for money or power, this situation allowed an international community of corporate executives and investors to seize control over the property that Americans used to make their living, often transferring it indirectly into the countries with the cheapest, trainable workforce. (That is, rather than maintaining or replacing steel-mills in the U.S., corporations bought steel from the Koreans or Chinese, giving them the money to expand and modernize their mills.)

We're physical creatures needing food and shelter and clothing to survive. One of the few valid insights of the liberal school of political philosophy (Hobbes through Locke through many others) was the realization that a 'right' to property is necessary for any sort of true political freedom. When we Americans and others in the modern West allowed corporations and bankers to gain control over our farmlands and small shops and small fac-

tories and even our homes, we basically sold ourselves into slavery, though some lived early in the process and got the profits for selling their children and grandchildren into slavery. Our jobs were transferred overseas to those who were willing to work hard for less money than what's needed to support an American standard of living. There was more going on than even that, but that's the most readily describable part of the looting of our civilization by our mostly home-grown barbarians who piled up huge private fortunes or political empires or both at the expense of other Americans.

We've taken on, positively sought at times, a form of slavery in which most of us roam free and are allowed to engage freely in activities more appropriate to pigs than to men. It's a form of slavery in which the upper-classes are willing to give welfare alms to poor people through a political process and for political reasons. It's a form of slavery in which most human beings have been reduced to means, serving the ends of the unscrupulous and the ambitious. Now we move towards a more profound sort of moral degradation: men seeking fortunes and men with the good desires of easing or eliminating suffering or death have united to turn that which is human or that which might be human into a source of spare parts for others.



## 388 Celebrating Beauty

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=157>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/06/02.]

Here is the beginning of a Vatican Information Service news-item:

### ROMANUS THE MELODIST: FAITH CREATES BEAUTY

VATICAN CITY, 21 MAY 2008 (VIS) - During this morning's general audience, Benedict XVI dedicated his catechesis to Romanus the Melodist, a Syrian "theologian, poet, composer and permanent deacon who resided in a monastery on the outskirts of Constantinople in the sixth century". Before delivering his catechesis in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father visited the Vatican Basilica to greet faithful gathered there.

Romanus, the Pope explained, belongs to "that sizeable group of theologians who transformed theology into poetry" and whose numbers include "St. Ephrem the Syrian, . . . St. Ambrose, . . . St. Thomas Aquinas, . . . and St. John of the Cross. Faith is love and so creates poetry and music. Faith is joy and so creates beauty".

Who better than Pope Benedict XVI to speak of the value of music and other arts in glorifying God and in drawing mortal men into proper worship? A highly cultured man who is said to be an accomplished pianist, he is also fluent in a multitude of languages perhaps including Old Syriac—the language of at least St. Ephrem. Certainly, I can't read any of the ancient poets or even the modern French or Italian poets in their own languages. I'm monolingual.

But I can speak one language fairly well and that's a language that is a combination of the words of the Creed and the descriptive words of modern empirical knowledge. And that leads me to sometimes listen in bewilderment as flesh-and-blood priests or ministers, or their televised brethren, speak another language which I can understand but consider obscurantist. I write theology and philosophy in my preferred language and also novels—some containing very amateurish poetry intended as a tease for real poets to speak of Creation as we now know it. I also speak, in my preferred language, of God in His role of the Creator who comes into view a bit more clearly with contemplation of a universe described well by general relativity theory and quantum theory. I even speak in that language of the areas of modern empirical knowledge that bother many Christians, evolutionary theory and history that doesn't always flatter our favorite nations or characters or ethnic groups. Yet, all this empirical knowledge points towards a Creator of a living, developing world which is a morally well-ordered narrative.

We won't be able to see that moral order until the artists and creative writers of our age speak in terms of the empirical knowledge which remains our age's greatest contribution to human civilization. After all, poetry, even about the greatest of Christian truths, is concrete and grounded in our understanding of what lies around us. We need to be grounded in the past and that includes a need to appreciate poetry based upon earlier understandings of God's Creation but we need good and creative and risky poetry which draws upon the understanding of God's Creation which is developing in its empirical aspects. Physics and mathematics, history and some fields of philosophy, literary studies and the practical fields of engineering and management are doing fine. At the same time, few are working on a way to restate the truths of Christian revelation so that they can be understood in the context of God's Creation as we now know it. We simply haven't produced much in the way of theology or even spiritual guidance for those many modern souls who are "lost in the Cosmos". And we've also not produced much poetry or narrative fiction that really deals with the modern realities.

Poetry, hymn-writing, musical composition both sacred and secular, need to be part of a living human culture. We need to keep alive that which we've inherited from the past but we need our own literature and music which is part of a greater culture along with our modern knowledge of mathematics, our deep and often disturbing knowledge of history, our knowledge of man's bodily nature, our knowledge of matter and energy and

fields at their most fundamental level. Our poets and our musicians, our philosophers and theologians, have not yet grappled with what might be called the universe of Einstein and, until they do, they won't be able to grapple with that more important matter of God's purposes for this universe, purposes which turn a universe into a world, a morally well-ordered narrative of sorts.

Until we have theologians and metaphysicians and poets and novelists who can speak of the realities of evolution and genes within the context of God's moral order, we'll have no chance of understanding Creation in Christian terms. Let's continue to read and study the poetry of Romanus and St. Ephrem, but let's pray for a modern Christian poet who can speak of man as we now know him, an evolved creature of genes and proteins who lives in a world where matter and energy are well-described by such fields of knowledge as quantum electrodynamics.



## 389 A Fraudulent Economy: Mixing Wealth and Illth and Mismeasuring the Mess

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=148>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/06/06.]

There's an article on the *Harper's Magazine* website titled *Our Phony Economy*—see <http://www.harpers.org/archive/2008/06/0082042>. I'd originally read a summary of this article in another article I can no longer find. Both the original and summary articles talk about the odd fact that our economic statistics look better as our problems grow and we expend more scarce resources to deal with problems usually better handled in other ways. For example, our economy looks stronger as we get sicker and need more medical services. The original article also references a very good website which I'd been following for a while – *Shadow Government Statistics* at <http://www.shadowstats.com>. That website has a set of good primers on the political corruption of our government's unemployment and national income statistics, a corruption which has been ongoing since Lyndon Johnson's efforts to cover up the real costs of the Vietnam War and his Great Society programs. John Williams, the economist who runs that site, calculates unemployment statistics and other economic statistics the way they were calculated before the methodologies were corrupted by the various Presidential administrations since Johnson. Appropriately enough, you have to subscribe to his newsletter to get recent statistics, but the older numbers which are available to the general public are frightening enough. He does note in his background discussions that some changes to government statistics and analyses have been improvements but argues

strongly that the corruptions overwhelm the improvements.

One of the ways in which we defraud ourselves in our economy is through our accounting for our medical system. By pretending that a dollar given to a hospital is the same as a dollar given to a farmer or a manufacturer of durable goods, we Americans have been boosting our economy by living unwisely. Age-onset diabetes becomes an economically beneficial state because it causes us to buy more treatments from our doctors and hospitals. And there are also various therapists and maybe athletic clubs which benefit if we have good medical insurance. Money flows and obviously we're richer. Our standard of living has risen because we have more hospitals treating more diabetics. Over time, you have heart surgeries and various expensive drugs to contribute further to our wealth. Or is it illth? If half of us Americans or so were to obligingly get leukemia, the other half could go to work for the medical system, if only as van-drivers. Expensive testing and treatments would give us a hell of an economic year. Maybe even two years or so.

We wouldn't have to even worry if some lost their jobs because the patients were dying off at young ages. Some clever political operator would advise the President on how to eliminate those poor slobs from the unemployment statistics as President Clinton managed to eliminate the inner-city unemployed with the 1996 elections approaching. That was progress of a sort, at least to that exploitive class of politicians. President Nixon failed to even get the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) to publish the more optimistic of the seasonally adjusted or the non-adjusted. The BLS insisted on at least announcing which set of statistics they were publishing.

And did you hear the one about keeping the calculation of inflation estimates down over the past 15 years or so? When we're less well off because of price increases, then obviously, a pound of hamburger gives us as much satisfaction as a pound of steak and so a substitution is made in the basket of goods used to calculate the consumer price index. Substitutions of that sort are one way that the published CPI over the past ten years or so has been about half of what it would have been by more consistent and more honest calculations.

## 390 Maybe We Should Fight the Disease and Not the Symptom?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=150>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/06/09.]

I confess: I drank too often and too much in college. I went to college unprepared for the effort of serious learning and was shocked to discover that was the case. Lacking something in my moral character, I fell into evil ways. Yes, evil. And those were evil ways which can flourish in a society in which young men and young women are raised to be good, pliable targets for the exploiters of the marketplaces of the modern world. Once trained to long for the latest toy or the latest breakfast cereal, should we be surprised that they have little self-control when faced with the temptations of life on their own?

In a word, we fail to raise our children to be morally well-formed creatures possessing not only a knowledge of moral principles but also good habits. And then we send them off into the world, to college or into the corporate world. Even those who live near a good extended family might well play softball with guys who head right off to a bar after each game, not for a beer and some good debates about the pennant race but rather for six or seven beers and some increasingly irrational arguments.

You shouldn't even have to think about saying, "No," to a party you know is going to be a falling-down drunk-fest when you're in college to learn, supposedly something of a moral adult and ready to be turned into a cultured and perhaps productive moral adult. Well, a frighteningly high percentage of college students drink heavily and always will when they're not properly formed in their moral characters. See the article *Not All University Students Will 'Mature Out' Of Heavy*

*Drinking Habits* at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/05/080531185855.htm> for a study showing that some of them keep those heavy drinking habits when they leave college. Maybe we should be putting in the hours and efforts to develop moral character—habits first and then powers of reasoning—in our children? Maybe we should be more careful about the television shows and movies they see. Maybe we should be careful to teach them to admire their hardworking, if somewhat boring, grandparents instead of drug-using athletes or heavy-drinking singers.

# 391 Causality and Moral Freedom

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=169>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/07/05.]

One of my goals is to find ways of speaking about causality, freedom, and related matters in terms that are consistent with what we know of this universe and with what we know of the nature of that unique animal called man. Tentatively, we can set this plan:

1. The human mind is formed as it responds to its environments. The conjecture that a rational universe exists will allow that mind to respond to the universe as a whole, potentially shaping itself as an encapsulation of that rational entirety. If that mind sees that cosmos or universe as part of a Creation of a rational God, that mind will be able to see that universe as a morally ordered narrative, what I call a world.

We have a duty to properly form our minds by way of appropriate responses to reality. This doesn't mean all human beings have to be physicists or meta-physicists. A farmer who truly inhabits his farm, nurturing the human beings in his household, the cattle and poultry in his barns, and the soil and plants in his fields is shaping his mind properly in response to God's Creation.

2. A truer moral freedom is largely dependent upon a solid body of knowledge and a mind capable of working with that knowledge. We have to understand our absolute constraints to best be able to build our moral natures and live our moral lives.

We have to understand lesser constraints so that we might be able to handle the cases of human brokenness which we can, so to speak, conquer. We have to understand the true options we have that we might realistically work towards a state which might even be moral nobility. Not all pious men need to do this work any more than all pious men need to be good farmers. Each part of the body plays its role. Physicists contribute empirical knowledge about the nature of being in this universe and speculative knowledge about the being from which this universe was shaped. Metaphysicians speculate beyond the range of physics, but subject to the discipline of the knowledge of physics. Theologians, poets, politicians, and many others play their part in bringing this understanding of being into concrete cultures: language and customs and institutional forms and so forth.

3. The above two items are opposite sides of the same coin. We need to understand our universe and from that understanding we can maybe attain a greater understanding of the entirety of Creation. We also need to understand the possibilities of human nature that we might become the creatures God wishes us to be and we do that by shaping our minds by responding properly to God's Creation. By way of a complex movement involving both of these tasks, we can begin to see the coin as an entirety and realize that a properly formed human mind, simple or intellectual, is one formed to think the thoughts which God manifested in this world.

The end result of this project will not be a bottom-up explanation of our situation in terms of basic physical forces but rather an understanding of created being in general. Though this greater understanding will be schematized in textbook form, it will actually be realized in properly formed human minds and in the structures and content of one or more human civilizations which I believe to be in embryonic forms. This effort isn't an academic exercise but rather part of a creative movement towards a new phase of Western Civilization or perhaps a radically new civilization or perhaps we can move towards multiple civilizations in this age of a technologically advanced and populous human race.

If we're successful in moving towards those new civilizations, we'll likely see new possibilities for dealing with our personal and social moral problems. We'll see new possibilities for building moral forms of human life,

new realizations of concrete human communities. For example, we might come to some understanding of the way that systems organize themselves. From this necessarily abstract understanding of systems, we might be able to gain some greater moral control over the various large-scale organizations of which we're part.

And then, I'm sure, we'll create new problems and history will continue.



## 392 Causality, Moral Freedom, and Genetic Glitches

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=170>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/07/10.]

So what freedom do we have when we're strongly constrained by our genes and the rest of our body, by our upbringings and our social and political circumstances, by the very nature of space and time and causality? Whatever the result of the various debates about nature versus nurture, there are certainly some constraints upon us and, in a sense, it doesn't matter as much as some think that we might be shaped relatively more by our ancestor's environments or by our environments. That is, it doesn't matter for many modern theories of freedom, personal responsibility, and other diverse issues related to moral nature. In these theories, freedom is defined in terms of freedom from: nature, nurture, and current environment. I'll label all three of those as 'constraints'.

Constraints provide structure, you might say they're necessary for particular entities to exist. Without constraints, there's nothing to be free. I think that was the real point of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* though it's often read as some sort of endorsement of the radical freedom which the protagonist sought. Having partly gained it by cutting her ties to first husband and then even her children, she completed her decay by swimming out into the ocean and entering a sort of formlessness.

Human nature is a set of constraints from which any particular human being draws his characteristics. Those constraints can be good or bad, and often that goodness or badness is a matter of context. We have breakable but somewhat strong instincts against killing other human beings. We feel various sorts of love for various sorts of other human beings or non-

human animals. Many of those forms of love might well be ‘re-targeting’ of the hormonal urges we have to protect little creatures that look like us but have eyes as big as plates and ways of cuddling up to us that break down barriers. Other loves may have developed by separate evolutionary pathways but might have been intensified by the strong urges that nearly all social mammals have to protect and play with their young.

Freedom isn’t bad for sure but it’s also not a good in itself, any more than constraints are. Our constraints offer the possibility of moral order or moral disorder but we often need to freely choose the specifics of our behavior, including the natural constraints we choose to nurture.

Freedom as such isn’t the point. A Christian wishes to be Christ-like, those of other traditions have their own ideal state. I’ll just say the goal is to be a good man, not to be free to be good or bad. How many would say a man who develops his freedom and uses it to become a mass-murderer (Hitler?) is a better man than a simple man constrained by genes and upbringing to be a good man? True it is that the simple man isn’t constrained so that there is 100% chance of becoming a good man. He can decide to be distrustful or hateful, he can fall in with the wrong crowd or become addicted to drugs, such as amphetamines, that nurture violent tendencies or other drugs that lead him to a deceitful and self-destructive state.

What about those who are constrained to be that which they don’t wish to be? I’ll not speak of the overall moral issues involved in homosexuality, but only of the dilemma of those who feel homosexual urges and don’t wish to be homosexuals. I’ve known a few such individuals, as well as some who varied between not wishing to be homosexual and then accepting it.

So what do we say when a scientific research project tells us that there is a strong correlation between homosexuality and the existence of a certain form of a gene? Most claims linking homosexuality to specific genes or brain-structures have failed to pan out when other researchers set out to verify them, but it’s far from impossible that one such claim will be verified. In a recent story, we learn of a discovery that certain genes which pass through the maternal line are correlated with an increase in the fertility of daughters at the same time they’re also correlated with increased odds that sons will be homosexual. See *Male Homosexuality Can Be Explained Through A Specific Model Of Darwinian Evolution, Study Shows* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/06/080617204459.htm> for a summary.

Excuse my anthropomorphism for the sake of economy, but it’s hard to

imagine a reason for nature to make homosexuals for the sake of that trait, but it's easier, given what we know of evolution, to think that homosexuality might be produced as a side-effect of a process leading to some reproductive benefit for siblings. A maternally transmitted gene that increases fertility of daughters while disposing some or all sons to homosexuality would be in line with a situation which seems, at first glance, to be at odds with evolutionary theory which is, in major part but not fully, a theory of selection by way of reproductive fitness. Though homosexual males can certainly father children, it would seem likely they wouldn't produce as many children on average as heterosexual males.

What can we say about evolutionary pathways which produce such seemingly strange results? First of all, we can simply say that evolution is a theme in a very complex story of which human beings are only part. Like all stories, it has rational underpinnings but it also has many factual aspects. In this way, it's no different than, say, *The Scarlett Letter*. If Nathaniel Hawthorne had written a prologue giving the entire history of the Bay Colony and every one of its members, we could still not have known in advance the flow of events in his classic story. If we were able to suspend our knowledge of history after 1776 and then read Douglas Southall Freeman's biography of Washington, we might well have been doubtful of the chances of the Washington's success as he took command of the colonial army at the siege of Boston.

The story of life on earth, biostory?, is a wondrous tale of great beauty and—at times—great horror and—very often—beauty marred by glitches. In fact, there has probably never been a creature not marred by glitches and human self-awareness has increased the problem by leaving many individuals aware that they're constrained, by nature or nurture or circumstances, to have traits or desires or limitations they desire not or to accept desires that leave them at least partly outside of their natural human communities.



## 393 Properly Empathic and Properly Moral

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=159>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/07/18.]

See the article *Children are naturally prone to be empathic and moral* at [http://www.eurekalert.org/pub\\_releases/2008-07/uoc-can070808.php](http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2008-07/uoc-can070808.php) for an interesting finding about a complex moral differentiation which seems to be (at least partly) inborn rather than the result of upbringing or conscious thought.

One interesting point is:

<blockquote>

“Consistent with previous functional MRI studies of pain empathy with adults, the perception of other people in pain in children was associated with increased hemodynamic activity in the neural circuits involved in the processing of first-hand experience of pain, including the insula, somatosensory cortex, anterior midcingulate cortex, periaqueductal gray and supplementary motor area,” Decety wrote.

However, when the children saw animations of someone intentionally hurt, the regions of the brain engaged in social interaction and moral reasoning (the temporo-parietal junction, the paraculate, orbital medial frontal cortices and amygdala) also were activated.

</blockquote>

That is, children empathize with those suffering from ‘natural evil’ but have an additional response to cases of ‘moral evil’. They respond morally.



## 394 Destroying Minds One Show at a Time

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=161>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/07/23.]

There is still another research effort that points to the dangers that television presents to developing minds, even when it's only on in the background. In *Parents should limit young children's exposure to background TV* at [http://www.eurekalert.org/pub\\_releases/2008-07/sfri-ps1070808.php](http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2008-07/sfri-ps1070808.php), we read:

Despite the fact that pediatricians recommend no screen media exposure for children under age 2, three-quarters of very young children in America live in homes where the television is on most of the time, according to research. A new study has found that leaving your TV set on disrupts young children while they are playing, even if the channel is tuned to adult shows. This means that simply having the TV on, even in the background, may be detrimental to children's development.

What is it about television that's so attractive that parents will watch it despite dangers to the minds of their children? It's bad enough that those parents are willing to destroy their own minds, but their children's minds?



## 395 How Should We Speak of Sin?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=172>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/07/23.]

In an earlier entry, Chapter 25, *Broadening Horizons of Reason*, I quoted the entirety of a Vatican Information Service news article. I'll quote a stretch of that article about Pope Benedict's speech to a symposium of philosophers:

“Modernity is not simply a historically-datable cultural phenomenon; in reality it requires a new focus, a more exact understanding of the nature of man.”

Benedict XVI indicated that since the beginning of his pontificate he had received various suggestions “from men and women of our time”, and that “in the light of these I have decided to offer a research proposal which I feel may arouse interest in a relaunch of philosophy and of its unique role within the modern academic and cultural world”.

Quoting his own book, *Introduction to Christianity*, he said: “The Christian faith has made a clear choice: against the gods of religion for the God of the philosophers, in other words against the myth of custom and for the truth of being”. And he went on: “This affirmation . . . is still fully relevant in the historical-cultural context in which we now live. Indeed, only on the basis of this premise - which is historical and theological at one and the same time - is it possible to respond to the new expectations of philosophy. The risk that religion, even the Christian religion, be surreptitiously manipulated, is very real even today”.

“The proposal to ‘Broaden the Horizons of Reason’ should,” he proceeded, “be understood as a request for a new openness towards the reality to which human beings in their uni-totally are called, overcoming old prejudices and reductive viewpoints in order to open the way to a new understanding of modernity”.

I’ve argued in various entries on this blog that physics and mathematics are the most important of the sciences when it comes to a revival, even rehabilitation, of Christian philosophy. This relates to the way that revival would unfold in time—we need to have some coherent and fundamental understanding of being before we have to deal with the particular entities which God shaped from more abstract forms of being. Once we have a fresh metaphysical perspective which considers what’s actually known about the possibilities of human thought (given largely by mathematics and logic) and the basic properties of physical being (given by mathematics and physics), we can engage in a fresh encounter with other forms of empirical knowledge and research, including disciplined contemplative knowledge based on understandings of empirical reality. In fact, we can’t really proceed in quite that way. Good historians (e.g. Jacques Barzun or John Lukacs) and good biologists (e.g. Walter J. Freeman and Gerald Edelman) will do their work using a metaphysics with plausible foundations even if those foundations are still being rebuilt.

Some say God is in the details. I think it better to say that the thoughts God chose to have in His role as Creator are in the details and also at the level of the entire universe. (See Chapter 193, *A Universe is More than it Contains*.) In Chapter 229, *Reality is Still Knocking: Human Uniqueness*, I discuss the losing strategy to grasp hold of tool-making or language use or moral nature as the explanation for human uniqueness. Our uniqueness, if we are truly unique in the animal kingdom, comes from the incarnation of the Son of God, when He became one of us; it comes from our relationship to our Maker.

If Christians are to engage in a fruitful encounter with modernity as Pope Benedict wisely advises, we’ll have to breath in the atmosphere of modernity without letting the rich gases burn away our beliefs. We need to learn the facts and speculations and stories of modern physics and biology and astronomy and then we must learn how to embed modern empirical knowledge into the Christian story. I’ll address a specific example, research results discussed in this story: *Sociological research shows com-*

*bined impact of genetics, social factors on delinquency* found at [http://www.eurekalert.org/pub\\_releases/2008-07/asa-srs071108.php](http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2008-07/asa-srs071108.php). The results are summarized in these words:

“While genetics appear to influence delinquency, social influences such as family, friends and school seem to impact the expression of certain genetic variants,” said Guang Guo, the study’s lead author and a professor of sociology and faculty fellow at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill’s Carolina Population Center and Carolina Center for Genomic Sciences. “Positive social influences appear to reduce the delinquency-increasing effect of a genetic variant, whereas the effect of these genetic variants is amplified in the absence of social controls.”

In other words, identifiable patterns in a child’s genes indicate their predilection for serious misbehavior if they’re not raised properly. These results are hardly surprising and are, in fact, consistent with Biblical views. The Old Testament, in particular, speaks often of traits passing from one generation to another and also of the bad results from a tree being bent wrong at a young age. It’s the New Testament that speaks of a freedom that comes through the Incarnate Son of God.

As St. Augustine of Hippo told us:

We do not sin, we are sin.

We are bodily creatures and we are sin, that is, we’re unformed and the possibilities for disorder are as great as those for order. We are sin but—remarkably—we can achieve a state of moral order. We can become at least virtuous pagans if we have some integrity and also the luck to receive a proper upbringing. To a Christian, a state of natural moral order is good in itself, but it’s far surpassed by a Christ-like state. With the grace offered to natural man by the Lord Jesus Christ, mortal man can achieve that still greater state, a share in the divine life, a resurrection into life without end as a companion of Jesus Christ.

Evolution can be seen as the prologue, but also an ongoing part, of the story of natural man, a creature which can rise to a state of natural moral goodness but in such a way that he’ll fall again. With even mild social breakdown, or an irresponsible or ineffective parent, a child with certain

genes might grow into a juvenile delinquent who endangers the welfare of many. A substantial social breakdown, such as we might now be suffering in the West, might well lead to the formation of a large body of barbarians born and bred in the heart of a decaying civilization.

By his own efforts, natural man can accomplish much but he needs good luck to achieve even a state of natural goodness and he needs the help of God to pass beyond that.

## 396 Are Americans Willing Victims or Merely Confused?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=163>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/07/24.]

The *Wall Street Journal* published an opinion piece entitled: *Why No Outrage?*. Why indeed? It's beginning to seem as if a vast transfer of wealth has occurred over recent decades though becoming headline material only in 2008. This transfer moved wealth from the middle-class to a grasping minority. It's likely that many have dropped from a middle-class economic status and many more children of prosperous workers have lost their chance to reach the standard of living as adults which they enjoyed in their parents' houses. It's also likely that the upward path into greater physical prosperity has been largely blocked for those who are poor and those who made decent livings in jobs that break down the human body.

Our bankers, private and public, have continued the tradition set by Lyndon Johnson with his illegal and off balance-sheet financing of the war against the Vietnamese people, not that any presidents since Johnson have missed many opportunities to loot American assets to fund their favorite projects, many simply irrational and others intended to purchase the loyalty of specific groups of voters or deep-pocket contributors. I'm hardly surprised that generations of Americans who've formed their minds by watching television and modern movies haven't yet realized that the cash which comes from mortgaging assets isn't a true increase in wealth. It's cash you've received for an encumbrance upon your property (as an individual or as a citizen of a certain political entity). Sometimes it makes sense to borrow on some assets and sometimes it's just an inefficient and dangerous way to endanger your title to your own house or the assets which will provide for

your retirement or medical care.

This is a serious mess we're in. I'm relatively optimistic in thinking we can reorganize our economy and our governments, but we need to make a firm decision to deal with our problems and that means, first of all, that we have to deal with those who've robbed us while we were busy enjoying the fruits of our cash-flow. I'm sometimes pessimistic in fearing that we Americans will keep pumping air into the various bursting balloons of our financial markets until we've used up much of our resources. We need to understand our situation before we can begin to act to protect our families and to turn our country in a better direction.

We need to realize that credit is inflationary unless it generates a net increase in income, net after payment of principal and interest. Don't feel sorry just for those losing their houses or those who can't find a good mortgage. The inflationary damage of bad mortgages and bad credit-card debt and various forms of bad debt to stock-brokers and bankers and corporations has taken a hunk of flesh from nearly all citizens in this world though I think Americans have paid the biggest price to date. On the other hand, American politicians and a small number of now-wealthy businessmen and Wall Street sharks have been the biggest personal beneficiaries. We have a growing number of billionaire investment bankers and politicians who hold questionable fortunes of tens or hundreds of millions of dollars. We also have a shrinking number of families who could even afford to buy their own houses if they were starting over again. With the growing budget problems in local governments and the shrinking tax base, I think we may be looking at a future where we'll not be able to maintain our roads or bridges. Our sanitary systems maybe even be in danger, especially in some of the older cities on the East Coast or even the Midwest of the United States. I fear that even our school systems, as bad as they are, are in danger and we may soon see a year when many American children are sent to work in fields or factories in their early teens. Or earlier.

I repeat my question:

Are Americans Willing Victims or Merely Confused?

I'd say, "Confused." Politicians and corporate executives and various sorts of bankers have created a system so complicated that few have the knowledge or thinking skills to understand the debt-financed prosperity of recent decades was just borrowing on the future by way of selling off assets

that we'll soon need and that future generations will need before long. There may be some who don't want to understand so long as the party continues.

We should be outraged at politicians and businessmen alike. We Americans can start in the voting booth this fall. In the interests of non-partisanship, I'll suggest that you vote for Ralph Nader or Ron Paul depending upon your overall political stance, even if you have to write-in the name.



## 397 Why the Rush?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=177>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/07/29.]

Nanotechnology which uses tiny, man-made particles which don't occur naturally is already being used heavily, especially in the electronics industry, but it would seem that many branches of industry, including medicine, are starting to deploy nanotechnologies. There's lots of information available on the Internet or in popular science magazines for those who wish to pursue the subject. I merely wish to raise the point that we've worked our collective selves into a mental state akin to an optimistic fatalism. If something is possible and bears the promise of some good results, we assume it will be done, it must be done. We sometimes consider the possible downside risks but mostly in a cursory manner. This remains true even as we deal with the fallout from the deployment of previous technologies. Those problems include a variety of problems: technological, political, social, and economic.

Now we're developing nanotechnology in which molecules and atoms are manipulated into forms they wouldn't be likely to take on in nature. This can be very good but there's also a likelihood that some anticipated and unanticipated dangers will be realized. The dangers might be small, but what is the reason to rush in implementing this technology that we risk the possibility of serious damage to the environment or to human health?

Some scientists are beginning to realize there might be problems. See *Nanoparticles In Sewage Could Escape Into Bodies Of Water* at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/07/080724221823.htm> for one example of concern about possible problems.

Why the rush to implement technologies when we're just starting to learn the problems which we need to avoid or at least mitigate?



## 398 The End of Illusions About Democracy?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=239>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/09/16.]

There's no magic about democracy. Merely having formal democratic procedures gains you nothing but a more vulgarized class of political exploiters. Political machines will use those procedures, at least when they decay into populism, to gain control of the electoral processes that they might use governments to provide services for their clients. Honest, courageous politicians will be few and far between since the machines will have a strong incentive to weed out any possible candidates who have moral integrity. For what it's worth, this was and is one of my main reasons for a strong skepticism about Governor Palin—I have confidence the Republican Party bureaucracy wouldn't have allowed her to be chosen unless they already owned her soul or knew it was up for sale for a price they were willing to pay. (In addition, she seems to have little in the way of knowledge or developed intelligence or respect for politics as much more than a sport against that team using a different mascot, but that doesn't make her so much different from the vast majority of modern American politicians.)

When democracy, or any other system, works, it's because of men like George Washington who are willing to take a moral stand and worry about the consequences afterward and a Washington will succeed only if men of lesser stature but significant moral integrity are willing to follow him.

The moral integrity which can found a good polity, democracy or other, consists of a willingness to give life or fortune to do what's right. Americans, and nearly all those of the modern West, are far more likely to decide before hand how they wish to live and then to look at the possible moral stances

they can take. When we make our decisions in this way, most of us will naturally choose a prosperous and orderly life, unless we're in that small band who seek danger. This is why we need to take the first step with our moral foot rather than our calculating foot. If we're lucky, we can do what's right and also be blessed with a prosperous and orderly life, but we can't assume such.

Somewhere, Mark Twain pointed out that Americans, given a choice, don't really choose to engage in activities that might be a part of any Heaven conceivable under Christian beliefs. Those who know much about Mark Twain know his main moral allergies were set off by the middle-class who choose their moral rules according to the amount of support they give to a safe, comfortable life. Sins are allowed so long as they don't endanger safety, comfort, and middle-class respectability. In other words, Mark Twain was talking the sort of fellow who could be very upset about teenage promiscuity and abortion in the United States and would also support the use of criminal military technology such as napalm against other human beings, even civilian populations. Such a man is more interested in maintaining property values than he is in serving God and Man. Such a man is more interested in bourgeois respectability than he is in carrying his cross. Modern democracies seem to have produced masses of such creatures who are usually pleasant and neighborly while being morally deformed, at least by Christian standards. In Christian terms, they're men who prepare themselves for the outer circle of hell and not for Heaven.

Does democracy really nurture such men, encouraging them to become the sorts of cowards who place no value on any state that might be truly labeled 'freedom' because such a state carries risks of suffering or at least lack of luxuries? Does democracy merely allow such men to reveal themselves as such? Is the real problem the sort of populist democracy favored in the modern West, a democracy which sighed in relief when moral giants such as George Washington grew old and gave up power? "Now, we can choose the sorts of self-serving scoundrels who will flatter and bribe."

We have met the enemy and he is us.

Who engaged in the orgy of profiteering that led to the gutting of our banking industry, our construction and real-estate industries, perhaps our insurance industry, and even much of our manufacturing industry?

Us.

Who has taught many peoples about the globe to hate and fear the United States and its citizens when those peoples mostly admired us and mostly trusted us not so many years ago?

Us.

Who unleashed the corporations who did so much to corrupt our children and our own selves with truly mind-numbing and perverse entertainment?

Us.

We have met the enemy and he is us. And he looks like an ugly and cowardly beast in that mirror.

Let's stop talking about democracy as if it were a primary good and start talking about moral integrity. It might be an embarrassing and humbling conversation, but it might also be the beginning of a cleansing of American souls and also our public squares.



# 399 Our Troubles Have Just Begun

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=252>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/09/22.]

It was a sad scene, all those mostly young men and women carrying their personal belongings in cardboard boxes as they exited the Lehman Brothers building. Did the better-established looters leave by way of limos that picked them up in a basement parking garage? Likely, but I don't know. I only know the scene was heart-rending. All those men and women who'd thought themselves so close to possessing their heart's desires and their tender hearts were torn from their chests, still beating, still bleeding.

What hurts, truly hurts some of us, is the realization that the vast majority of those Lehman refugees, and the vast majority of those who've kept their Wall Street or corporate widget slots, see nothing wrong with their behavior. Nor do their ex-roommates from Harvard who now work at the department of Treasury or State or Defense or even at some branch of the Fed. Maybe they're cognitively impaired so that they couldn't see they were systematically liquidating the productive assets of the United States to build a warfare empire overseas or a welfare empire inside the borders of the United Socialist States of America. Or maybe they were morally impaired so that they wished to be in the ranks of those skimming from that vast pool of cash as it flowed rapidly by. Empires offer good financial opportunities to their tax-farmers. In fact, I'm betting our tax-farmers on Wall St. and in the Fed are morally diseased human beings more than stupid human beings. To the extent they're stupid, it's a self-serving sort of stupidity that leaves them comfortably blind to the evil they participate in.

This is a frightening snapshot of some of America's best and brightest: highly skilled in certain financial and mathematical realms while being deformed and stunted in their moral characters. Meanwhile others of our best and brightest are in Washington spending money that doesn't exist to fight murderous wars that seem to produce no fruits other than more murderous wars. Still others of our best public servants spend their days conspiring to capture more welfare clients for the expanding welfare systems of our military socialist republic. And then there are those who are in laboratories figuring out how to harvest parts from lab-grown human beings so they can be sold for big bucks.

Productive assets can be built up again and sometimes will be far better than those lost for one reason or another. It's very, very hard—to the point of impossibility—to reform the moral character of so many who have so much promise in other ways, so many who could have done so much good by, for example, building tunnels that don't leak or systems that prevent simple human errors from killing many in train collisions.

To put it another way: the work a man is equipped to do is part of who he is as a moral being. A man who's been formed to skim from money that's moved around fast for the sake of generating fees is a certain type of moral being, one made to be such by his upbringing and his own decisions. A man who's instead been formed to live the disciplined life of a dairy-farmer or one who's been formed to live the orderly and sociable life of a small-town lawyer and local political leader is another type of moral being, one which seems to be dwindling in influence though there may yet be many of them.

I explored these issues in a novel looking at the prior stage of the decay of our commercial morality, a stage when corporate executives were still somewhat interested in actual business operations but in a strange way. They lusted after each other's corporate bodies, so to speak, in the way of a man and woman who truly love each other and have good, practical reasons to think a marriage might work. Yet, they are trapped in the superficial mating rituals of the modern pick-up bar, rituals marginally better than the flat-out irrational orgy of Wall Street in this year of our Lord 2008.

Anyway, the interested reader can download a copy of my novel, *Corporate Sex* at <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/corpsex.pdf>. It does bother me that the absurdities of the plot can't match the most recent facts, though the government's rescue plan doesn't yet involve help for an alcoholic and attractive Wall St. lawyer who falls in love with a rising star of the financial heavens.

It would all be a joke except for the massive destruction done to the American economy, for all the jobs lost as productive assets disappeared from the American landscape, for all the careers and business opportunities likely to be lost to the younger generation, for all the cynicism bred by the sight of our political and commercial leaders in action—as reprehensible as they are stupid.



# 400 Hard Times: Our Last Best Hope for Survival

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=263>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/10/02.]

In this insightful essay, *The Big One is Nigh* at <http://www.chroniclesmagazine.org/?p=741>, Srdja Trifkovic provides some sobering analysis, including this statement:

If reasonable men agree that our civilization is spiritually diseased, morally rotten and demographically moribund, then a colossal, rapidly spreading global economic crisis should be neither feared nor wished away. It may yet be our last best hope for survival.

I would quibble about the fear, but I imagine he was advocating the conquest of normal fear of terrible likelihoods and not really the absence of fear. Fear is natural because many of us will at least go hungry and have to learn to live with cold houses or dangerous streets even in our nicest towns. We may face far worse than that, such as loss of many American soldiers during a bloody retreat from Asia or increased disease rates as our food runs short and our sanitation systems decay.

We have a need for prudence, properly understood—see the article on *prudence* at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prudence>. Prudence is “the exercise of sound judgment in practical affairs” and not “the vice of cowardice.” Prudence can guide us to the virtuous way to proceed. Having done that, we proceed, step by step, avoiding unnecessary danger but not retreating or moving aside in a cowardly way. If necessary, we keep our eyes on the ground just in front of our feet and not on the vaguely seen

horrors which lie ahead or to the side. For many, this prudential analysis may simply mean that they choose their leaders as best as possible and then follow those leaders into the desert if necessary. After all, God called Abram and expected others to follow. He called the retainers and servants of Abram through their leader.

We modern Americans, and other citizens of the West, tend to decide what risks we're willing to take on and then to set the best and most moral course within the boundaries set by our desire to be as safe and comfortable as possible. We must learn to put what's right first. Considerations of safety and prosperity should be secondary.

# 401 Bankrupting the Soviet Union and then Our Own Country

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=267>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/10/03.]

Antiwar conservatives and others have expressed great admiration over the years for a man who died in May of 2008, William Odom. See the article at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_Odom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Odom) to learn of this retired general who stated in no uncertain terms that the 2003 invasion of Iraq was the greatest strategic blunder in American history. He deserves great credit for that, but he seems also to have been involved in the decision of President Carter and then President Reagan and President Bush (the father) to boost our weapons programs in the hopes that the economically incompetent USSR would be forced into bankruptcy by trying to keep up with us.

As the story is usually told, we spent the Soviets into bankruptcy. I don't really believe that to be the main reason for the collapse of the Soviet Union, but we certainly spent a lot on our military systems and have gone on to spend far more in the 15 years since then. Apparently, no one seems to have recognized there was some level of expenditure at which the United States would also go bankrupt.

And no one seems to have thought about the difficulty of putting the genie back in the bottle. Once we had given over so much of our economy to the production of missiles and cluster-bombs, once the armaments manufacturers had hordes of well-connected lobbyists, once workers in Los Angeles and Detroit had jobs manufacturing weapons, once scientific research had

been redirected to projects important to weapons development, how were we to return to normal ways of making our livings rather than ways deformed to the goal of “bankrupting the commies”? It’s perhaps fitting that we bankrupted them and went on to waste our so-called peace dividend and to bankrupt ourselves.

In his farewell speech, President Eisenhower warned us that the military-industrial complex, a term first used in that speech, was already dangerously large and that was nearly 20 years before the strategy of enlarging it further to bankrupt the Soviet Union. It turns out that General MacArthur warned his fellow Americans, in the early 1950s, of the dangers of an economy in which military production is so important. (See *A Dial Marked ‘War’: The last resort of our bankrupt elite* at <http://www.antiwar.com/justin/?articleid=13533>.)

By choosing to fight sadistic barbarians with their own weapons and their own strategies, we’ve made ourselves like unto the enemies who frightened us so. We’ve chosen to turn our country into the greatest producer in history of products intended to rip apart human beings, to burn through their skin and then slowly through their muscles, to destroy fresh-water and sewage systems. We’re weapons producers and merchants of death. After all, is not a man who kills women a murderer? Is not a man who heals children a physician? Is not a country devoted to weapons production and the support of huge armies and navies and air forces a militarized socialism, however much some profits might remain private?

Now we’re also broke, a state that seems more disturbing to us than our moral degradation. As a Christian, I’d have to suggest we should fear God more and bin Laden less.

## 402 Where the Political and the Moral Part Company

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=289>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/10/28.]

We bring our moral order or moral disorder with us into the political sphere, a region in which a healthy people would spend only a small part of their lives. Our moral natures are shaped in our communities and not even in our town-halls let alone in that state capitol 75 miles down the turnpike from where I sit. God help us if we start believing that we should expect or want any moral guidance from that other capitol 500 miles away from where I sit, so accessible by way of the interstate highway built for military mobility and so useful for destroying local moral order, the only sort of moral order possible to flesh-and-blood human beings.

Many of those who are fighting for moral sanity in the modern world don't seem to recognize this truth that underlies the semi-truth, "You can't legislate morality." That statement is wrong in that sense that a morally well-ordered society will have moral legislation which will be binding upon morally disordered people and those who are moral as a matter of convention as well as those who are morally well-ordered in a deeper and more substantial sense. But we have to remember two constraints upon moral activity in the political sphere:

1. Political means can't build the consensus which can produce a morally well-ordered society.
2. As you ascend to higher levels of political abstraction, to greater centralization of power—however little or great, less and less agreement

is possible amongst the various communities and political associations of communities with their various ways of life.

In fact, it's unlikely that an overly complex society, actually a complex of communities, can build much of a consensus for more than the most basic issues. In saying this, I'm not even speaking of a society which has a substantial minority or majority of those whose moral ordering is less than complete or even outright deformed. A society which is really a collective of several morally well-ordered societies won't be able to arrive at a consensus of customs and laws because those would be different for an Orthodox Jewish society and for a Mennonite society and still different again for Ukrainian Catholics.

## 403 Differential Geometry and Moral Narratives

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=267>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/11/01.]

Pilgrims travel paths, journeying from one location on earth to another, sometimes those places are fictional but usually quite concrete. To be sure, Dante's pilgrim found (as some of the more recent translations of *The Inferno* attest) that the path could wander away from him. It requires sharp vision and alertness to keep track of that path which seems to often test us in so many ways. That Christian poem, or other such Christian works as *Pilgrim's Progress*, follow in an ancient tradition scouted out by Homer in the *Odyssey* and likely many preceding verbal works that were not recorded in a more lasting form. C.S. Lewis followed a less popular variant of pilgrim literature when he wrote *Pilgrim's Regress* as a highly metaphorical work in which the pilgrim moved mostly, as I recall, from one site representing an inadequate or defective modernist philosophy to another.

Our moral and spiritual and intellectual journeys bear close comparison to physical journeys and there will always be room for concrete journeys in our various tales of our lives, individual or collective. But there's more to be said for modern man because there has been progress of an sort in complexity and richness of human life if not necessarily in quality of life. Moreover, there's at least one way in which the journey across roads or over oceans was always a distortion and oversimplification of the human experience:

There's not so strong a boundary between inside and outside for any creature in this universe though there was an illusion of such during the period that the human mind was evolving

through a stage where our individual existences were coming into somewhat sharper focus.

But there's more:

The number of human beings in our lives, the number of things, the level of abstract relationships in our lives (such as our relationships to far-away, centralized governments), the sheer richness of our relationships in total, demands better ways of examining and analyzing our moral and social lives.

We need metaphors as rich as our moral lives. Seemingly by accident, I've constructed the possibility of such metaphors by my efforts to view Creation from a Christian position while accounting for modern empirical knowledge, including the most theoretical of physics and mathematics. But it's no accident because my major concerns all along have been with the nature of created being and the nature of the human mind.

Modern empirical knowledge has increased by extraordinary amounts in recent centuries. In fact, much of it is really data that hasn't yet been digested enough to call it knowledge. Yet, we've greatly enriched our understanding of being, at least so far as atoms and stars are concerned. Still more importantly, we've come to have some understanding of the universe as an entity in its own right and not just a collection of all that we've observed so far.

We certainly can't claim to understand even the aspects of created reality covered by our most successful theories: general relativity and quantum physics. Yet, our understanding of certain aspects of being in this universe, and maybe a bit beyond, has been greatly enriched. It's been enriched far beyond the understandings of created being which are a part of our philosophical and theological traditions, including our moral traditions. The concepts of created being which underlying the study of black-holes is far richer than the corresponding concepts which underly the understanding that nearly all philosophers and theologians have for their study of human nature.

So, let's get to work.

Under a Thomistic existentialist philosophy, the human mind is seen as forming in active response to the environments of the human being or a multitude of environments or even the entire universe in some meaningful

sense. Our richer understanding of Creation is reflected in an increased richness and complexity of the human mind, at least a mind which is open to this new knowledge while also having a worldview, such as an intelligent Christianity, which allows that mind to make sense of those mountains of knowledge.

The path is not just beneath our feet, it's in our heads. Our minds partake of the slope and surface material of that path. Moreover, we're constantly being jostled about or just generally pushed left or right by the masses of our fellow-travelers—the traditional journeys don't respect the social nature of human beings and portray us as more or less pure individuals when it comes to our moral natures. To be sure, we often spend parts of our journeys in some sort of lonely desert, but we'll then return to more heavily populated regions.

But the journeys of a self-aware moral creature with a complex mind lie beyond our current ways of speaking, beyond metaphors drawn from simple paths across the surface of the earth. In this case, a need for complexity is also linked to a need for greater abstraction. I'm going to use differential geometry as one likely source for useful models for advancing our understanding of our increasingly complex and abstract selves, a change brought about by various factors including the increasing size of the human population but mostly the increasingly complex and abstract nature of our social and political relationships—although we should be careful to realize that this is a case where increasing quantity has caused significant qualitative changes. Differential geometric models are very abstract, but so is the world of a human being living in a complex society and developing a complex mind. Differential geometric models allow a much richer description of possible future paths at each point on a journey. Along with tensors, they also allow ways of speaking about the distortion in a space, say a moral space, caused by the presence or the movements of other creatures. Tensors are typically used along with these models (or separately for some purposes) partly because they allow a concise expression of complicated and complex physical actions, such as stretching or twisting or both at the same time.

The American physicist John Wheeler once summarized general relativity by telling us that matter tells space how to shape itself and space then tells matter how to move. Maybe we can play around with this metaphor:

Human beings tell moral space how to shape itself and moral space then tells human beings how to move through life—how

to act.

Now we're talking. I can relate to moral metaphors that speak not so much of a simple path beneath my feet as a path that merges into me, twisting and stretching me even to the depths of my being. This 'path' is all that I move through or communicate with and all of my own bodily substance.

I can relate to a human world in which, for good or bad, we shape our moral space, the space in which we live our moral lives, including both our lives in public spheres and private spheres. 'We' shape our moral space. Few there are strong enough, brave enough, to move onto a path far from those they've traveled to that point in their lives, far from the path they were raised to travel. But it would be easier for all of us to see the more abstract possibilities and demands of our increasingly complex moral lives if we had better ways to speak and think about those lives. An obvious example of human beings who were, so to speak, in over their heads is the bulk of 'nice' Germans from the 1930s and 1940s who continued to live local lives that were decent and morally well-ordered even as they failed to understand or to respond to the more abstract demands upon them as citizens of a nation which was acting in evil ways at higher and more 'abstract' levels. It's certainly true that some did see and understand their moral responsibilities, but even those had problems, so far as I know, bringing matters into focus.

I can relate to a human nature which is stretched and compressed and twisted as it travels along those paths, paths which can shoot away in unexpected directions without warning and sometimes without giving good indication of what's happening until we're well along a path we falsely thought to understand. Again, those nice, middle-class Germans were doing all they'd been raised to do, hold good jobs and pay their bills and take care of their own children, but the path leading to regions of moral order had veered well away from those simple paths they'd traveled, not because they'd been raised wrong in ways that could have been forecast but because the world had become complex in a way that modern middle-class thought doesn't even perceive. The world had gotten more complex than could be handled by modern middle-class ways of moral thought and behavior.

I can relate to a human life and to a human community life in which the path veers away from us as it did to Dante's pilgrim in which we can find out late in the game that the 'right' path we followed has led us or our children into a state of moral corruption.

Like it or not, human beings don't live in a world which is 'only' concrete—as I've tried to communicate in my various writings on this blog as well as in my first published book: *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41]. We live in a world in which the abstract is with us always. How else could mathematicians and other thinkers know of such strange entities as transfinite numbers? In my way of thinking and speaking, God shapes the concrete aspects of our world from a more abstract foundation which is the manifestation of the truths He chose for Creation. I call that abstract source of created being the 'Primordial Universe'. We can, so to speak, coax the abstract aspects of our universe, and perhaps those of Creation in general, out of what seems to be only concrete by way of proper tools of thought, such as differential geometry and tensor analysis and metaphors and analogies and so forth.

I say 'proper tools' because they are not merely useful fictions. Good metaphors draw upon more abstract levels of reality where, for example, the moral paths of a mind-ed creature can be more complex than any possibilities seen directly in his concrete world and the visible events of his life. Oddly enough, those complexities—at a proper level of abstraction—seem to bear similarities to the stretching and bending of space and time described in modern theories of gravity and in the sheer strangeness of being, time, and space in the levels of being described by quantum physics. Differential geometry and tensor analysis and other abstract tools developed by mathematicians and other scientists point towards certain aspects of being which I speculate to be thoughts God has manifested in the Primordial Universe, aspects which do greatly affect the lives of creatures which have true minds and which live in complex societies with other such creatures.



# 404 Not All is Fungible that has Value

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=299>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/11/13.]

From The Collaborative International Dictionary of English v.0.48 [140], we have the definition:

**fungibles** Things which may be furnished or restored in kind, as distinguished from specific things;—called also fungible things. —Burrill. [1913 Webster]

A house is fungible, a home isn't. Goods can be moved in to build a subdivision but not a neighborhood. Even if the residents of an existing neighborhood were to move from New York to Montana and built houses near one another, it wouldn't be a neighborhood until the various relationships between individuals and households settled down into proper sorts of patterns. It would take some time and might not happen at all. In general, an existing neighborhood can be deserted but a new one can't be purchased.

Grandpa's tools are fungible in the sense that they can be sold out of his estate but the living attached to those tools, or his workshop, isn't fungible. It can die but can't be sold.

If we had economists and political scientists who could understand the above statements and develop them into a system of thought, we might have an understanding of truly free forms of capitalism and of describing some stable and tradition-based systems capable of dynamically responding to legitimate opportunities.

Instead, we are burdened with economists who teach us that freedom and prosperity are to be found by always being willing to sell that property

which grounds our ways of life. In opposition to that, I'll note that ways of life are built upon ways of making livings and to sell out those small family businesses on Main Street or to sell out the traditional family home to move to a subdivision is to sell out a way of life.

And we Americans have sold our ways of life in return for promises of soft and comfortable lives from cradle to grave. Now those promises are showing their worth with each bit of bad news about the economy and about our miscellaneous wars in countries we Americans can't even locate on a world map. But we and our parents and our grandparents should have been suspicious from the moment that our politicians at war (especially Lincoln and Wilson) so willingly and so easily took up the powers of a tyrant and, in fact, exercised those powers with greater ruthlessness than all but a few kings in European history. We certainly should have been suspicious of the *New Deal* which was not an effort to help troubled people but rather an effort to make the United States safe for large corporations which are in cahoots with politicians and government bureaucrats. We most certainly should have been suspicious when family businesses were burdened with all the regulation laid upon corporations. One particularly absurd example was the imposition upon local dairies of the sanitary codes necessary for those corporations which were trucking large amounts of milk from various sources and trucking that milk many miles to be sold days later.

It took many generations to build up the communities and habits and customs which we threw away for a chance at winter homes in Florida and for SUV's with heated leather seats. Should I mention our desire to buy lots of stuff at Walmart as cheaply as possible, stuff that we didn't really need? I just fried some bacon and came to wonder why I need floral printed paper towels to drain the grease. I'm old enough to remember that newspapers did the job fine. But now I live in a town where I can buy those pretty paper towels at a large supermarket and then return to a neighborhood where I don't know even the name of most of the families that live in a block or two of my residence. And we don't even really want most of the stuff we buy. It's the buying experience we seek and much of that stuff is disposable. Much ends up being stored in attics or given away after light use. Most Americans would have needed a warehouse to store all the stuff they bought over the past decade.

The party is drawing to an end, but we many have enough resources to keep it going in a low-key way for a decade or more. Will we have the guts and the moral integrity to admit we ruined much that we inherited? Will

we try to just live as well as possible and hope we escape this life before more is demanded of us? Will we instead have the guts and the moral integrity to sacrifice for the future? Will we continue to play the role of barbarians looting our own civilization or will we be willing to roll up our sleeves and become builders?



# 405 Ways of Thought in the Modern West

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=370>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/12/29.]

I've just read *The Evolution of Civilizations* [119]. The author, *Carroll Quigley*—see [en.wikipedia.org/Carroll\\_Quigley](http://en.wikipedia.org/Carroll_Quigley) (1910-1977), was a distinguished historian who taught at Georgetown for 30+ years, Princeton and Harvard before that. Quigley was a bit controversial, a rather moderate conspiracy theorist with insider's information and a high opinion of the “Anglophile network” which was, and maybe still is, trying to bring about a one-world government. So far as I can tell, Professor Quigley differed from the mainstream of modern thinkers more because of his understanding of moderate realism (of which Thomistic existentialism was the most complete form before my efforts to update it) than because of his teaching that there is a group of bankers striving to reorganize the world.

In any case, *The Evolution of Civilizations* [119] covers the content of an introductory course he taught at the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University where diplomats and other foreign affairs professionals were educated. Professor Quigley has many interesting comments upon the processes by which a full-blown civilization develops and then decays—there have only been about 24 verifiable civilizations in history. He speaks of Western Civilization as beginning about 750AD when Europe was pulling out of the Dark Age which followed the collapse of Rome. He goes on to speak of the West going through three stages of expansion (very unusual for a civilization which usually expands once and then moves towards its death by prolonged stages). He labels the three resulting phases of the West as feudalism, commercial capitalism, and industrial

capitalism—names carrying political as well as economic meaning. Each of those first two systems began to decay into a static state, foreboding stagnation but the West went on to new creative efforts as new ‘instruments’ (such as insurance brokerages to allow British fleet-owners to trade far and wide) developed to replace older instruments—such as the feudal system’s local production of nearly all goods. In Quigley’s analysis, creative ‘instruments’ decay eventually to self-serving institutions. He claimed our industrial capitalist instruments had become such self-serving institutions by 1930 or so. If true, this means our current task would be to develop new instruments, if we wish the West to recover once more and move forward, but we can’t really do that consciously though we can aid the process by being flexible and letting go of ways that no longer meet our general needs. The problem, of course, is that current ways provide prestige and wealth to the vested interests, those instruments which have survived past their period of useful service to become stagnant and self-serving institutions.

For now, I’m only going to pull from Professor Quigley’s book one idea, the fundamental idea of what he calls the outlook of Western Civilization—which he dates from about 750AD when Europe was pulling out of the Dark Age which followed the collapse of Rome. Its domination of the human mind was perhaps short-lived, he indicates perhaps the 50 years following the death of Aquinas, say 1275-1325 or so. And, yet, as I’ll explain later, moderate realism survived as what might be labeled the principle of modern science, in which category I’d place all disciplined ways of thought which accept reality. In the words of Professor Quigley, moderate realism is the outlook defined (loosely) by:

The truth unfolds in time through a communal process.

This worldview was, and is, diametrically opposed to various forms of idealism and dualism, views which can be illustrated by Platonism and Pythagorism and the early thoughts of Aristotle. There are various modern ‘isms’ that are idealistic and dualistic. In fact, nearly all organized systems of thought are idealistic and dualistic. Moderate realism is unique in its basic willingness to be shaped by responses to reality and thus to respond to the evolutionary and developmental forces to fundamentally part of this world. Thomism reached a highpoint of sorts by the teachings of Aquinas on the importance of the act-of-being, his existentialism, and by his teachings on the formation of the human mind and moral nature by

way of responses to environments. Under Thomism, or even less complete systems of moderate realism, philosophers and even theologians to some extent pay at least as much attention to sensory perception, to empirical data, as does a farmer or a road-builder. Under Thomism, there is no clear divide between theologians and philosophers and physicists, not because theologians or philosophers can dictate to physicists, but because they each have important ways of dealing with empirical data and penetrating more deeply into being and into the meaning of Creation and its various phases and parts. In this unified way of approaching God's unified Creation, we can see the truth of one of the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas:

We know even God through His effects in Creation.

From this point on, I'll assume my updated understanding of Thomistic existentialism, which was itself a great expansion and 'updating' of the moderate realism developed by pre-Thomistic thinkers such as St. Augustine of Hippo. Unless I refer directly to Professor Quigley, the claims and analyses are my own. I'll also note that I've claimed in earlier entries that Jamesian pragmatism shares some important elements with Thomism or—more generally, moderate realism—in that knowledge is properly acquired from sensory data but the building up to greater structures can't proceed properly because no such structures, not even the world as a true world, can be assumed even tentatively in pragmatic philosophies as currently defined. See Chapter 84, *Pragmatism and Thomistic Existentialism*, and some of the following chapters for some more comments on this issue.

I'll illustrate the conflicts between moderate realism and other ways of thought by referring to a somewhat vague but important belief system—the American belief that our ways are inherently superior to all other ways, past or present. The two aspects of this belief are:

1. Dualism: There's American ways and there's inferior ways.
2. Idealism: American ways represent virtue and goodness and we can know that without the trouble of empirical investigation of reality.

In fact, reality has had a dream-like quality in the minds of Americans from at least the early 1800s. Tocqueville noted (circa 1838) that Americans had the odd trait of ignoring facts which were in conflict with

the American mainstream view of matters. This helps explain how Americans have always been willing to violate the traditional Christian concepts of just-war, including unlimited attacks upon upon civilian targets. After ignoring our actual behavior in wars against native Americans, in the Spanish-American War and all succeeding wars, we Americans will babble on about how morally pure we are and how much good we do for others in the world. From a different perspective than that of Tocqueville, Hermann Melville came to similar conclusions, claiming the so-called philosophy of Emerson and Thoreau to be a spiritualized materialism which was morally insane (a need to justify the self at the expense of charity and also of true piety is a major part of the thought of Emerson and Thoreau) and Melville feared that this moral insanity was a part of the American character. That moral insanity depends upon dualism and idealism to isolate the self from objective reality and its often inconvenient facts so that we Americans can see ourselves as pure no matter what we actually do.

This sort of self-justification in moral matters isn't allowed in moderate realism and neither is the myth-making that imposes our preferences upon physical reality, creating a world corresponding to American divisions of good vs. evil. What we like is good and was part of the creative work of the American-approved God. What bothers us is evil and is the result of the invasion of this world by evil forces independent of God. In particular, biological evolution is okay so long as it can be seen as having produced beautiful deer romping through the woods. Biological evolution is under the control of evil when it produces parasites which invade and eat the human eyes or retroviruses which destroy the human immune system. Similar comments can be made about the realms of this world which aren't part of life. In general, much is made independent of God so that He can join us, Americans and those good enough to want to be like us, in our purity. Such an important part of physical reality as biological evolution becomes something to be used by Satan as readily as by God. It's not a part of God's story but rather something existing independently of the Almighty.

Christian methodical realism is more accepting of God as Creator and tries to honestly deal with this world in all of its aspects even when humans find something to be repulsive. As Professor Quigley sees matters, correctly in my opinion, the scientific method is basically the way in which an adherent of moderate realism would explore empirical reality. St. Thomas Aquinas, a pupil of St. Albert the Great who was an important early European scientist, said pretty much the same though those fields we usually

label as ‘science’, such as physics and biology, weren’t so well-defined as specialties in those days.

Recent events would indicate that even bankers and business managers, certainly economists, in the United States pay little attention to reality. Some of President Bush’s advisors are said to have stated the belief that ‘power’ can overcome reality. Bush himself seems to have believed that noble intentions and a good opinion of oneself can somehow negate the objective evil one does. No wonder we’re decaying so rapidly, the good and bad parts of the West alike though I’d fear our war-machines will pull out of this decline better than our social or economic institutions. The United States maybe yet develop into a military socialist state with enough resources and firepower to continue dealing out death and destruction to many regions of the world for decades to come.

Quigley wrote that, quite plausibly, the instruments of our capitalist economy had become self-serving institutions by 1930 or so. His deep and prolonged efforts to understand the meaning of his vast historical knowledge led him to believe that such a problem can be overcome by either the destruction of existing institutions in such a way that fresher instruments can grow up or perhaps by the growth of instruments alongside difficult-to-erase institutions. So far there’s little sign that such growth of new instruments is occurring but the early stages might be hard to discern. What bothers me is that the commitment of the West to moderate realism is very weak, even in the ranks of Catholic theologians and philosophers and clergymen, and practically non-existent in the United States which is now the dominant political entity in Western Civilization. The United States seems to be leading the West on some death-march into Lalaland.

Philosophy and theology matter in our day-to-day affairs, but there’s a tricky point here. Plato knew that a philosophy dictated a way of life but, believing in an idealistic and dualistic way of truth, believing in a realm of the truly real which could be reached only by a great effort of a large-minded man, he preached a separation from concrete reality. And he preached a sort of idealism which would have no corresponding ‘outlook’ that would make sense to most men and would help them engage the real-world successfully. Let me repeat Professor Quigley’s words:

The truth unfolds in time through a communal process.

I’ll take Professor Quigley’s term ‘outlook’ as being the way in which our

community, however defined, views created reality and also transcendent reality. An outlook is then a more concrete version of what I call a worldview which is a more systematic, or 'philosophical', way of tying together our understanding of all realms of reality. Using this terminology, we can say that the average baker from Western Civilization should have a coherent outlook in which he has been formed over his years of schooling and working and playing and living in a family and church community and other communities. Theologians and philosophers, some historians and literary scholars, some scientists and politicians, should have a more sophisticated version of that outlook, a worldview. Over the history of the West, there's generally been a separation of outlook and worldview as one or the other develops faster or deforms faster, but they should be largely synchronized. In recent centuries, it would seem that the outlook of practical men advanced further and to more sophisticated understandings of reality than did the worldview of philosophers and theologians. To a certain extent, scientists began to take up that outlook and separate themselves from more disciplined forms of speculation, though we must always remember that much of the work of both Newton and Einstein began as philosophical speculation before the mathematical work began.

I'd argue that the West was unique in having a synchronized outlook and worldview just because the respect of the likes of St. Jerome and St. Augustine and especially St. Thomas Aquinas for the data of the senses, for the manifestation of divinely instituted truths in mere matter made it possible for men of the West to make sense of what goes on in a morally well-ordered marketplace and also what goes on inside the head of an Einstein and—perhaps surprisingly—to at least talk coherently about the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. This, of course, assumes that there is truth manifest in the real world as opposed to idealisms that, in their pure form, teach of realms of truth separate from concrete reality. The historical truth is more complex. Christians, even during the age of moderate realism, often taught a form of idealism in which the world and the human body seemed to be totally depraved. Hegel created a system of idealist thought and Karl Marx's inversion of that system materialized the spiritual world of Hegel who had himself spiritualized all of created reality.

There have been important changes in adherence to moderate realism by various groups in the West, accounting in part for the strangeness of Western intellectual history and perhaps for our more recent practical problems. Catholic thinkers in particular seem to have separated themselves from

the mainstream of Western thought, which thought is still quite fertile in confronting reality and reaching to profound and abstract depths of understanding. With my light-weight knowledge of history, I placed the Catholic falling-away at the time of the Renaissance but that might have been more a falling-away of priests because Etienne Gilson places that falling-away at the time of the French Revolution when the inability of Catholic intellectuals to deal respectfully and intelligently with Enlightenment thought reached some sort of a crisis point. This is sad because the core of that Enlightenment thought seems to me to be, to a large extent, a weakened but true moderate realism.

Catholic thinkers may have been reluctant to deal with unfolding truth just because they were educated in and employed by instruments of the Church, and of Western Civilization, which had decayed into self-serving institutions. One possibly clear example comes early in the modern era with Galileo's feisty relationship with the Jesuits, some of whom were bitter opponents of Galileo and some of whom were respectful opponents and many of whom were supporters of one degree or another. Suddenly, Jesuits who had supported his ideas shut up as did those who had supported him personally as one who might be in error but should be allowed to work. Stillman Drake, the great biographer and translator of Galileo, says that it was likely the Superior General of the Jesuits sent out an order that Aristotle and his writings were to be defended at all costs, not the Church and the Bible but Aristotle and his writings.

Moderate realism shares with one of its children, physical science, an awareness that its specific forms are contingent and time-bound but specific truths can be discovered. St. Augustine's rejection of the idea that the human race had transmuted from another species was an inconsistent act and perhaps an act of intellectual cowardice, an act that led to a specific version of the doctrine of original sin which is still taught by the Catholic Church alongside Her more recent admission that evolution has occurred. There is a deep incoherence here that is detected even by young Christians with minds poorly formed by our modern educational systems, religious education as well as secular education in public schools. As strange as some might think this statement, Darwin's work was the necessary response to a thousand year-old wrongful conjecture which had rigidified into a caricature of an absolute truth. In simpler terms, Darwin corrected a major error in the thoughts of St. Augustine. This shows the power that a great thinker can have over the intellectual development of a civilization, in his inexcus-

able errors as well as his better thought. I'd also have to believe it was the incompetence of Catholic thinkers in dealing with this situation which brought on the anti-Christian attitudes and words of many evolutionary thinkers though they can't really be excused either for not understanding the situation more clearly when Catholic intellectuals don't have a good understanding of the historical background or the speculative content of Catholic teachings.

Still, there has been a general movement towards some greater body of truth, though often by way of conflicts which were quite avoidable. That movement can be summarized by:

The truth unfolds in time through a communal process.

As Christianity has turned away from moderate realism, the so-far successful project of the Christian West to understand what God is saying in the Bible and also in Creation is decaying into various superstitious forms, including the forms being generated by science acting without some overall guidance to be gained from an understanding of this world, a necessarily moral understanding. I think the loss of respect for the nature of the relationship between the human mind and God's Creation is already endangering the viability of the physical sciences and other fields of empirical research and analysis as self-sustaining projects, though the decay of optimism and openmindedness in empirical research is well behind the advanced state of decay in philosophy and theology. The decay seems still more advanced in politics and economics. We've already lost many of the practical goods realized during the years the West was truly Christian, including our political and economic forms and our self-understanding through historical analysis. We'll lose more before it's all over, whether it ends in a new recovery or an ongoing decay until Western Civilization is no more. Quigley documents the long periods of decay which almost always end civilizations.

Much is being lost and it's sad and it can, in principle, be avoided by a civilization founded upon the idea that we should openly accept and deal with empirical reality, a civilization founded upon a worldview of Thomistic existentialism or the sparser outlook of moderate realism. After all, truth is seen as unfolding rather than as being manifest in any particular forms of knowledge or any specific political practices or forms of production of food and artifacts. Formed to look at history as being an unfolding of truth, men of the West could move into the future confident that old truths can

be better understood, new truths discovered, better ways found to care for ourselves and our children.

There's always hope, however quixotic it might seem. I don't recommend jousting with windmills to be sure, but I do recommend studying those windmills and the movements of air which drive them and I also recommend efforts to build better windmills. I recommend studying the millers and their customs, stories, and songs and I recommend creative efforts to form new customs, tell new stories, and sing new songs. I recommend efforts to restate Biblical and other truths in terms of new words and new concepts, that is, efforts to see God in His better understood effects in Creation. I recommend the rolling up of sleeves and the setting to work without any hope that good will result in our lifetimes or even in the next generation. I recommend that we start acting as if we have faith and hope and love, as if we possess an energetic courage. Maybe we can reshape ourselves to be true men of the West. Maybe our pretense could become reality.



# 406 St. Paul and Worldly Wisdom

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=456>. It was finished and uploaded on 2009/03/14.]

Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart.”

Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. [1 Corinthians 1:17–21 [141]]

St. Paul didn't have much trouble speaking bluntly but, like me, he was exploring new realms of thought outside the existing words and concepts. He often spoke in a confusing manner, a rather obvious fact that remains invisible to many who would draw revealed truths from the words of a man who was a preacher and founder of communities and not a systematic theologian nor was he any sort of philosopher. Commentators, including some famous theologians, have taken to the Pauline letters with tools reminiscent of those used to cut, shape, and sometimes deform sheet-metal. I'll try to

do better, neither missing the claims to revelation, nor the human insights, nor the mistakes due to the limitations of any particular human being, nor the inadequacies and mistakes due to imperfect ideas about God's Creation which are part and parcel of our condition as limited creatures of small regions of space-time.

I'll be making some background comments on my view of the Bible and how it should be read with an eye towards a number of Biblical commentaries I'll try to write, at a slow pace, if God grants me a good, long, active life. After those few comments, I'll be mostly concerned with this attack of St. Paul upon wisdom, an attack which is properly qualified in a commentary by St. Thomas Aquinas. I'll argue that we can gain a better understanding of what God is saying through His time-bound, finite, and error-prone servants by placing ourselves in the position of, for example, St. Paul and trying to hear what God was saying in words and concepts which we find more appropriate, often because we've learned much in these 20 centuries and have a better understanding of such matters as the nature and behavior of the entities of this world. And so:

What does St. Paul mean in condemning "worldly knowledge"?

It's hard to recover the meaning of St. Paul in some of his writings, because of the cultural distance and also because he was working as evangelist and founder of local church communities, not as a systematic theologian. And though important and useful, the recovery of what St. Paul truly thought might be less important than would at first seem. St. Thomas made two claims in his major writings which might shed light upon this issue:

1. Human moral nature is organic, not 'spiritual', and develops in active response to its environment. More generally, and adjusting for more recent discoveries about the human brain (and human being), I've made a strong claim that such is true for the intellectual aspects of a human being, including our so-called intuitions or 'sentiments' (the word used by Adam Smith and others in his school of moral philosophy) which were formed by the response of our human and pre-human ancestors over many millions of years and are still be formed and reformed as we respond to an ever-changing world. Our individual minds also develop by way of responses to our environments which may include some substantial understanding of all of Creation.

2. God does not generally speak to His prophets and apostles in the way that you and I would speak face-to-face. A man becomes a prophet by learning how to speak along with God, that is, by letting his mind and his tongue move with a human will aligned with that of God.

Aquinas, thinking of human ‘stuff’ as being too inert for certain responses, posited a ‘soul’ which is not human but is attached to a human being and carries out abstract reasoning functions. With this time-bound and plausible thought eliminated in favor of the modern knowledge of the dynamic nature of all matter and of the very particular dynamic nature of the human brain, we arrive at a radically different view of mind and of knowledge and of the world from that held by St. Paul. In particular, we can see that ‘mind’ doesn’t pre-exist human nature. There are some aspects of our minds which developed over the millenia as our ancestors evolved by responding to specific environments and there are some aspects which develop during our lifetimes as we respond to our own environments, even to the world as a whole. In this context, it’s important to realize that we don’t have pre-existing minds that can be filled with knowledge but rather minds that are shaped as we deal with the world in a way that can be seen as a knowledge-generating process. There’s not a clean separation between mind and knowledge, though we’ve been taught to think in terms of systematic knowledge that can be pushed into a more or less empty mind.

We have to learn how to avoid approaching primary sources of knowledge with too much in the way of a system. That is, we have to learn how to shape our minds to the truth as found in the Word of God and in the Creation of God rather than approaching in the manner of Fundamentalists with a small list of principles or dogmas which tell us what is true before we listen to God’s revelations in the Bible and in Creation. In other words, we have to give up our habits of filtering God’s words and our knowledge of God’s creative acts through our all-too human ideas of what can be true. I’ve discussed some of the underlying issues in *Four Kinds of Knowledge* [43], a book freely available for download.

In his commentary on 1 Corinthians, St. Thomas Aquinas tells us:

[J]ust as a disciple reaches an understanding of the teacher’s wisdom by the words he hears from him, so man can [r]each an understanding of God’s wisdom by examining the creatures

He made. . . [Page 17 of St. Thomas Aquinas' *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* [3].]

Later, Aquinas tells us [3]:

[T]he wisdom which attains to God through the things of this world is not the wisdom of this world but the wisdom of God. . . [page 51]

I suspect that St. Thomas didn't appreciate how radically insightful his theory of the development of the human mind was. He probably attributed to St. Paul too great an understanding of the importance of empirical reality as part of Creation. Though I'm sure Aquinas thought himself to be recovering St. Paul's meaning, he was bringing about a commentary as if he were putting himself in the place of St. Paul, responding to God and trying to move along with God.

In all likelihood, St. Paul did distrust the best human knowledge of his day, not quite seeing it was imperfect knowledge of God's Creation, that is, of God's acts of creating contingent being and sustaining it in existence. Aquinas did see this, at times very clearly, and he read into St. Paul's words his own better view of the nature of empirical reality and of human knowledge of that empirical reality. This is the correct way to read the Bible, but it should be more explicit than it was in the mind and writings of Aquinas. This is to say that the Bible remains the source of Christian revelation not because it's a collection of writings which somehow transcend the limitations of their all-too human authors. The Bible fills that role because it's the human recording of a particular conversation God was having with all of us by way of a particular group of poets, court historians, prophets, evangelists, and apostles. We can enter this conversation but not as a mere matter of the 'spirit', rather does it take some discipline in the way of 'worldly' thinking and a healthy bank account of 'worldly' knowledge. I can remember a high school history teacher of some wisdom telling us we have no 'right' to an opinion until we know some facts. I'm claiming that we should bring our knowledge, especially our modern empirical knowledge, to the process of encountering God by way of an intelligent and respectful reading of the Bible. We should use our facts organized as knowledge in our efforts to understand the Bible as a recorded conversation including some revealed truths sometimes unclearly stated, some time-bound insights, and some outright errors.

There are many valid reasons why we should be concerned about St. Paul's life and his education, about the historical circumstances of Isaiah, about the development of the Semitic peoples and their cultural state at the time of Moses. There are also good reasons to be concerned with the meaning that St. Paul and Isaiah put into their human utterances. But God's meaning that He was conveying through His prophets and Apostles is far more important than what those prophets and Apostles thought the Lord to be saying and far more important than the limitations of their individual selves or their cultures.

If Aquinas was right, then our understanding of the Bible will be greatly improved by admitting "the wisdom which attains to God through the things of this world." This doesn't mean we push aside the Bible or even its human authors in order to impose a better and more modern version of God's instructions to His children. It does mean that we need to struggle to put ourselves in the positions of those prophets and evangelists and Apostles to try and hear God's words fresh in order that we can have those words in terms that allow us to speak with God in our contexts as St. Paul spoke with God in his context.



## 407 If We Have to Use Mathematical Analogies. . .

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=478>. It was finished and uploaded on 2009/04/08.]

We have no choice but to use mathematical analogies in even our most subtle thoughts about moral and spiritual issues since mathematics, by definition, is the proper way in this universe to describe paths. We move over paths, we develop over paths. Our current moral talk and thought assumes a Euclidean space for our moral lives, including our innermost selves and our relationships to others. At the same time, mathematicians and scientists and engineers have moved on to far more sophisticated geometries for the description of not only exotic sorts of stars and black-holes but also spinning components in machines.

With all the self-justifying talk of moral theologians and philosophers and literary men about the differences between physical objects and moral natures, I find it hard to believe we live in a world where it's appropriate to describe the moral lives of men and beasts with simpler words and concepts than those which are necessary for physical objects. Surely, we can enrich our understandings and discussions of our own lives by using a richer set of words and concepts. Surely, the more abstract concepts corresponding to paths which can be found in more modern geometries can help us to speak more truly of our lives and our societies than the simpler concepts which correspond to simple paths and journeys over the surface of the earth.

Don't we spin and twist, often discovering that a simple event in our lives or a change in attitude leaves us in a state that might be labeled orthogonal to our societies or families? Don't we often feel ourselves relatively unchanged as our surroundings change around us, generating forces

on us which might well be analogous to the so-called ‘fictitious forces’ of physics which are, in one sense at least, generated by nonlinear changes in coordinates though no ‘true’ forces be involved?

Call me proud in my human nature, but I simply find it hard to believe that my insides can be described by analogies to simpler concepts than what is necessary to describe the forces on a spinning disc in my computer. I find it still harder to believe that my relationships to others, including those who are long dead, can be described by those simpler concepts.

My personal situation is making it difficult to put in as much time as I’d like in exploring the mathematics and physics which might give clues as to the true nature of the created being which is our human stuff and of which we are part. Yet, I’m plowing through, slowly, trying to learn as much as I can about concepts appropriate to more abstract sorts of paths, more abstract states of being, concepts which can be used to analyze seeming messes to determine what the true invariant relationships are. I know not what the end result might be, but I hope to at least inspire others to move on in this effort to expand the horizons of human reason, to borrow a phrase from Pope Benedict XVI.

In the end, a human being is far more than a star, far more than a spinning disc in a computer. My problem with those in literary and other human sciences is that they so strongly prefer inherited language and concepts which imply we’re triangles in Flatland rather than being—potentially—encapsulations of all of complex Creation described by such ideas as those of the general theory of relativity and quantum mechanics, transfinite set theory and abstract algebra. The moral nature of a creature struck with wonder by the glories of God’s Creation, the minds of creatures capable of exploring those wonders, are at least as complex as what they can appreciate, as least as complex as what they can understand—however incomplete that understanding might be.

To complete the title of this entry:

If we have to use mathematical analogies in describing our moral and spiritual and intellectual journeys, shouldn’t we use the best available mathematics rather than ancient stuff?

To be sure, that ancient stuff is still true, but it’s so small a part of the truths of modern empirical knowledge and it describes so small a part of Creation.

## 408 The Need for Abstractions in Moral Self-understanding

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=526>. It was finished and uploaded on 2009/06/19.]

In this article, I'm continuing my efforts to deepen and enrich my moral self-understanding as an American born in the middle of the 20th century. These efforts run parallel to my studies of modern empirical knowledge, including the seemingly arcane mathematics used in physics, and my assumption is that normal processes of mind-shaping will result in a more or less natural use of that knowledge in these moral analyses and also in my related literary efforts. This is to say that I hope to acquire a reasonable facility with the enriched understanding of fundamental aspects of created being which has been developed in modern mathematics and physics and to integrate that understanding into my understanding of created being in its other aspects.

As I've discussed before, a prominent historian, *Carroll Quigley* (see [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Carroll\\_Quigley](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Carroll_Quigley)) has claimed that the economic system of Western Civilization nearly collapsed twice before and new forms of economic organization were found so that West could return to a robust health—see Chapter 405, *Ways of Thought in the Modern West*. Those collapses don't seem to me to have been brought on by decay processes, though there was some moral and cultural decay which occurred as part of those processes. It seems to me that the very expansion and success of the West created conditions more complex and more abstract than the earlier forms of thought and feeling could handle. Those who accept the usual understanding of 'abstract' should be at least a little surprised by this prior statement but I intend it to be taken more or less literally. In my

way of thought, the abstract is a different level of being from the concrete but is also part of Creation and not some formality which doesn't really have an existence. I think the West reached a state of complexity centuries ago which indicates that abstract being is more directly a part of our technology, our politics, our art, our philosophy, and so on. During those two earlier periods of near-collapse, our ancestors needed to respond and to develop more powerful minds that could generalize from the concrete up to a more abstract level. The results were impressive, but the advancement of technology and of our understanding of fundamental aspects of created being has accelerated and we're in worse shape than ever. The remainder of this article is an effort to show how I clarified, somewhat, my own ideas upon this subject because of recent contemplations upon a nasty event in New England history – the war known as *King Phillip's War*, described at [http://http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/King\\_Phillips\\_War](http://http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/King_Phillips_War), a war waged by some of the Indian tribes against the European settlers and some Indian allies.

The details of the war aren't at issue here except for a general background understanding. My interest lies in an important stream of thoughts and attitudes of New England European colonists which showed itself during the period of King Phillip's War, a stream which I think to represent a failed intellectual maturing process on the part of highly educated and intelligent men in confrontation with alien cultures. Instead of moving towards a proper abstraction that would have allowed a defense of their own culture but also an understanding of the human good in a different way of life, the European settlers raised their particular way of life to a self-righteous ideal. A conflict of cultures was seen as a war between God's servants, the White settlers, and Satan's slaves, the Indians. This stream, which may have been nascent in Puritan thought from the time they first stepped into that wilderness region of the New World, developed fully during the lead-up to the war as the Puritan leaders dealt with the growing resistance of the Indians to the expansion of settled ways of life.

I'll mention one other relevant complication—the Puritan leaders were also blind to a problem that was affecting their relationships to the Indians who were baptized and living lives superficially similar to those of the European settlers. Those baptized Indians were strange creatures who had been shorn of the externalities of their native culture without truly becoming what the Puritan preachers wanted them to be—English Protestants. Rather than preaching the Gospel and letting it take, or not take, an In-

dian shape, the Puritans tried to make those Indians into inferior images of themselves.

This historical mess indicates we'd reached the point centuries ago where we needed to develop the language and concepts and mental tools to deal with the multiple levels of reality created by a world become far more complex than can be handled by the physical perceptions and simple models of reality held by an English mind of the early Enlightenment. As the human mind has encapsulated more and more of the richness and complexity of Creation, we've created not only powerful technologies but also forms of social and political relationships which make promises of wonderful possibilities even as they threaten our freedom and our flesh-and-blood relationships and much else. How are we to develop the possibility of richer and more profound moral thought and discourse? How are we to regain control of our individual lives and, by doing so, reshape the West into a morally well-ordered civilization?

I'd suggest that we start by familiarizing ourselves with the tools developed by Gauss and Einstein and Heisenberg and so many others, tools which deal with a reality in which time and space and matter are different from what Plato or Augustine or Aquinas or Kant thought them to be. From there, we can build up layers of understanding which correspond to complex things and even living creatures, especially those complex creatures called human beings. To be sure, some moral philosophers and theologians and novelists have made steps towards a recognition of the world as described by modern empirical knowledge, but we're far from a true integration of scientific 'facts' and 'theories' into our general ways of thought.

Let me return to the bloody mess known as King Phillip's War. I rely upon the narration and discussion of events which is found in the book *The Name of War: King Phillip's War and the Origins of American Identity* by the historian Jill Lepore, but I'll simplify matters by considering only two fairly well-defined groups of human beings:

1. American Indians who wished to continue a nomadic existence that was being disrupted by the spread of White settlements, and
2. white settlers who were spreading rapidly, especially through the river valleys, and were disrupting the nomadic patterns of life by clearing forest, letting domestic animals take the food of wild animals, filling in blueberry bogs, etc.

The first group was made up of tribes led by that man who was called King Phillip by the settlers, a man who saw that the Indian way of life was endangered by the very existence of the European settlements. King Phillip apparently wasn't prejudiced against Europeans as individuals. As was generally true with nomadic American Indians, he was biased against settled cultures and not the individuals from those cultures and was very generous from his standpoint in trying to integrate captured Europeans into the Indian way of life. Since the Indians had no written language and the transmission of their oral histories was disrupted, we don't know too much about how most of them viewed matters but there was fairly widespread support for King Phillip's war against the White settlers and many of the Indians fighting with the White men or standing on the sidelines did so because they considered King Phillip, his followers, and his allies to be more immediate enemies than the Europeans. The Europeans, with a few notable exceptions, saw the conflict as one between good and evil.

What's of interest to me in this situation is the apparent lack of intellectual detachment, the lack of abstraction from their particular situation, on the part of the European settlers. There is the appearance of abstraction in the highly literate writings of the Puritan intellectuals but that was really an idealization of a particular and concrete human culture. That is, they idealized a set of beliefs and ways of life not even held by all Englishmen, seeing those beliefs and ways of life as human norms for all times and places. True abstraction generalizes from the particular and specifically recognizes the possibilities of other particulars, in this case, of other ways to realize the moral good in human lives. The sort of pseudo-abstraction I call idealization seems to be common among modern thinkers, beginning at least with Kant's raising of the Newton's speculative and empirical view of time and space to the status of metaphysical truth. The Modern Age may well be an elementary school of sorts, a place for learning, or failing to learn, how to think in terms of proper abstractions that we might have a greater understanding of Creation, but we men of the West are not doing well outside of physics and mathematics and technology.

We've advanced in our technology very noticeably, allowing the development of, for example, ways of getting at natural resources deep underground and of fashioning them into useful artifacts or processing them for use as fuels. Our technology has allowed a tremendous growth of the population of the human race and a confusing complexity of political and social and moral relationships. We no longer understand ourselves or our societies and we

are, in that sense, “lost in the Cosmos.” It’s better to think of us as children in a situation where adults are needed. We need richer and more complex understandings of human morality at the level of our modern complexity of community and political life and also at the level of an individual navigating through this modern mess. And then we need to mature according to those understandings, but I’ll stick to the learning part of this process for now. After all, the implementation of what we learn, if we learn it, is done by way of lots of small-scale experiments in ways of life and ways of thought. It’s not possible to write an authoritative manual for good forms of human life in the 21st century, but it is possible to explore possibilities in the flesh or in fictional narratives.

Those who abstract only by idealizing their particular beliefs and ways of life will remain trapped by their prejudices, country yokels come to the big city and seeing no choices but to give up their ways of life fully or to react against the surrounding confusion by withdrawing into self-righteousness and maybe outright hatred. Only he who learns to abstract up to higher levels can truly see the viewpoint of others and see the goodness in multiple cultures which are in conflict even when he decides that he’s morally bound to side with one. For example, someone might see the goodness in the nomadic life of the New England Indians while deciding either that English Christian culture is far richer or simply that a larger, more settled population is morally preferable to a nomadic society of the few.

Some of the Puritan leaders of New England during the period of King Phillip’s War were very well-read in Newton and all were well-read in the Bible and classical literature and Calvinist theology, yet they proved unable or unwilling to ascend to a higher level of abstraction during the conflict with King Phillip and the tribes which followed him into war. Staying bound in their own concrete manifestation of Christianity and Western Civilization, they failed to see their position was not one of good and God-centered men fighting against a Satanic enemy but rather that of somewhat good and would-be God-centered men fighting to expand the domain of one manifestation of the Christian West. The enemy wasn’t Satanic but rather barbaric and nomadic. A suitable amount of competent abstract thought on the part of the European settlers of New England would have allowed them to see the true good they were defending but also the good the nomadic Indians were losing. A truer and more just peace might have been obtained even though I doubt the war could have been avoided.

Is it now possible for the West, as a civilization, to achieve greater

competence in the abstract thought necessary to understand our complex selves and our complex civilization? We seem about to needlessly destroy our own civilization because of the same sort of self-righteous blindness which led the New England settlers to misunderstand their conflict with King Phillip and his followers. The New England founders dug a rut of sorts and we Americans seem to have traveled that rut in the ensuing three and a half centuries. We've even managed to idealize that rut into the path of truth and righteousness and we claim to be trying to teach peoples around the world to travel those wonderful ruts with us.

## 409 Individuals and Herds

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=549>. It was finished and uploaded on 2009/06/30.]

This short article, *Conformists may kill civilizations* found at <http://www.nature.com/news/2009/090624/full/news.2009.593.html> is about an effort to find, in archaeological and evolutionary biological terms, a way of speaking of the odd fact that the residents of a once successful but collapsing civilization will go on acting the same way they, or their ancestors, did when that civilization was prosperous and growing. Having studied the mindlessly habitual behavior of Mayans as their civilization was being destroyed by environmental damage, these archaeologists in the article were able to see the likelihood that most human beings are conformists who don't even see the need to act differently from their habitual ways as things are falling apart around them. As we can see in the current financial and political disasters of the United States and some European countries, even those who are as aggressive as wolves are still sheep in the sense of conforming to once successful models of behavior even as the evidence grows that fundamental change is needed.

Banks are only one of many institutions which are failing and responding by continuing to do what hasn't worked lately but to maybe do it more intensely and more efficiently. There are schools, churches at various levels of organizations, government at all levels in the United States, publishers of newspapers and also publishers of books, who have acted no more sanely to their share of our current problems. Schools are particularly important since they're responsible for teaching the susceptible many to march along in a herd and for doing what they can to restrict the development of those inclined to think on their own. I remember learning in fifth grade that I had to watch *The Monkees* if I wished to be able to talk with my

classmates during recess. And, so, began a hobby of watching television which—quite fortunately—ended a few decades ago. Though I'll occasionally catch snatches of a show when I visit a dedicated television-watcher, I'm happy to say I'm mostly mystified by the blandly good-looking faces on those magazines at supermarket checkout aisles.

In the modern West, especially during the American dominated years following World War I, innovators haven't been particularly valued unless they produced new products and services for an increasingly passive citizenry, passive in an intellectual and spiritual sense. This, of course, has led to a frightening homogenization of speech patterns, entertainment habits, professed political beliefs, etc. across large swaths of the earth's surface. This wasn't a new phenomenon, but rather a maturation of a problem which Tocqueville saw when he came to the United States in the 1830s and observed a new sort of man being shaped by liberal democracy—a self-brainwashing herd animal.

But there are deeper matters than those which most label as 'politics' and 'economics'. A complex economy and a sophisticated political system are structures built upon a foundation of ideas about reality, ideas made manifest in the truly great literary works of a civilization—not the genteel ones produced by trained writers during periods of decadence but the works like *The Iliad* and *Don Quixote* and *Moby Dick*, the raw and powerful works exploring our relationships to some significant aspects of Creation. Those sorts of works, along with some more abstract works about Creation and its Creator, such as Plato's dialogs and Augustine's *The City of God* and Nietzsche's explorations of the mindlessness and soullessness of the post-Christian West, shape our ideas of time and space and matter and movement and human nature. We've not yet seen the Augustine of the modern world who can help us to make sense of the desires of that pretty young woman and also of the exotic physics which lies behind MRIs or even old-fashioned solid-state electronics, unless I'm that thinker or someone else who's being ignored by the mainstream.

Shakespeare was at least of comparable importance to William the Conqueror and Henry VIII in the creation of England as we know her. At a time when England was still a collection of local cultures, Shakespeare provided a call for the residents of those local cultures to join some hitherto non-existent herd of Englishmen. The jingoism of the drama *Henry V* made Cecil Rhodes and the other British empire-builders possible. Arguably, Shakespeare was himself riding a powerful wave and another might

have done that work if the Bard of Avon had never lived or had decided to preach something other than a self-righteous English nationalism. In the United States, we had Emerson's and Thoreau's glorification of a certain selfishness and self-centeredness which Melville labeled as a spiritualized materialism. Emerson's ideas suit us Americans fine while it is hard to read Melville's books, not because of his verbal and narrative experiments but because he deals with a reality we don't much like. We don't even want to be responsible for our children or our elderly parents and Emerson provided a pseudo-rational justification for the public school system and eventually the Social Security system. The counter-culture crowd seems to think of Thoreau as one of them, but he and his teacher were perfect philosophers for a nation of crooked bankers, brainless machine-politicians, and ordinary citizens who tolerated such because they hoped to win that odds-against lottery to join the ranks of the exploitive. On the whole, we Americans, and perhaps all citizens of the modern liberal democracies, revealed ourselves as having that trait Tocqueville feared he saw in us: we have never met a fact that we can't ignore if it's inconvenient to our purposes.

Melville created an Emersonian antihero in Captain Ahab who had the guts to attack Creation and to try to get past what wouldn't respond to his desires. Captain Ahab strived to attack the Creator rather than sitting in a Cambridge study and whining. Americans over the years since Emerson have been a mix of the two, brutal but squeamishly looking away from their own actions and the actions of the harpooners they send out against God's creatures. I should note that there are some serious Southern thinkers, alive and dead, who have seen this moral disease as located in the New England soul. They're more right than wrong, but the disease seems to have spread throughout the West because it's the perfect mind-set for conformists, self-justification presented as philosophy. The American attitude was showing clearly during King Phillip's War as I discussed in Chapter 408, *The Need for Abstractions in Moral Self-understanding*. Puritan thinkers failed to properly abstract from their own morality with the result that they associated their ways of thought and of life with absolute truth. This is to say that their concrete ways provided a false abstraction of human nature and human possibilities, but a very convenient abstraction. Men of the modern West can be willfully ignorant and culpably stupid while speaking in grandiose moral terms.

We need new ways of thought, respecting the past for what it is, doing our best to understand it but not remaining trapped in it that we might

respond to a ever-changing world. We need to start at a fundamental level where physics and mathematics have enriched our understanding of time and space and matter and movement and the nature of thought. Those new ways of thought won't save the West in the short-term. If the West continues its collapse into barbarism, those new ways of thought won't lead to any obvious signs of a new civilization before the next election of an American President. Between the end of the High Middle Ages and the beginning of the Renaissance, Europeans suffered through a century of stupidity and disease and famine and brutal violence. That period of suffering was short by other such periods between the collapse of a great civilization and the rise of another. We can hope to make the current period still shorter, but that new civilization or new phase of Western Civilization won't appear anytime soon unless men alive now are willing to sacrifice for and work for a great good not to be seen in our lifetimes.

The spiritualized materialism which Melville diagnosed in the thoughts of Emerson and Thoreau is founded upon a poisonous but powerful way of thought that can be described with equal strangeness as an idealized particularism. United with the conformist tendencies of the majority of human beings and financed, so to speak, by the spectacular prosperity of economic and political forms which encourage conformism of a sort which can be labeled a decentralized totalitarianism, we end with a mass of humanity in the modern West which is remarkably resistant to reality. They are frightened by change, but that's a normal human response which I also feel. More importantly to those of us who are puzzled by the ongoing repetition of what's not working, conformist men are blind to the need or even possibility of true change. They try to deal with their fears of things that roar in the dark by denying that there are such creatures as man-eating bears or knife-wielding men. When those denials seem to endanger them, conformist men lift their wrists to bear the shackles of those who promise to protect them.

## 410 As the Ruins Crumble...

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=565>. It was finished and uploaded on 2009/07/28.]

The policy analysts, Right and Left, are working hard to assign blame for the problems of modern economies and polities. In the United States, they examine taxation and regulation policies of governments from Washington's administration right up to that of Obama. They also examine the strong dislike Americans have for taxes along with the longing they have for the promises of security which can be fulfilled – in the short-run—only by a government with strong powers of taxation. We argue about social security but few get to the real point—social bonds are formed by our dependencies upon each other and our willingness, even the desire of many, to be dependent upon a central government rather than upon relatives and neighbors speaks of matters deeper than the technical details of financing our elderly years. Social security could have been pretty much the same if it had been designed specifically to implement in a gentle way the goals of Lenin and Hitler and Mao—the destruction of the ties which bind human beings into families and other local communities. FDR and LBJ succeeded where those great tyrants failed.

Americans, modern men of the West in general, are willfully stupid and ignorant creatures. I've spoken of this often, as have the likes of Tocqueville, Hawthorne, Melville, Ray Bradbury, Solzhenitsyn, and Gore Vidal. Seemingly a strange group, especially with Bradbury, an interesting writer and thinker but hardly one at the level of the others in the list. He joins them in his intelligent sensitivity to moral issues and his willingness to ask tough questions. Way back in the 1950s, as one example, he was one of a handful greatly worried about the power of television to suck out our minds and souls to complete, in a manner of speaking, the true American Revolution,

the revolution desired by the decent and cowardly members of the herd rather than the revolution desired by the true noble amongst the Founding Fathers and rather than the revolution desired by the bravely greedy amongst the Founding Fathers.

Melville wrote about his fears of a basic defect in the moral character of Americans, one which may now be found around the world. More exactly, Melville first saw a deep flaw in the expressed thoughts of Emerson and Thoreau and then began to fear it was a true sign of a basic American trait. What was this trait? He wrote in his diaries at one time of hearing Emerson speak for the first time and being impressed in some regards but feeling that the sage of Cambridge, if he'd been present at the moment of Creation, would have had some good advice for the Almighty. In the margins of a copy of Emerson's writings, he was said to have written a plea for God to help the poor man who organized his soul according to these teachings. In the strange and interesting novel, *The Confidence Man*, he portrayed Emerson as the philosopher who spoke gobbledy-gook, who advocated a genteel sort of self-centeredness that denied true love for the other. Thoreau was portrayed as his practical pupil who put this perverse morality into words that appealed to the many who couldn't read Emerson. Melville once described Emerson's teachings as a sort of spiritualized materialism. And he wrote *Moby Dick* as his awareness of this moral defect in the American mind and soul was growing. That novel, which breaks all the rules taught by advocates of mediocrity, had some interesting scenes such as the brutal behavior of the American whalers who stumbled upon a birthing ground and bloodied the waters killing the mothers and their calves, not only showing an opportunistically murderous streak but also a lack of concern for the future of their own way of making a living. And, of course, there was Captain Ahab. Was he Ralph Waldo Emerson with the courage of his convictions? Was he the 'mainstream' American who had the strength to attack a Creation which didn't meet his standards and the honesty to refuse to willingly accept his status as a creature?

Were all the American war-crimes from the time of the early wars against American Indians acts which ring true to some evil deep inside of us rather than being just temporary aberrations? I wrote of King Phillip's War in Chapter 408, *The Need for Abstractions in Moral Self-understanding* and my belief that the crimes committed by the colonists from Europe (the American Indians were far from a state of innocence), and perhaps their prosecution of the war as a whole, came as the colonists—for all the high

education of their leaders and scholars—proved incapable of generalizing from their own ways of life to wider human possibilities. They thought the Indians were evil because they resisted becoming a certain type of middle-class, dissenting Englishman.

The Puritans leaders and thinkers feared signs of something I would have considered good—some of the European settlers were adopting some Indian ways. Two peoples (speaking very simplistically) were living in the same region and might have been able to form a new way of life, but the Puritan leaders thought any compromise of their ways of life to be a surrender to Satan and some of the Indian leaders, including King Phillip, saw that a compromise would force the Indians to adopt a more settled way of life. They preferred to die and to lead their followers to death rather than give up that nomadic life.

Modern Americans are much like those Puritan leaders—precocious adolescents. They and we have advanced to a high level of concrete and moralistic ways of thought, but we've refused to even see the need and desirability to move on towards adulthood. This is almost certainly the explanation for the phenomena noticed many years ago by some European observer: The United States is the first country to go directly from barbarism to decadence without passing through the state of civilization. Mom and Dad have gone away and the kids have control over the house and the checkbook. Those kids were well-raised and go off to school and work each day, even with Mom and Dad gone, but they don't know how to spend their leisure hours in activities which will enrich their human beings. It's hardly surprising that the thugs down the street have taken over the neighborhood and are grabbing up what hasn't yet been destroyed or used up in the name of a good time.

This claim isn't in conflict with the great success of Americans in many realms, nor is it in conflict with the reality of promising American cultures, even hints of a civilization, which showed themselves regularly in the 1800s and less frequently since then. An immature people might be precocious and high-achieving barbarians so long as they are able to inhabit a civilization built and maintained by others. We Americans were, in a deep sense though not a political sense, colonists of Western Civilization as incarnated in the British Isles in recent years. Then, the highly honored idiot-leaders of Europe decided, beginning in the early 1900s, to destroy each other's countries over differences that could have barely justified an old-fashioned, pre-modern duel between warlords and a few thousand of their mercenaries.

Since then, the Europeans and Americans have become parasites of a sort, drawing down the bank-accounts left us by centuries of thinkers and doers.

In any case, our problems are deeper than even the inability of the bankers and corporate executives and politicians of the West to make money any way other than selling productive assets overseas. Our basic problems reach down into our very souls and minds, into our most fundamental relationships to God and Creation and man. Those basic problems are the cause of the lack of intelligence and the lack of moral integrity that lies behind the American belief that we can make our livings by selling to each other goods made overseas and serving each other steaks and micro-brews while purchasing the plate-ware and mugs from countries of cheap labor. Those basic problems help to explain the American belief we bankrupt citizens can somehow get together to pay each other's mortgages—with Washington and Wall Street taking a cut in the process.

Many are the classical liberals and libertarians who seem to think that we can solve our problems by getting the government off our back and getting back to work, unlikely as it is that Washington or Boston/Albany/Sacramento/. . . will shrink to more appropriate sizes. The problem is that, as I've discussed in a few entries, the human mind which is so important to our ability to function in a complex civilization has developed along with that civilization. If that civilization has decayed, or has never taken root in the case of the United States, that tells us that few are those who have minds well-formed enough to really understand themselves as individuals living in complex societies embedded in complex political structures. Few can even understand such abstract concepts as property rights or even rights over their own persons. It takes many generations to build a civilization but once destroyed, in perhaps a single century, the foundations are gone. Those foundations are found in the minds and souls of civilized people and they are not to be restored or replaced by simply educating barbarian children. It takes many generations to go from barbarism to civilization when the foundations need rebuilding.

I've written of the contingent nature of the human mind, that is the aspects of a human being that work with abstractions—see Chapter 250, *Preliminary Thoughts on the Evolution of the Human Mind*. Simplistically, the human mind has evolved over eons at the species level though it doesn't seem to have shown itself clearly until circa 600BC when Homer and the succeeding lyric poets had made philosophy and mathematics possible, when some unknown Israelites put together the complex mosaic known as the

Books of Moses, when some unknown Vedic geniuses created Hinduism. No matter how poor or rich the social environment, the individual mind must develop over a lifetime. Clearly, there are going to be complications as a result of intermediary relationships and entities such as large-scale civilizations and smaller-scale societies, including towns and church communities and extended families. It takes centuries, and a lot of hard work on the part of butchers and bakers and poetry-makers, to build a civilization which can then be a home to those smaller-scale societies. In the case of the most recent cycle of Western Civilization, it has taken about five centuries of growth and then decay in literacy and reasoning skills to bring us to a sad point—see Jacques Barzun’s *From Dawn to Decadence* [9] for a powerful narration of this most recent major period in the West.

We aren’t the proudly independent and hardworking retailers and manufacturers that Adam Smith observed. Those Glasgow Scots of the mid-1700s were self-seeking but highly constrained by damaged but largely intact moral and social structures. We should be careful in applying Adam Smith’s thought to modern Americans who possess little of the humanly defective but certainly strong moral characters of an eighteenth century Scotsman. And those Scotsmen lived in a society that demanded certain types of behavior from its merchants and professionals. Whatever one thinks of the specifics of that morality, it provided a good framework for freedom in the marketplace, that is, one merchant could trust another if only because he knew the price the other would pay for behavior seen as wrongful.

I’ll go no further into those sorts of issues, preferring to make the more fundamental, and Thomistic, claim that we are intentional animals. Our moral natures and our minds develop in an organic manner producing physical changes including changes in external relationships. For now, I’ll ignore the complication that our relationship to our Creator isn’t quite external and deal with the other aspects of our lives.

Man is a particular creature, each of us developing by our responses to our environments—which sometimes include some representation of the entire universe or even some additional parts of Creation. But our environments and our readily available responses, our habits and customs, are the results of historical processes themselves made possible by billions of years of evolution. I believe man has become the sort of creature who can, in principle, encapsulate all of Creation within his mind, thus imitating by way of understanding what God did in creating this world and all else that is part of Creation. That implies there are some proper directions for

our development. To transcend our immediate environments and even to understand the depths of our own human nature, we have to develop our abstract reasoning abilities. To move towards a state where we are truly images of God, we have to be like Jesus Christ, true persons who move with freedom yet do the will of the Father.

Western man was moving in the right direction, not that we can ever reach our most highly desired destination by our own efforts, nor can we even truly see that destination this side of the grave. Then, Western man was diverted by a struggle for forms of material prosperity not fit for human beings—we sought prosperity for its own sake and not for the sake of what it makes possible for us and our children. Having lost his bearings, Western man, in his political collectives, has become a murderous and treacherous beast indeed.

In any case, we are in the presence of that famous cliché, a two-sided coin. On one side, we find my claim that our main problem is more profound than the problems discussed on so many websites and on all the cable news channels. In future generations, those lesser problems will likely be seen as symptoms of the more profound breakdown of Western Civilization. One way of seeing the nature of this breakdown is to simply ask: What understanding do men of the West now have of Creation? Any answer would be an incoherent mixture of contradictory elements. We don't exist to advance towards heaven, at least not as the West as a whole. We move as a herd of anthropoid creatures, but we don't really move with a common purpose beyond the satisfaction of needs and desires which are unnecessary and sometimes dehumanizing.

On the other side of the coin is the open possibilities of building a new phase of Western Civilization. If the people of the West prove not to be interested, or if they prove to be not up to the task, those who can produce a greater understanding of Creation and of man's place in it can teach the men of the recovering civilizations of the East, and also teach men in regions where new civilizations might arise. In any case, this work of understanding Creation can be quite demanding but also great fun much of the time. Always demanding and sometimes fun. Even when I struggle, doing odd jobs sometimes, to get a pittance to pay my small bills, I'd rather be doing what I'm doing than what the great predators of the decaying West are doing. And what I'm doing right now is contemplating what I've written and wondering how much of the analysis can be enriched but also made more rigorous by applying the understandings of time and

space and matter which come from modern physics and mathematics. For example, is there a better way, in terms drawn from modern geometry or tensor calculus, to speak of the multiple levels of development of the human mind: species and civilizational and individual?



# 411 Defining Landscapes and Possible Paths, Not Determining Paths

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=583>. It was finished and uploaded on 2009/08/12.]

I'm stumbling along with my project to enlarge and enrich our moral discourse by drawing upon the modern mountains of partially processed empirical knowledge, including some disturbing information about our inability to anticipate or prevent the development of evil in our own societies. I'm learning or relearning—at an elementary level – some of the most important tools of modern mathematics and physics, in particular those necessary to understand the revised, and still evolving, understandings of time and space and matter. I'm also reading history and novels again and have retrieved a few unread books by serious brain-scientists or evolutionary theorists. At some point, the pot will begin to boil, and I hope to find I'm cooking up something interesting.

In all of this, I would hope any readers would realize that I'm not making any sort of assault upon human freedom though I think standard doctrines of so-called free-will are in serious conflict with those inconvenient things called facts and—even more importantly—with any coherent stories to be derived from the various facts of modern neuroscience, evolutionary theory, history, literary explorations of human nature, and the actual working methods and recorded thoughts of the likes of Einstein and Feynman, Gilson and MacIntyre. See Chapter 385 *Is this Evidence Against Free-will?* for a discussion on experimental evidence that our free-will isn't what we think it to be. Perhaps part of our moral problems are due to our misunderstand-

ing of how we make decisions and of the sort of freedom appropriate to a human being.

I'm charting out our world, our more complex world which has emerged as a living story. I'm also trying to speak, especially in my novels, about our relationships to others and to our world. I might state my preferences on how to best traverse this world but I'll try to make those clear as I try to provide ways of describing human possibilities, immense territories with a huge number of possible paths. It will be up to individuals and communities to begin cutting paths through the woods or to begin exploring other sorts of wilderness regions, to try different ways of organizing their moral movements through this world. I'd be happy just to provide some of the concepts and words which might help make possible those efforts.

One need is words to speak of the different shapes of our moral spaces at different levels of our hugely scaled and immensely complex world, family vs nation as one example. I think we'll see a great problem because we, or at least our community and religious and professional leaders on our behalf, have given a great deal of control over our lives to organizations which work top-down, killing all natural development just when mathematicians and other scientists are discovering the apparent dominance of self-organizing systems in this world. Our entire universe seems to be such a system and each living creature from bacterium to blue whale is such a system. Wolves interact in such ways as to set in motion self-organizing processes that form packs and even somewhat larger scale social structures when multiple packs interact on boundaries of their territories or when they move alongside each other to follow migrating caribou herds. Human beings form a dangerously rich set of interactive structures from the so-called nuclear family and individual friendships through extended families and local communities all the way up through nations to supra-national groups formal and informal.

The best that can be done right now is for historians or sociologists to tackle pieces of this big mess, without having a coherent way to view or discuss human moral, social, and political life in a more complete way, without having ways for an individual to have a coherent view of his relationships to family and friends, to local community and national government, to church and larger-scale religious communities.

Think for a moment of a social, moral, and political problem which is tied to purely physical foundations: How do we move ourselves and our goods from one location to another, within our local communities, to other nearby communities, across the continent, and to regions on the other side of

the earth? First of all, we Americans, and most others, of this age will think of this problem in false terms of the cold-war bureaucrats and cold-warrior politicians who reshaped the United States into a form more useful to them by way of building the highway system and otherwise stealing resources to create a car-centered life. When we fall into this bureaucratic view, we'll see the United States, or any other country, as just a piece of real estate upon which we can impose a grid of interstate highways connecting to state roads connecting to roads which go to malls or through neighborhoods in suburbs or inner cities. You don't have to study the works of *Jane Jacobs* (see [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Jane\\_Jacobs](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Jane_Jacobs) or other critics of these highway systems to realize that such road systems designed top-down will not just provide for transportation routes. They'll destroy or destabilize neighborhoods. They'll put a town which will benefit from a bridge in conflict with the town on the other side of the river which might well disappear or change to a different sort of community if that bridge is built.

In other words, a simple road system, when designed in a simplistically rational way, begins to distort various sorts of social and political spaces, moving 'social mass' from one point to another or creating black-holes or intergalactic voids. I'm writing as I think and won't try to elaborate this sort of idea for now, but the point is that sometimes we might need *Salvador Dali* (see [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Salvador\\_Dali](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Salvador_Dali)) if we wish to have a realistic map of a road system scaled to its local effects on human beings and their flesh-and-blood communities.

What interests me now isn't so much a static view of our current state so much as ways of speaking of our movements upon the various social, moral, and political paths of our lives and of the lives of our communities. First of all, we need to recognize that that the paths we travel in our social and political and moral lives are themselves dynamic, being reshaped by our own movement, the movements of other human beings including the gathering into communities, and various changes in our physical environments. The paths we travel, the possible paths ahead of us, can be twisted by the actions of others and by the very existence of large-scale groupings of human beings which can distort moral space in the manner that a black-hole can distort spacetime.

We need to be able to qualitatively discuss our movements through moral, social, and political spaces. We need to be able to define and use invariant relationships that allow us to discuss relative distances as well as

forces and so-called pseudo-forces which push us aside or spin us around or even suck us down into some pit. Even a great truth can be distorted by changes in the path or in other external conditions. It's good to become a self-supporting and family-supporting worker but blindly doing so can make a human being into a widget of an evil bureaucracy. Your father minded his own business, went to the machine-shop each workday and brought home a paycheck to pay the mortgage and the taxes. A good man, good father and good citizen. If you do the same thing, you might be supporting a country turned towards evil ways. I hate to pick on the Germans of the 1930s all the time, but they provide a benchmark of sorts for a change in the moral spaces of the West. A man who was a hardworking factory supervisor in 1910 and lived the standard middle-class life was a morally responsible human being. His son who did the same in 1935 was a servant of evil. We should appreciate the problem of the common man in 1930s Germany who was not equipped to even recognize what had happened to him or to discuss it in coherent problems.

I'm still taking baby-steps, but I'm beginning to intuit a qualitative but disciplined way of speaking in which Germans traveled a path which remained upon a regularly shaped surface, corresponding to a reasonable manifestation of Western civilization and its traditional morality, but began skirting near a cusp of sorts by at least the 1920s and then moved over that cusp onto, perhaps, a funnel-shaped surface where a single misstep led to a slide down into a spout which empties into a moral pit of sorts. Such a slide can be seen as due to a moral 'pseudo-force' similar to gravity. Movements transverse to the general movement of a man's community could also cause a pseudo-force which would induce a spinning and a curvature of that man's movements, a moral Coriolis force.

## 412 Narrative Plausibility as Approximation to Truth

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=601>. It was finished and uploaded on 2009/09/28.]

It seems to be hard to say in what sense a truth can exist apart from a context, even one so seemingly clear as  $1 + 1 = 2$  or “Two contradictory statements cannot both be true.” Think of it in terms of works such as Whitehead and Russell’s *Principia Mathematica* which attempted to ground our ‘intuitions’ about arithmetic upon an elaborate formal apparatus. In order to build that apparatus a large amount of sophisticated mathematical thought is already assumed. This doesn’t mean that such works are useless—they can be at least consistency checks—but it does mean such works don’t provide a foundation for our belief that  $1 + 1 = 2$ . I believe it was Wittgenstein who pointed out that the apparatus of Whitehead and Russell used a system of indexing which assumed the very truths which were to be justified.

It seems more likely that our mathematical systems are the result of bootstrapping operations which have sometimes moved slowly and have sometimes involved jumps to new plateaus especially during the explosion of mathematical thought which began with Leibniz and Newton and, maybe, hasn’t yet ended. After some digestion of these these major jumps, and perhaps at times when smaller jumps have accumulated, mathematicians have reformulated human understanding of what mathematics is and what formal truths are. This is not to deny the large amount of exploration which can be done on each plateau once a formal understanding has been accepted, but I’m not setting out to produce a serious work of the history of mathematical thought. I’m raising a very large claim:

Individual truths, as creatures can know them, are true only in context of the entirety of Creation, though our view of that entirety is necessarily time-bound and contingent.

Or at least: those individual truths need a context, but the context has to be larger in scale the more encompassing or more abstract the individual truth at issue. Absolute truths have to be a plausible part of a narrative understanding of Creation. Plato and Aristotle produced a narrative of sorts for higher pagan thought but they didn't do it in a self-conscious manner as did Augustine when he produced, in *The Confessions* and *The City of God*, a well-organized narrative for a system combining Christian theological beliefs and Neoplatonic metaphysics. St. Thomas Aquinas also produced such a narrative oriented strongly towards an empiricism nearly buried at times beneath a Medieval style of rational argumentation and also elaborate Neoplatonic decoration which played no essential role in his thought and in which he doesn't seem to have really believed.

If we follow these great pre-modern thinkers, updating to what we now know of Creation and cleaning up some of their errors of substance and presentation, we find that there is still the need for intellectual developmental processes which involve bootstrapping. We have to rebuild even those parts of the foundation which are in good shape to recover a truer understanding and to integrate it into the parts we'll be adding.

I'm trying to produce a very explicit, but very sketchy, narrative of Creation. I'm a child of an age of some substantial historical awareness, an awareness that cuts across true (human) history, our understandings of the evolution of life, our understandings of the development of this expansionary phase of our universe, etc.

As our understanding of all these narratives has become more sophisticated, we've found ourselves facing a conundrum of sorts. Under my claim that truths are contextual, we can say the ancient Greeks could understand the elementary truths of arithmetic in light of arithmetic itself along with their understanding of geometry, physics, and some sort of Platonic-Aristotelian understanding of the human mind. Now arithmetic can only be truly understood as part of a whole that includes transfinite set theory, modern logic, quantum physics and all that, more modern understandings of the human mind, etc. We can now see the world as a far more complex story, more complex in its plot but also in its material stuff and its characters. Even simple truths are part of a not so simple whole.

I believe that Wittgenstein said something of this sort: the search for the foundations of our universe may well reveal that the foundations are supported by the superstructure. This is in the same spirit as my claim.



## 413 Freedom and Structure in Human Life

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=621>. It was finished and uploaded on 2009/12/29.]

Over the past twenty years or so—beginning with some novels, I’ve been creating a worldview on a somewhat disorganized basis, that is, I was writing as ideas came to me, sometimes addressing a few moral issues, than a theological belief, then a modern understanding of a basic mathematical or physical entity—such as ‘random number’ or ‘universe’. My store of ideas is now large enough to move on to an effort to write a more systematic work which will start with a summary volume and then will move on to a more detailed discussion of created being in its various levels along the spectrum from abstractness to concreteness. Along that path, I’ll deal with some theological issues since divine being, God who is His own Act-of-being, is the source of created being in both its abstract phases or levels and its concrete phases or levels. As Aquinas pointed out, we learn God’s wisdom by studying His creatures. (I understand ‘wisdom’ in this context as something like perfect knowledge, but that’s another issue.)

For now, I’m playing around with some ideas about created reality at the narrative level, the level where created being is shaped to fulfill some purposes—need I write “moral purposes”? —of the Creator. Within that narrative, men form political communities. Remembering that human nature evolved at the species level over billions of years and that a particular human nature (human being) develops of the course of his life, we have to ask how human relationships could be any different. Human relationships must also evolve at some ‘species’ level and develop in their individual instances, including those often complex and multi-layered relationships

which are ‘political’.

How is it that Plato or Aristotle or Hobbes or Rousseau or Marx could tell us how we should organize our political relationships when those are actions and aspects of human beings who are creatures of a developing world of empirical processes? I don’t wish to attack pre-modern thinkers nor even those who did their work when the modern enterprises of gathering empirical knowledge were well under way. I do wish to encourage a different attitude towards our efforts to understand political or other aspects of human nature. Likely it is that the evolutionary tree of political species is highly complex if less so than the evolutionary tree of life on earth. Likely it is that there are more such political species than there are recognized nations. Likely it is that new species will come into existence as we move forward. Likely it is that species of political systems are parts of complex environments and can’t even be understood apart from those environments. Likely it is that the work has hardly begun on understanding the branches and nodes on that tree of political species.

Let me be true to character. I’ll digress. . .

The human mind as we know it seems to have come into being in relatively recent times. In the creation of Judaism as a coherent monotheism, the creation of Hinduism as a coherent philosophical polytheism, and the creation of Greek philosophical/scientific thought – all in the sixth century BC or so, we see the first clear signs of human abstract reasoning. As the human mind developed, human civilization became more complex. Prior to the development of higher-level abstract reasoning, the technologies of earlier civilizations, such as the development of building techniques in Egypt, seem to have developed by trial and error and not by design. Apparently, the pyramids were built to proportions corresponding to ‘mystical’ numbers because earlier pyramids were built to greater heights relative to the lengths of the bases and those pyramids collapsed, killing workers and supervisors alike. As biological evolution is said to operate by blind experimentation of a sort, so early human technology operated by half-blind experimentation. Now, we can see more clearly, but I’ll note that truly new technology – such as quantum computing devices—still must be developed in part by clear-sighted analysis of half-blind experimentation. The world is not a tinker toy device and we must acquire empirical knowledge by experience of some sort.

We’re told by some great thinkers of earlier centuries that governments are monarchies or oligarchies or aristocracies or democracies. Those

thinkers lived early in the development of the human mind and also early in the exploration of possible forms of political organization. Why would we think that men barely in the childhood of human abstract thought, such as Aristotle, could provide us with a complete catalog of political possibilities? Why would we think such a catalog could exist since many human social and economic possibilities had not yet appeared. Why would we think that our belief in such an existing catalog would do aught but trap us in ruts? It seems to me that any effort to discuss the current political mess of the United States in those terms of monarchies and oligarchies and aristocracies and democracies is akin to discussing the nature of elephants in terms of tree-trunks and snakes and ropes.

But preliminary and simplistic ideas were necessary in physics and in political thought as well. Physicists moved on to shape their theories to understandings of created being which were themselves shaped by established theories or known holes in established theories or perhaps rawer forms of empirical knowledge. Political scientists and philosophers, those who deal with human nature in any of its aspects, need to pull off a more difficult project since human political organizations aren't mathematical objects but rather real-world entities which come into being by the actions of the same creatures who study them.

Most political thinkers of past centuries wrote as if they had some sort of mystical access to a realm of absolute truth. On the other hand, some political thinkers of recent centuries, have seen the dangers of systematizing done badly or too early and seem to have rejected—perhaps implicitly—the possibility that theory can be properly shaped to the empirical reality of even a narrative of morally ordered or disordered events. I say this acknowledging that a proper political theory or historical theory may not look to be such if one thinks in terms of the rules set down by political philosophers. A more proper theory might have a narrative structure abstracted from the particular narratives of human history. Is that a theory as we currently understand it? Was the story of Adam and Eve perhaps an early version of this sort of narrative theory? In my opinion, that story speaks of an awakening of moral self-awareness, but in a highly abstract way that is sometimes classified as mythical, perhaps because we can only classify early attempts to produce abstract narratives as standard myths. In other words, the story of Adam and Eve might well have been a very conscious literary construction similar to the narratives found in the writings of Plato and Hobbes and Rousseau and Nietzsche.

In my way of looking at things, traditional thinkers were struggling to develop more powerful conceptual tools but their thought wasn't rich enough to handle the real world for a simple reason I'll be mentioning often as I move on to various writings: God, our Creator and Lord, has a richer imagination than men, certainly a richer imagination than the apish men who were our ancestors. We have to learn God's thought by studying His Creation. Even when the implications of Einstein's general theory of relativity were played out by both mathematical development and empirical discoveries, the human mind had to stretch greatly to encapsulate those aspects of this universe. When quantum theory was being first developed, the most open-minded and creative of physicists could hardly believe what they were discovering. Could the greatest of ancient historians or poets have believed that mankind would one day number in the billions, that a man would step on the moon, that old age would be pushed back to the eighth or ninth decade of life?

Let me repeat a speculation I've developed over the past few years and stated in Chapter 590, *Theology, Physics, Philosophy, and Politics* as follows:

1. The components of thing-like being arise by local processes which allow the possibility of some substantial freedom.
2. In this world, certain patterns exist at a global level, including the fundamental structure of space-time. Local entities will respond to those global aspects of this world as they—so to speak—grow up into the world. The local entities will change themselves to somewhat encapsulate what they respond to. Over time, some entities will achieve some sort of success by a combination of proper responses and luck. Other entities will fail. Over time, complex environments will also develop.

It seems to me that all forms of thing-like being in its various and sundry aspects should follow this abstraction. We should be able to develop in political thought (social and moral thought in general) conceptual tools which follow this model as do some of the conceptual tools of physics. We should be able to develop a set of theories and discover a body of empirical knowledge (or reorganize existing knowledge) so to make use of this model of thing-like being in this universe. As quantum mechanics deals with the domain of things arising from processes with substantial freedom and general

relativity deals with the domain of larger-scale structures, so we need to be clearer about theories of human nature, including theories dealing with man's political activities (the realm of freedom) and his political organizations (the realm of constraints imposed by large-scale structures). The unity of this world comes from those larger-scale structures, the shape given to space and time by gravity, just as unity of the human race comes from the larger-scale structure of the Body of Christ shaped to conform to its Head, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Political science and political philosophy should follow physics not in specific calculations but in engaging in both exploration of empirical reality at the emerging thing-like level and at the structure level to which the things must form themselves by response. That formation by response will take place over generations in a way analogous to biological evolution. We should not assume that we have a catalog of either individual human actions or human political organizations (or more generally—any human community). We must act and we must study and contemplate our own actions if we are to understand human nature. We must have hope in the future and faith in God while still realizing that we can't achieve a perfect polity, or any other sort of perfect human community, because new forms of community do arise in history and these give rise to new possibilities which might well be proper parts of the Body of Christ which is the perfect human community.



## 414 Civilization for Dummies

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=628>. It was finished and uploaded on 2010/02/02.]

So far as I know, there is no such book as *Civilization for Dummies* though it's what a modern man might hope to find if, that is, he were aware of the nature or even existence of such a complex entity as a 'civilization'. In fact, modern man has decayed into that barbarian child foreseen by Jose Ortega Y Gasset, a barbarian child living in the midst of a great city from which his parents and other adults have disappeared. The city is simply his natural environment rather than a great work of past generations. Until recently, it has seemed as if there were plenty of material goods for having a good time and generally living well, but we can fear what the rapidly approaching future might hold for us. I wouldn't predict an apocalypse but I might predict a century of darkness, ignorance, and poverty such as that which followed the High Middle Ages, fooling Renaissance and Enlightenment thinkers into believing that the entire Middle Ages had been so dark.

I believe it likely that Western Civilization will eventually revive for it has been quite resilient, surviving not only internal economic and political crises but also barbarian invasions and near-conquest by the Turkish and Berber empires. Moreover, major changes in human views of their world were adopted and integrated into an enlarged and enriched Western intellectual structure. This resiliency and adaptability was largely provided by a balanced respect for the abstract and the concrete, for speculative and empirical knowledge, which was grounded upon the the Christian philosophy of moderate realism summarized by the American historian Carrol Quigley in these words: "The truth unfolds in time through a communal process." (See Chapter 405 , *Ways of Thought in the Modern West*.)

I'll cut through a lot of complicated historical analysis and simply make the claim that books have played an essential role in Western Civilization because they allow us to take empirical data which is beyond the reach of any one mind and to abstract it into knowledge which can then be used in speculative efforts to attain greater understanding. Books allow the construction of complex networks of understanding of Creation which can then be disciplined to God's revelations of His purposes as Creator. Books allow us to better explore and understand and properly use our world.

Nowadays, we of the West are increasingly illiterate. Even many of those in the shrinking pool of highly skilled readers don't always have the attitudes of the literate. All things considered, many of our most highly educated citizens would no more choose to read a difficult book than would our citizens with only rudimentary reading skills. To be truly literate, you must have a great deal of respect for books and for bookish forms of knowledge. You must desire to entertain yourself and teach yourself in bookish ways. You must be as willing to exercise your visual and mental literary skills as a swimmer is to work his lungs and skeletal muscles. It's not sufficient to have good reading skills to be deployed when necessary for immediate purposes. Those reading skills will have been lost just as a swimmer who doesn't work out daily will soon lose his speed and endurance.

Real books, not books written for self-proclaimed dummies, are an ideal form for human beings to engage in a conversation over the centuries. That sort of sustained conversation is a running commentary upon human events, a commentary which forms a narrative too complex for any individual human mind to actually understand, though it's understandable in principle to a human with a well-formed mind. Empirical knowledge from various sources can be bound together by speculation and the entire mess can be abstracted to a higher level which may well cut across cultures or even across phases of Creation.

It was the *City of God* by St. Augustine of Hippo and not *The Idiot's Guide to Christianity in the Roman Empire* which helped found Western Civilization. It was Shakespeare's *Henry V* which gave voice to the English nation as truly such. A Cliff Notes version might be a useful study aid but it's hard to imagine such stuff giving a strong sense of nationhood to a mob of Anglo-Normans and Saxons and Welshmen and Gaels and various and sundry other tribesmen.

The more complex a nation, and certainly a civilization enfolding multiple nations, the more complex the stories which bind the parts and the

whole together. Inhabitants of a complex, well-ordered civilization need a correspondingly complex literacy that a correspondingly complex and well-ordered story, or set of stories, may be told and heard. We have particular problems in our age because our newer and richer understanding of the stuff of this world and how it acts and relates to other stuff is not going to be so easy to integrate into our thoughts as it was to integrate Euclidean geometry and Aristotelian physics nor is our current understanding of the origins and nature of the Bible going to be so easy to integrate as it was to integrate simpler views about Moses being literally the author of the Pentateuch which was seen as speaking literalistic truth about a variety of issues. It will also not be so easy to integrate our modern understanding of man as it was to integrate a simple view that man was created as a creature somehow endowed with something called a ‘mind’.

I’m oversimplifying, but, my point is that so many human beings, including many proclaimed as great thinkers, are convinced that man was given access to absolute truths about Creation and intellectual history was to be no more than filling in some details. We are instead confronted with a world which must be understood by shaping our own ways of thought to match with that reality often upsetting to the genteel souls in our midst, a reality which can’t be described by books which fit on the shelves of any one library.

The narrative of Creation I’m working on—though no one man or even generation could finish it—would consider our inherited knowledge from Jerusalem and Athens, our immense mountains of empirical knowledge, and plausible speculations which tie it all together so that it makes sense as descriptions of stuff created by God and a story being told by God using that stuff. As I said above, this would be a very complex narrative, one certainly not reducible to any sort of *Civilization for Dummies*.

We had a vibrant civilization in the West when we had a substantial number of human beings in the West who had faith in the Biblical stories and some faith in the appropriate and tentative narratives told by their poets and philosophers and—more recently—their physicists and biologists and mathematicians. We have no such faith in the Bible, no narratives worthy of the vast accumulations of knowledge in our libraries and computers. Not surprisingly, we also have a decaying civilization. Despite the belief of some that science and other empirical fields of knowledge have somehow come to dominance over revealed knowledge and faith, I don’t even see evidence there are many scientists or historians who have a coherent view of

science beyond the horizons of their own highly specialized fields. Not only has the center not held, the pieces have themselves fragmented.

# 415 Why We Can't Build or Rebuild the Countries of Other Peoples

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=631>. It was finished and uploaded on 2010/02/06.]

I'm proposing this principle:

A Creation meeting the plausible criteria of unity, coherence, and completeness, would most likely behave in a manner consistent with the manner in which it was created.

In other words, if the evidence strongly tells us that the world and the entities within it develop at the level of individuals and evolve (a different sort of 'develop' in this context) at the level of classes of individuals (stars or *homo sapiens*) is likely the work of a Creator who can be plausibly regarded in this context as a story-teller and not an engineer with bureaucratic inclinations. Modern empirical knowledge indicates strongly we live in a world in which developmental processes dominate and few, if any entities, come to existence in their final state. The specific conversations and acts of God recorded in the Bible also show that He is a story-teller, even a coach for His characters.

I've addressed some of the underlying issues in my writings on this blog and in my first book *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41] as well as a book on the nature of knowledge, *Four Kinds of Knowledge*, which can be downloaded from my website, <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/know.pdf>. For now, I'll avoid further discussion and simply note that, in this world, types of entities, such as species of living creatures, evolve and

individual entities develop by way of internally developed responses to their environments. Even stars develop by processes more closely analogous to character development in a human novel than to the design of a bridge. In the Bible, the Israelites were shaped and molded by God over a period of centuries and the pilgrim Church on earth, however defined, is also being shaped and molded in similar ways.

The erector-set paradigm of engineering design is breaking down even when applied to technology, but that paradigm was never fully accepted by the best of engineers nor by talented tinkerers such as Ford who was aware in his eccentric way of the social effects of not only automobiles and roads but also of the factory system. Electronic circuitry, and certainly such facilities as particle accelerators, have been so complex that no one human being could have much more than a superficial understanding of the totality of the structure. We've come far. In ancient times, trial-and-error construction techniques resulted in unstable pyramids that killed workers and supervisors. A king or one of his officials could more or less organize an entire kingdom, as Joseph the Hebrew did for Pharaoh, but that was also a trial-and-error process that didn't produce results that allowed for both freedom and a well-ordered society.

A movement towards design techniques solved some of those problems, on relatively 'small' or 'simple' projects but then failed when applied to complex technology and certainly failed spectacularly when applied to any complex society, which any human society is, even a society of two. In fact, it really doesn't work very well to plan your own life out and to act as if those plans can be fulfilled exactly. Plans should always be ways of allowing reasonable responses to an ultimately unpredictable world.

Recently, we've heard of 'design' processes, such as those for the Boeing 787, so complex that no one could even know if the darned thing could even be assembled properly until the major sections were flown in from the factories in various parts of the world. Apparently, the engineers at Boeing headquarters demanded that they be allowed to assemble one plane by hand before moving on to regular production. It's perhaps more interesting to consider the social aspects of the construction of a bridge. The best bridge in the world can destroy nearby communities, perhaps because of a conscious concern on the part of designers with larger communities or perhaps because engineers haven't always been aware of the consequences of building ramps and entrances in established residential neighborhoods or in commercial neighborhoods frequented by those who would find repugnant

even occasional visits to regions dominated by masses of concrete and steel. In general, those sorts of depopulated areas tend to also be crime-ridden or at least frequented by drug-addicts, alcoholics, and others who give at least some sign of being dangerous. If bridge construction projects can be so destructive of human communities, then imagine what havoc can be wreaked when such limited engineering design techniques are applied directly to human communities.

We should act in ways consistent with the underlying processes of our world. This world is one of developmental processes where each entity has to respond properly to what its environment offers it, or throws at it. Moreover, as biochemical stews became cells of some sort which then absorbed self-replicating chemicals (DNA, etc.) to become cells as we know them and as cells combined into mold slimes and then into more advanced and specialized colonies such as jellyfishes and . . .

The responses which an entity makes, shaping itself in the process, must come from inside that entity, animal or family-line of animals or religious community or nation. This isn't a pessimistic claim that "The world is too complex to anticipate all possibilities," though there are such concerns allied to my main point which is simply:

The world operates in the way of a developing story and nearly all entities in this world also develop or evolve as if characters in a narrative rather than being raw stuff to be machined.

I'm making a positive claim we should operate according to reality as best described by our historians and physicists and many others.

We don't know where the world is heading. We don't even know what will happen to our families or countries, though we who are Christians are bound to believe that the end result will be the incorporation of those who belong to Christ into the Body of Christ without loss of particularity. In fact, that particularity will be enhanced so that we can be truly Christ-like. Before I can further explore this idea of the Body of Christ—not to be done in this article, I have to say what should be obvious from the Bible, especially the letters of St. Paul. Particular human beings are unique and don't even all fit in the same general categories. The same is true of nations and other natural groupings of human beings. We won't fill the same role in the Body of Christ and we don't fill the same role in this mortal realm. Not every human being is suited for life as a rocket engineer at NASA and

not every human community is suited to be a part of a high-tech society that sends rockets to the moon. Moreover, some human beings capable of living such a life, some communities capable of so forming themselves, have no desire to do so.

Why can't we just help the Haitians after their natural disaster without trying to rebuild Haiti so that it has an American-style or European-style infrastructure? Why don't we let them find their own way by responding to their own environment? Why don't we let them develop according to what they can find inside themselves and in their relationships to each other and to those who go to help them without the agenda of turning them into Americans or Spaniards? We like to burden others with American or European technology which leaves them confused at best and certainly unable to respond to their environments in their own ways. We like to burden other countries by educating some of the natives to be Western-style bureaucrats and academics of a sort who are no longer 'natives' and, because of that, aren't capable of developing native responses to the new possibilities they learned of at MIT or Oxford or Heidelberg. We in the West have also erred against the particular human being, trying to channel our children into paths of development suited for forming more bureaucrats. Nor have we respected local cultures.

I'll pass on to make one last point, though it's not something I can yet write about with any clarity. Development of an organism, or the evolution of a family-line of organisms, isn't really something that works bottom-up. The development of complex organisms is ongoing at multiple levels and perhaps at all levels of development currently available to that organism. One of the best examples involves only two levels—individual organisms develop over their lifetimes even as species evolve over longer periods of time. But individual development and special evolution overlap. As we develop as individuals reflecting one temporal stage of evolution of the human species, we remain part of the greater evolutionary flow, though there is reason to believe evolution might itself have evolved to a new level with the appearance of a rational and self-aware race.

Moreover, we have other forms of evolution or development which overlap with biological evolution and the development of an organism. Life on earth engages in complex and recursive relationships with the atmosphere of the earth. There is also interaction at the level of DNA and soma between different species—such as that between viruses and their hosts. Viruses can implant their genetic coding inside the genetic code of other species.

Viruses can also transport pieces of genetic coding from one species to another. Bacteria form a super-organism of sorts, being able to shed some genes and pick up others from a pool of bacterial genes flowing through the earth's biosphere and including genes for resistance to various antibiotics. An interested reader can download my dark comedy, *A Man for Every Purpose*, at <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/aman.pdf>, which plays off some of these confusions caused by our willful misunderstandings of our human selves and our situation in this world.

A human community is one very complex entity. We should fear those who try to guide this development because they will deform the organism, just as if a child were to be fitted at birth with a brace to straighten the natural and necessary curve in his spine or to force his skull into the shape found in a different ethnic group.

We should help those who are in need of food, shelter, medical care, and clothing but we should think long and hard before imposing Western style infrastructure upon the peoples of Africa or Haiti or other regions. Centuries ago, the Japanese and Chinese had already developed their social organisms to a level where they could adapt Western technology and even some social forms to their own needs and desires. The Chinese needed only to get back on their feet after a period of weakness which was the result of Western dominance established during the later stages of political decay of a particular imperial government. The Haitians aren't in that sort of a position. They're descendants of Africans torn out of their tribal environments and thrown into a brutal system of slavery where they didn't really have even the limited opportunities to learn the skills and forms of self-discipline which were necessary to slaves on a Virginia tobacco plantation. The Haitians have no part in the West other than as victims of brutal exploitation and then as welfare dependents of various Western states and charitable organizations. They don't need the Marines building roads and modern housing for them. They probably need help in increasing the output of their many small farms and crafts shops and they need that help in the form of simple technology they can sustain while moving into the future their own way, even if their way turns out to be a recreation of African tribal life in the middle of the western hemisphere.

Of all human beings, those who call themselves Christians should realize that not all parts of the Body of Christ are the same. The heart should not be trying to force the liver to pump blood. The power-plant engineer should not be trying to help the Amish blacksmith who'd suffered a fire

by installing a modern, factory-built natural-gas forge and erecting a steel-framed building around it.

I write not so much to criticize Haitian aid efforts as to make the general point that we modern human beings haven't yet come close to integrating modern understandings of our world into our ways of thinking. Now that we're learning, or should be learning, about the complexities of evolution and development in this world, we have some who expand a critique against centralized, or top-down, control into an argument that we're just so many social atoms and will never be anything different but at the loss of our personal selves and we have others who plow forward to stimulate economies or to rebuild foreign countries as if they were constructing a 1880 textile-mill according to a blueprint which can be drawn on a single, large sheet of paper.

## 416 How Grotesque the Good when It's Developing

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=660>. It was finished and uploaded on 2010/06/03.]

While thinking of the suffering endured by patients in the modern medical quest for miracles, I grew depressed and sought to cheer myself up by thoughts of hospices which allow human beings a bit of dignity as they approach death. And so it was that I turned to Flannery O'Connor's insightful and Thomistically funny introduction to *A Memoir of Mary Ann*, a book which told the story of a young girl with a face-deforming cancer who went to live in a hospice run by sisters from the Dominican sub-order founded by Rose Hawthorne Lathrop, Mother Alphonsa after she had donned the habit. She was the daughter of Nathaniel Hawthorne. Near the end of this short essay, Miss O'Connor tells us:

After an afternoon with [the sisters], I decided that they had had about everything [in their hospice work with cancer victims] and flinched before nothing, even though one of them asked me during the course of the visit why I wrote about such grotesque characters, why the grotesque (of all things) was my vocation. They had in the meantime inspected some of my writing. I was struggling to get off the hook she had me on when another of our guests supplied the one answer that would make it immediately plain to all of them. "It's your vocation too," he said to her.

This opened up for me also a new perspective on the grotesque. Most of us have learned to be dispassionate about evil, to look it in the face and find, as often as not, our own grinning reflections with which we do not argue, but good is another

matter. Few have stared at that long enough to accept the fact that its face too is grotesque, that in us the good is something under construction. The modes of evil usually receive worthy expression. The modes of good have to be satisfied with a cliché or a smoothing down that will soften their real look. When we look into the face of good, we are liable to see a face like Mary Ann's, full of promise.

Full of promise? How can a face distorted by disease be full of promise? How can the founder of the Church of Christ without Christ be funny, especially after blinding himself and then killing himself by prolonged, horrible penances? How about a self-named Misfit who went to prison for a crime he no longer remembers, certain though that the punishment was out of proportion to the crime, be full of promise? Was it his promise that was realized when he killed a family, mother and father, two children, and a grandmother, after finding them stuck on a dirt road? How about a smart 12 year-old girl who loses her nasty attitude only when she's immersed in prayer? Full of promise to be a nun but that's a pretty limited sort of promise in this modern world where God-centered people do good by finding careers with social service corporations (nonprofit, of course). As for the 14 year-old cousins of that 12 year-old nun-to-be, in a convent school but itching to be loose women. . .

Strange promises she created in her fictions though she herself lived amidst those we who have decided our best goal isn't the pursuit of what is truly good but rather the avoidance of pain and suffering. We wish to inhabit a world in which pain and suffering can be eliminated, a world in which the Creator brings us to prosperity and an easy death so long as we obey our understanding of His commandments. And, so, we Americans—but probably many modern peoples—do inhabit such a world, if only in our own minds. And we've been able to pretend this is the world since our spiritual ancestors, epitomized by Emerson and Thoreau, first discovered that God had botched His Creation and seems deaf to our advice on how to fix matters. If God won't listen to us, we'll create our own world. . .

For a remarkably long time, good luck in geography and natural resources and the self-destructive tendencies of our enemies allowed us Americans to pull off this rebellion against God and to even present ourselves, even to ourselves, as a Christian, God-centered people. This is a complicated subject and I've written about it in various contexts, including

that of the war of the European peoples of New England against the native peoples. See Chapter 408, *The Need for Abstractions in Moral Self-understanding* for a discussion of my understanding of the basic weakness in the moral characters and moral reasoning of the Puritan leaders of New England, weaknesses I believe to have been magnified into virtues, partly through the work of Emerson and Thoreau but also through the idealistic deformations of American politics by Abraham Lincoln, deformations upon a system already deeply corrupted by Aaron Burr's founding of Tammany Hall and Thomas Jefferson's willingness to ally himself with this early political machine when he thought he could use Burr and his followers to his own purposes. This combination of idealism and fundamental corruption has created a political system that's quite beyond any true reform.

We need to keep our political and social situation in mind, but I'm mostly concerned in this situation about the clear fact that people classify any grotesque creature, man or beast, and any grotesque situation as evil. Why do we not see the possibilities of good arising through the sorts of evolutionary and developmental processes which have produced the human race and also the Christian Church? Cowardice has much to do with it but there's something still deeper involved, a revulsion to human nature as we see it when we look at a human being eaten by a cancer that grew from his own bodily stuff or a human being entering a dementia that leaves him there in body but strips him of memory and then reason and then other human characteristics or behaviors. There can be little left of our grandfather or friend, little left but a shell that even seems a mockery of human nature as the eyes grow vacant and the skeletal muscles lose their tone.

I confess to being a coward myself, not so much about death but a lot when it comes to pain and suffering, I try to be honest with myself and with the fact that this too is a part of the world as God created it. But I struggle to toughen up my backbone. I look in the mirror and see not an actively evil man but one who has to paint himself into a corner to be somewhat certain he'll do what is right when the real trouble begins (maybe before many months pass). I feel strongly that we live in a world where there are undesirable moral implications to our dedication to avoiding pain and suffering. And we court various moral ambiguities, and even moral degradation, when we raise the avoidance of pain and suffering to such a high priority. When we also make it a priority to avoid death as long as medically possible, we begin to turn away from Creation and from our Maker. Yet, even more than death do we avoid pain and suffering though

we do our best to avoid any and all unpleasant aspects of human life in this world. We don't seek the good but merely seek to avoid that which fits in our pitifully inadequate understanding of evil.

Pain and suffering, and death, are often enough by-products of the historical or developmental or evolutionary processes which can produce not the good directly but the stuff from which God will make the good, mostly on the other side of death in the world of the resurrected, but this world can be quite good in its own way. In any case, when we try too hard to avoid the unpleasant aspects of the story God is telling, we risk placing ourselves outside of the story, we risk placing ourselves outside the sometimes horrifying processes by which we move forward towards the good. Then we babble on about carrying our crosses when we develop cancer or have to endure economic hardship, after devoting our lives to imposing our standards upon God's world rather than working within God's world, this story He's still telling. It's been 20 centuries since our spiritual fathers murdered the Son of God, 20 centuries since we were shown the purpose of Creation: to allow the Son of God to learn obedience as a creature and to sacrifice Himself to His Father in an act of pure, self-giving love. And still we insist that God is supposed to give us a pleasant comfortable life so long as we follow a set of rules acceptable to us. And still we insist that the purpose of this all is to save us human beings. You see, this all-powerful God created a world in which human beings were to have been god-like creatures who led peaceful and prosperous lives. . .

Somehow, events escaped the control of God and here we are, but we'll do our best to be those god-like creatures and to demand the peace and prosperity which is rightfully ours.

The underlying problem we have is with developmental and evolutionary processes that stretch beyond very short periods of time. When we look at days or years or even the lifespan of mortal man, the easiest way of understanding is to assume entities of a permanent nature which act in events that don't change the entities in a fundamental way. And we fail to make the transition to thinking in terms of the eons over which God shaped us and continues to shape His Creation. Even Einstein thought in this way during his famous attacks upon any understandings of quantum physics which allowed the reality of the strange processes when very small transitions in energy or small regions of space or time are involved. See Chapter 156, *A Christian's View of Einstein's and Bohr's Debate on the Meaning of Reality* for my short summary of a position stated in *Critique*

of *Scientific Reason* [75] by the German philosopher Kurt Hubner.

We can't accept the idea that human nature is the result of a freely moving narrative process, a process factual to the extent it is free. We would be free to behave according to our desires and to be already fully-formed persons. Not necessarily do we desire to be God or even gods, but we have our own opinions about matters and will pretend that we can have opinions in clear conflict with reality so long as we have the power and wealth and circumstances to ignore that reality. We would rather live in DisneyWorld than DarwinWorld or EinsteinWorld.

I can understand why we modern men wish to be "persons frozen into some sort of immutable being." If particular human natures are shaped by responses to environments—as I've claimed—then we modern Americans would be the sorts of creatures who've been shaped as mostly passive participants in a rather despicable sort of life, watching violent sports and mindless situation comedies or reality shows. We would be the sorts of creatures who are passive victims of amusement park personnel. But we would like to believe that we are truly men and women who value freedom and have strong moral characters that we exercise when called for. We like to believe that we are the types of creatures who value intelligence rather than the stupidity and bestial passions which dominate our favorite entertainment. But we go on watching and listening to that which teaches values and attitudes which disgust us when embodied in a teenager who actually kills with the abandon of our heroes and anti-heroes or a young woman who aborts her baby so she can enjoy the free life of those modern women in the movies.

And, yet, the Body of Christ continues to form even if many of its organs turn into predatory parasites and many of the individuals, cells in a manner of speaking, will not likely be part of that Body when it is fully formed in the world of the resurrected. But who can tell? Didn't Christ forgive the sins of passionate sinners with surprising ease? Who can be more morally grotesque than those deformed by greed or sexual lust? There are other vices which also damage us badly but greed and sexual lust are pretty bad in their effects on us. While Christ seemed to often forgive the sins of those who were passionate, He offered up little or no hope for the lukewarm, those with smooth skin and regular features. The lukewarm are never grotesque in appearance. Often quite attractive the lukewarm. In a bland sort of way.

God is shaping the entirety of created being, especially the stuff of human nature and He seems willing to pound us to a bloody pulp at times,

to bury us under streams of molten rock, to pour moral-carcinogens down our throats with the drugs and alcohol which our bodies can come to so crave, to trick us into eating dangerous foods—at least dangerous in high amounts—by the desires for high-calorie substances which kept our apish ancestors alive during hard times, to twist the facial features of a young girl into sheer ugliness—at least by the standards of the lukewarm with their smooth faces and their regular features.

It would seem that Darwin, despite losing his poorly founded and Biblically literalistic faith, at least faced up to God's acts as Creator better than the vast majority of those who claim to be Christians, better than the vast majority of Christian clergymen. Yet, in the end, Darwin's honesty about the workings of Creation led him away from his Christian faith just because he couldn't accept a Creator who would work His wonders by such grotesque and distorted paths, paths through realms of ugliness and pain and sorrow. Any God acceptable to Charles Darwin had to be distant and uninvolved with such a world. He had to be a God who retreated after Creating. If He existed at all. Or maybe the pagans were right and matter co-exists with God. Most modern Christians seem to keep their pain at a distance by denying God would have created such a world and so they adopt a sort of semi-paganism which allows them to think that evil, from Satan or multiple sources, has somehow invaded the work of an – otherwise—all-powerful Creator. Christians who can't deal with the grotesque aspects of God's Creation have to act and talk as if the world doesn't quite belong to God. And so it is that these bad things happen against the will of this all-powerful and all-knowing God, who is then reduced to vengeful acts such as aiming a hurricane at New Orleans or unleashing a volcano on the gentle inhabitants of Montserrat. And then there's AIDS which killed even the gentlemanly and morally well-ordered Arthur Ashe who got his HIV from a blood transfusion. I guess God sometimes has poor aim. Or else maybe these terrible aspects of Creation are a basic part of the story He's telling, a story in which good in formation looks as grotesque as evil in its maturity?

I would suggest that Christians should grow up and accept the fact that God, while interested in our ultimate good, is clearly not interested in guaranteeing an easy and comfortable life to even His most faithful followers. In fact, He seems to sometimes hit those faithful followers all the harder and to twist them and their paths through life with all the greater force. If you eliminate all that is grotesque in your life, and your children's lives, be aware that you might be trying to eliminate all that brings about the

ultimate good that our Maker intends for those of His children who accept His will.

What could be more grotesque than a tortured Christ, a source of the true light of goodness overwhelmed by a rather sadistic darkness which is part of His Father's Creation? What could be more grotesque than the Son of God humiliated and whipped? What could be more grotesque than Jesus Christ, His body bloody and battered and His features distorted by pain and wounds? What could be more grotesque than a God who taught us to conquer evil by watching His own true Son submitting to such horrors? What could be more grotesque than a saved world, a world after the resurrection of Christ, where children can be more often healed—for a while—of face-deforming cancers of the sort endured by Mary Ann, but increasingly our miraculous medical cures depend upon techniques and methods and extend-life-at-all-cost attitudes which are sometimes morally bothersome even when not directly immoral, at least bothersome to those of us who value the good over the elimination of what is considered evil or grotesque by men of the modern West, as dainty in their sensitivity to nearby pain as they are brutal in inflicting death and destruction upon children and others in far-away regions of the globe.



# 417 Americans Govern in Order to Engage in Politics

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=670>. It was finished and uploaded on 2010/08/06.]

In one of his novels about the American Empire, Gore Vidal quotes the American-English novelist Henry James as claiming, circa 1900, that it was the United States which was corrupting political systems around the world. The Irish political scientist, William E.H. Lecky, wrote in the 1890s of the great divide in American morality, the citizens being so generally well-ordered in their private lives and the (caucus- or machine-controlled) politicians being so corrupt at least in their political activities. The French political scientist Bertrand de Jouvenel wrote in the middle of the 20th century of American politics being dominated by machines which select politicians of weak moral character because their job is to help the machine-bosses to deliver the goods to clients. Those bosses can't afford politicians in their systems who have enough moral character to vote the interests of their constituents or of the entire country, let alone traditional understandings of moral truths, because that might not serve the clients of the political machines.

So far as I can tell, the American political system is corrupted beyond repair and that raises serious questions in my way of looking at this world as being a physical world ordered to some purpose or purposes of God. As a Catholic Christian trying to make sense of the totality of Christian revelation and empirical knowledge, I see the world as having been created for the purpose of allowing the Son to make of Himself a willing and trusting sacrificial lamb for the purpose of learning obedience and showing His love for the Father. Given this particular world in which this drama of self-

sacrifice took place and especially given the incarnation of the Son as a man, the world is also ordered to the related purpose of allowing the birth and development of the Body of Christ. This world is a womb for the Body of Christ which will come to healthy and perfect adulthood in the world of the resurrected. In this world, developments seemingly analogous to diseases and cancers and parasitic invasions can occur. Is the American machine-controlled government a parasite which should have never have been allowed to attach itself to the body republic? Is it once a legitimate organ which has gone cancerous? Is there another analogy more appropriate?

But what of the individual human beings in whatever regions or organs within the Body of Christ as it develops on Earth?

Regions or organs?

Let me speak in general terms first before hinting of some great complications, and greatly interesting complications.

Individual human beings aren't simply absorbed into the Body of Christ as in a science fiction movie where they, or alien beings, become entirely enslaved to some sort of collective. Those who are saved will remain their own particular selves and yet will be one Body of Christ as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit remain individual divine Persons and yet are one God.

One real-world implication of my worldview is that it's likely, certainly more than possible, that there are a multitude of organs in this developing Body of Christ. I doubt the Church is the entirety of this Body though She is the organ which is the linked to God in specific ways and thus the most important of the organs. Yet, I believe there will be organs in the Body, even in the world of the resurrected, which will correspond to a variety of needs and talents, many of which the Church has nurtured in various ways over the centuries and yet are mostly independent of the Church. Complex human relationships will continue to exist in the Body of Christ. In this way, we will apparently differ from the relationships of the Persons of the Holy Trinity. Then again, three divine Persons might engage in a multitude of complex relationships within the divine nature.

Let's follow the organic metaphor implied by the Body of Christ and especially by the nature of the Body of Christ as a union of the Head, Jesus Christ, with those who belong to Him. Organs which work against the health or even the formation of the Body of Christ would be the equivalent of tape-worms or cancerous masses or infectious bacteria or viruses. Yet, as I've said before: there are various needs of human beings living in communities and governments of some sort seem to fit the bill. Just because

there will be no enemy countries in Heaven doesn't mean there won't be any need for human beings to engage in some purer and more abstract form of politics.

I'm sure the language of organisms will be part of my final results but I'm vaguely imagining organisms, including 'abstract' organisms formed of concrete organisms, which will have aspects needing more powerful descriptive language than that drawn from our knowledge of human beings and human societies at the purely concrete level. The traditional languages used in the modern West to describe human political and social and moral activities are themselves expansions upon the languages inherited from thinkers who had not, for example, seen anything analogous to modern industrial economies or the complex of modern research universities.

I'm planning to develop a language partially drawn from modern physics. To tighten this summary a little bit: I envision that the Body of Christ, and maybe many lesser groupings of individual organisms, exist partly—maybe even largely—in regions of Creation more abstract than the granite structures of Washington, DC. They would also have relationships which exist in regions of more abstract forms of being. Describing the Body of Christ in terms which are enriched by what we now know of Creation will require the application of abstraction best explored so far by mathematicians and physicists.

I'll return to my perhaps eccentric discussions of particular political and social and moral issues, though I've reformatted a fairly long and complex novel—my first (finished around 1998) but in storage since it was ignored (even SASE didn't guarantee a response to us lesser folk) or rejected by publishers in the mid-1990s. If you wish, you can download the novel *The Open Independence of the Seas* at <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/open.pdf> for free. This novel is, in part, an experiment in integrating some of the insights of modern science into our language and our thoughts. I also mention it because writing such works should be a sign that I'm not developing a politics solely for the afterlife but rather an understanding of human political needs and possibilities that might help us to solve some of our current problems.

I'll never tire of reminding people that the great thinkers of the past, Plato and Augustine and others, responded to new knowledge of the world rather than just shuffling about well-established ways of looking at, say, possible forms of human politics. As one example, there seem to be no political forms of organization in our tradition catalog of possibilities in

which power and responsibility are in proper balance for a technologically advanced human race with a population in the billions. Yet, our political reformers and political philosophers, even those who claim to possess moral imaginations or something of the sort, can do no more than return always to that catalog and try to solve serious problems by degreasing a cog or by painting a dial. Similar but more complex statements could be made about our forms of social organization and our ways of structuring our moral lives. The complexities are of a sort analogous to those of modern physics, leading to the need for speculation and disciplined theorizing but making it pretty much impossible that there is any way of replacing what might be called the 'Aristotelian catalog of political possibilities', as one example, with a similar set of political schemas. I'm not suggesting we build a new catalog but rather that we respond to reality but respond to it by serious, hard thought which will lead to good abstractions from particular empirical situations.

# 418 As Go the Immune and Neurological Systems

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=700>. It was finished and uploaded on 2010/09/21.]

Analogies can be taken too far and too literally, yet I wonder if we can apply to the human social organism, ultimately the Body of Christ, the example of a long-ago and primitive immune system ‘spinning off’ a neurological system. As I understand this particular line of speculation in evolutionary biology, and it was years ago that I read about it, that primitive immune system was largely a set of cells which tried to distinguish between ‘self’ and ‘non-self’, between what was supposed to be inside that particular organism and what was an invader. Somehow, that effort to distinguish between ‘self’ and ‘non-self’ led to a central nervous system, ultimately thought, as well as to defenses against diseases.

So this would be a line of questioning:

Government as we know it has grown out of systems to identify unfriendly or alien human beings (or sometimes to subjugate the other) or to protect against non-human dangers to the physical and moral aspects of our communities. As we mature towards the Body of Christ, is our government going to split into a policing (immunological) system which operates with some independence but under conditions where it has only as many resources as it needs for the task at hand and a planning and thinking (neurological) system which plays a role in the ongoing functions of the parts of the Body but also plays a central role in understanding the environment of that Body and planning for the future?

Once again, I'm throwing out a half-baked idea to point towards the possible fruitfulness of a true engagement with the organic aspects, and perhaps fundamentally organic nature, of human communities. By "half-baked idea", I mean not a dumb idea but a speculation in the early stage of development. Many speculations will be still-born to be sure, but you have to have lots of ideas to have much chance of even a few good ideas. (I'm pretty sure Einstein made a comment to this effect somewhere.)

For all the silliness of conjecturing a speculative but hidden relationship between government and thinking, there might be something to this idea if only because we, at least we Christians, need to pursue the organic analogy for human communities, ultimately for the Body of Christ—else that Body becomes a mere illusion separated from reality. We should take seriously our knowledge of cellular organisms, abstract from it, and apply the abstractions to our efforts to understand human communities, political and social.

For the benefit of those coming into an ongoing line of speculative thought:

Human beings won't lose their freedom when they become members of the Body of Christ. The best way to understand is by an analogy to the Christian belief in the Trinitarian God. As Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are free Persons while being one God, so many men can become free persons while being one Body of Christ. Rather than being enslaved, human beings who become members of the Body of Christ will share in the absolute freedom of God.

## 419 The Invisible Hand, Good and Evil

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=739>. It was finished and uploaded on 2010/11/19.]

I'm in the midst of revived efforts to explore modern knowledge of time, space, and matter to create an enriched and enlarged Christian understanding of Creation. My patterns of learning, contemplating, and writing are often interrupted by the horrifying spectacle of the United States decaying at a rapid rate and dragging with it a world which had allowed itself to grow dependent in many ways upon this immature giant of a country, this country peopled by adolescent people who somehow got hold of the keys to the liquor cabinet and the bulldozer from Daddy's company.

I've maintained and continue to maintain that we aren't just facing some technical currency problems. Even the more substantial loss of productive capital from the United States is only a proximate and local problem in a world which seems to be heading towards a chaos of sort. We Americans, indeed all those of the modern West, have fundamental problems which are showing as specific problems, such as ethical breakdowns in banking and politics. Addressing bank regulatory breakdowns won't help much if there are so many coming out of colleges and universities who have so little moral sense or perhaps so little in the way of moral courage—see Chapter 257, *Developing Virtues the Thomistic Way* found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=736>, for a discussion of how to develop such a virtue.

As a civilization, we have somehow shed our moral sense, our sense of who we are, what our world is, and what a proper human life is. We have no reason to be here beyond getting a house with a living-room suited to a

high-definition, wall-mounted, 60-inch television set. It's really not so clear that Americans ever had a true understanding of the civilization in which they exist, the West. Albert Jay Nock recorded in the early 1900s a comment made by a European friend finishing up a tour of the United States: "The United States is the first country in history to go from barbarism to decadence without passing through a state of civilization in between." [Quoted from memory.] As barbarians, we lived off the cultural heritage of still reasonably healthy Europe. As decadent hordes, we live off the cultural heritage of Hollywood and the National Football League.

This situation forms a background of sorts as I go about my work and provides a rather strong motivation for my efforts to make sense of the world in Christian terms, thus providing a foundation for a revived or reborn Christian civilization.

With this short apologia for my recent and anticipated efforts, I'll move on to talk about the other side of Adam Smith's golden coin. First, I'll certainly admit that Smith was right, along with many others before and after him, that:

Markets and other complex assemblages of human beings can produce desirable results in the aggregate though the individual participants act as individuals, aiming for their personal good and not any aggregate good.

Nor do they aim for any aggregate evil which can, and does, arise along with or sometimes instead of the aggregate good. And so, I would expand the claim:

Markets and other complex assemblages of human beings can produce either desirable or undesirable results in the aggregate though the individual participants act as individuals, aiming for their personal good and not any aggregate good or evil.

Almost all the time, desirable and undesirable results will occur in the same human communities. I'll also add that evil is sometimes a deliberate result brought on by brutal or exploitive men, criminals though they might enter the history books as great industrialists or statesmen. There have always been wolves in the sheep-pens.

There are also issues with human understandings of good and evil, but I'll only note for now that the good under development can appear

grotesque, even in an evil way—see Chapter 416, *How Grotesque the Good when It's Developing*. This opens up a number of possibilities, including the possibility that the structures built by exploiters and despots might well be primitive versions of important structures which will appear in a completed, perfected form in the Body of Christ. Or they might simply be corruptions of structures or organs which can play good roles.

I'm an optimist in the long-term, believing that evolutionary selection processes work in human communities to favor socially desirable behaviors, but we mortal men live in the short-term and have to face the prospect that our human communities can be organized by free activities in a way that's exploitive or even downright evil but stable in the short-term. To be stable in even the short-term, an exploitive system has to generate enough prosperity to pay the soldiers and policemen and bureaucrats. In the long-term, the effects of God's grace, His mercy or love, can be seen in the generally upward movement of a race of great apes with some talent for violence.

Grace doesn't destroy or replace nature. Grace completes and perfects nature. Even in this mortal realm, God's grace is at work. It moves and changes individual men and also communities of men, not just the Christian Church, in the general direction of states of completeness and perfection. But God's grace usually moves human communities forward at a glacial pace, relentlessly but slowly even when the humans in those communities are frenetically running around in circles. And glaciers often crush and pulverize towns and farmlands and beautiful stretches of forestland. Those crushing and pulverizing movements of glaciers are sometimes advances towards God's goal of shaping us into the Body of Christ, but we see not the greater good when that glacier is crushing our friends and destroying our homes and means of living. Yet, Creation includes explosive volcanoes and fast-moving streams of lava as well as glaciers. When the Creator wants to make something fresh, He is good at destroying what lies in the way of His efforts.

When individual men and human communities are the agents of destruction and creation, we can speak of the invisible hand because of lack of better ways of speaking. As I wrote at the beginning of this article, I'm aiming to develop better understandings based upon modern empirical knowledge disciplined to the very small stock of truths God has revealed through the incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ. Until then, we can use the obscurities of terms such as 'invisible hand' as early modern scientists

had to use meaningful but fuzzy terms, such as ‘impulse’ (a clumsy and inaccurate concept roughly corresponding to momentum), before developing better terms and enriched and enlarged understandings of the physical aspects of this world.

The invisible hand is neither all good nor all bad. It’s a part of the movement of God’s narrative towards and through the ongoing Apocalypse, the ongoing formation of the Body of Christ. Though I sometimes speak pessimistically of destructive forces working on the West and perhaps other realms of humanity, I try to always speak of the great possibilities for building something still better than Western Civilization, something that will still be imperfect and full of sinful men but might have some unanticipated traits or organs of the Body of Christ.

Some of the forms of organization resulting from the invisible hand will be misused in the short-term, as Hitler and his followers used the techniques of modern management to round-up and murder millions of human beings. We can’t afford to be too pessimistic about the troubles of the past century or so, which seem to be intensifying in some ways even as I write. We should start looking at the potential good of proper use of modern knowledge and start trying to figure out how we and our parents and grandparents went so far off-track. Yet, we should remember again that we sometimes assume too much. We were warned by Jesus of Nazareth about the straight and narrow path. It might well be that the path God wishes us to travel curves in certain ways. See Chapter 403, *Differential Geometry and Moral Narratives*, for a short discussion of this issue, a discussion I hope to enlarge greatly, God willing.

Those who live in an age with cities having more than 10 million citizens and the total world population in the vicinity of 7 billion should appreciate the need for rational use of resources and for better and more creative use of modern empirical knowledge. We should also appreciate the need for proper moral guidance in the application of those rational techniques, but God will continue to shape humanity into the Body of Christ whether we work in the short-term for good or evil or for morally unguided short-term goals of prosperity or safety. This doesn’t mean that all human beings or all human communities will be part of that Body when fully-formed. It seems unlikely that all men or all societies will enter the World of the Resurrected to live for time without end.

It does mean we should try to discern the shape God would have us take for our human natures, as particular individuals and as specific com-

munities, and to cooperate with His shaping processes even when it means we, as particular individuals and as specific communities, will suffer in this mortal realm. It does mean that we will be pushed forward onto a path suited for this shaping process but we individuals can enter brier patches or tar-pits, the probability of such disasters increasing if we fight against God. It does mean we can move off the path and go over a cliff while looking back at a time and region which we define as having been better. It does mean we can gripe and turn ourselves against the path we travel not seeming to understand we travel as part of a story being told by the Almighty, thinking that we can come to a Heaven of our own definition though we refuse to bow to God by properly responding to His own acts as Creator of this messy and sometimes nasty world.



## 420 What is a Conspiracy?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=743>. It was finished and uploaded on 2010/12/02.]

Relationships of a more abstract sort, such as those in politics and economics, are not so much different from concrete relationships as we might think. Not so much different as we've led ourselves to believe. Those concrete entities which are more complex, such as a man or a rhinoceros, are made of substances which have a variety of internal and external physical relationships with well-defined biological and mathematical aspects. For example, there are the various ways in which carbon, hydrogen, and nitrogen molecules combine to form a seemingly endless array of organic chemicals.

How does the magical jump occur when a complex biological organism, a man or a wolf, takes on the role of a moral and social being? Can we isolate this magic by proper use of our powerful mathematical tools? We sometimes optimistically assume such a role for mathematics in our efforts to understand concrete being and its relationships. Then at some point we confront some very complex entities or events and, as if facing a brick-wall, we retreat to either waving our hand in a spasmodic way and claiming that the magic occurs and man isn't 'just' a physical animal or we say that man is 'just' an animal and morality is only what hides from us our condition of enslavement to our own genes.

We do our best to skirt around the modern confirmation of the suspicions of a minority of pre-modern thinkers (including **almost** St. Thomas Aquinas)—man is a physical creature living in a physical universe but we should also take seriously our own feelings of limited but real freedom and our own moral feelings of guilt and longing. This is not to say that everything reduces to the physical but rather that the physical, concrete, and particular world we inhabit is the manifestation of an entire spectrum of

forms of being which range from the purely abstract manifestations of the truths God chose for Creation to the flesh and blood of human creatures. I've used something of a sound-bite phrase to convey the idea:

Matter is frozen soul.

The physical is more than a reductionist or dualist might imagine. Man isn't a soul attached to a flesh-and-blood animal. Rather is man a flesh-and-blood animal with attributes which imply strongly that flesh-and-blood, carbon and oxygen and hydrogen, can't be dismissed as no more than objects to the perceptions of immaterial entities.

Concrete, particular things and living beings are shaped from more abstract forms of being. We need to ask: what are the possibilities of describing this world, in both mathematical and narrative ways, once we expand our understanding of created being? (I include the biological as a special sort of narrative.) I can say that a great range of possibilities have opened up in front of us because of the vast expansion in recent centuries in empirical data and in the knowledge sometimes generated when good abstractions are drawn from that data. I've said that created being is created being is created being. Specifically:

- Abstractions accessible to the human being are also part of created being.
- Concrete manifestations of being are shaped from more abstract forms of created being.

We have no need for souls, not because physical reductionists are right but rather because our flesh and blood has already soul-like characteristics as does the flesh and blood of rattlesnakes and baboons. We human beings are unique because of our complex brains. We can respond to our environments or even the entire Universe or even the entirety of Creation in such a way that we shape our minds to what God has created, encapsulating various realms of created being in the very shape of our minds where I consider the 'shape of a mind' to include not only the underlying shape of the human brain but also the relationships of the entire human being to what lies outside of him. For those who like to have a hint of the end of the argument—the strongest and most important of those relationships is the

one we Christians call charity, love of a self-giving sort. Plato wrote of this relationship as did St. Paul and St. John and others in the *New Testament*.

So it is that I say we draw abstractions from empirical data—those abstractions are part of the being shaped into the empirical entities connected to that data and we can explore empirical reality to discover the abstract forms of being from which concrete things are shaped and which are yet present in concrete things.

For the remainder of this article, I'll write as if our only way of accessing abstract being is mathematics. It's a major way for sure especially when we consider general forms of mathematical reasoning, call it 'qualitative mathematics'. In any case, there are even some mathematical aspects to narrative. The easiest example is the great variety of metaphors drawn from traditional Euclidean geometry for describing our paths through life. Those paths are getting more complicated as human life grows more complex and as we learn more about Creation. We now seem to be traveling through regions of abstract relationships which mostly confuse us. Our moral and social analyses can benefit from modern geometries, even the differential geometry used by Einstein to describe curved spacetime.

For now, I'll assume that the mathematical aspects of concrete being are shaped from abstractions mostly but not entirely different from those used to shape the narrative aspects of created being. This is partly a matter of levels. Go to a very, very, very abstract form of being and it might be what all forms of reason, narrative and mathematical, are shaped from. Go far enough down the evolutionary tree or bush or whatever and you find a some multi-cellular creature that lived hundreds of millions of years ago and is the common ancestor of tarantulas and men. This is a weak and ultimately misleading analogy, but it can help us to purge ourselves of some dangerous delusions about the nature of being and mind.

I'm thinking that we can gain some perspective of the evolutionary and developmental pathways of human communities by trying to deal with those complex and sometimes terrifying events which give some sign of having been shaped by groups of conspirators. We can learn much from analyses of conspiracies or, more generally, events which have the air of a conspiracy, such as the murder of a powerful leader or a build-up to a war that later proves to have been not only unwinnable but also unjustifiable except for the benefit of a few who might well be conspirators.

Physical scientists, mathematicians and physicists as well as biologists, have learned a lot about empirical reality by studying pathological cases,

though it may be easier in those fields to identify a true pathology. Some conspiracies, pathologies of a moral or social or political or economic sort, are undoubtedly real and not just the nightmares of feverish and fearful minds. Has there ever been a lack of sophisticated criminal activities in history when vast amounts of wealth and power were at stake? This doesn't mean that all the theories about the murder of John Kennedy are true, but it does mean that we should consider the powerful interests endangered by some of the policy changes President Kennedy was said to be considering – ending the Cold War with Russia and disarming Europe (possibly with the aid of Pope John XXIII), dropping sanctions against Cuba and stopping plots to overthrow Castro, ending the oil-depletion allowance, withdrawing from Vietnam. We should realize there were investment bankers who lost fortunes in Cuba and maybe were threatened with further losses in the Texas oil-fields. There were also large losses coming with the possible cancellation of the contracts to build harbors in Vietnam (companies later folded into the ubiquitous Halliburton). There were careers and fame to be lost to intelligence operatives and generals and admirals who were, in any case, dogs well-trained to fight the Cold War whether it made sense or not. And, of course, there were various fanatics who wanted to wage war upon all of not-American humanity. Would they have hesitated to kill one man who endangered them?

I'm proposing we approach the study of the evolution and development of human communities by studying the socio-pathological acts of many a politician and general and investment banker. I'm proposing we start thinking of these creatures and their conspiratorial groups as being parasites and cancers and various sorts of infections in the bodies public, the entities which currently exist in the general movement towards the Body of Christ—a movement we Christians have to believe to be real however much we may realize that Body won't form in this mortal realm. Far too many think that these conspiracies, if they exist, must be mystical and supernatural, run by mighty wizards or demons or Jesuits or Freemasons. And so it is that many who think in more mundane terms consider it a sign of mental instability to ask if the CIA, the Secret Service, various investment bankers, and their politician allies might have killed John Kennedy. Or to speculate they might have destroyed Richard Nixon after he ordered Richard Helms, director of the CIA, to bring the files on the Kennedy murder and the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba. Helms refused to follow the direct orders of the President in this incident which appeared in the White House tapes

just before the CIA-trained criminals, such as E. Howard Hunt, began to appear on the White House payroll. And why was it that Ronald Reagan spoke out so strongly during his 1980 campaign for the Presidency against the Trilateral Commission and other banker-funded initiatives to influence public policy and then, after one meeting with David Rockefeller, loaded up his cabinet with members of the Trilateral Commission and the Council on Foreign Relations?

The fact is that we know some criminal conspiracies have worked – such as the bankers’ conspiracies run by Cecil Rhodes or J.P. Morgan. Sometimes, they’ve destroyed their own members or the country of their members. We can think of the conspiracies to gain control of most of southwest and central Asia which were first suggested by one of the most brilliant and unstable descendants of John Adams—Brooks Adams who was active in the latter decades of the 1800s and a little while into the 1900s. There is no guarantee that conspirators will be successful or even rational in their efforts.

So let’s put this issue in terms I’ve used in discussing being:

Are conspiracies a matter of being at abstract levels (such as those described by mathematics and theoretical physics and metaphysics) or rather a matter of being at the concrete level of particular entities and the narratives formed as those entities evolve and develop?

Are conspiracies a result of a brokenness at a deep level of Creation, an abstract level from which concrete being is shaped? Are conspiracies the result of a radical defect in Creation caused, perhaps, by a fall from grace of the ancestors of human beings? Or perhaps a radical defect caused by God withdrawing from His own work?

Are conspiracies rather a matter of concrete structures and entities sometimes forming wrongly, a matter of those wrongfully formed structures and entities doing damage to other entities in the context of a particular world of evolution and development? Even better formed structures and entities could sometimes engage in such destructive behavior. Conscious entities could even act in such destructive ways believing themselves to be serving a greater good. In the context of such a radically social animal as man, socio-pathological acts would be Darwinistically bad, to speak simply. In this way of thinking, conspirators could even destroy a host

organism of great promise, as the bankers and politicians might be doing to the United States.

I've already given my answer above. I'm going with the second option, choosing to regard conspiracies, in the context of the Body of Christ under formation, as being invasive acts by parasitical organisms or by cancerous bodies which grew from inside the (relatively) healthy communities developing, oh so slowly, into the Body of Christ.

If we take the path of thought I'm suggesting, we would consider conspiracies, by implication—sin in general, as being wrongful shapings or movements of a sort similar to the misshapings which result in biological entities such as parasites and infectious organisms and cancers. I've chosen conspiracies as a focus of my discussion partly because of their importance in the modern world since at least the formation of Tammany Hall by Aaron Burr and partly because they are a fairly well-defined phenomenon, so long as we take the rational view that they're simply the result of powerful men acting in small and organized groups for their own presumed good and against the common good. (I've noted that a conspiracy can aim at the common good, but I'll ignore that possibility to avoid unfruitful complications in this discussion.) So a small group of men developing a silver-mine in an uninhabited region wouldn't be a conspiracy but it was a conspiracy when businessmen and public officials acted to 'help' the Apache tribes by providing welfare programs of a sort which allowed them to steal the silver-mines discovered after the Apaches had been forced onto land originally considered to be bare of resources.

The Bible is sometimes ridiculed because it contains a number of stories in which disease is presented as a result of sin or of a spiritual invasion of the human being. Maybe we should have stepped back and considered the not so implausible suggestion that sin, and spiritual disease in general, is the same phenomenon as biological disease. I would deny they are the same phenomenon at the concrete level but would suggest they are similar wrongful developments shaped from the same abstract being.

One of my guiding rules is:

Grace doesn't destroy or replace nature. Grace completes and perfects nature.

This is certainly consistent with my proposal that evolutionary processes bring into existence new forms of social and political community

as well as the related proposal that development processes shape specific communities. The presence of evolutionary and developmental processes in human history implies we should learn from general thinking processes which have produced spectacular results in biology. And it implies we'll see many defective or inadequate or unlucky social groupings, some of them being promising social organisms which weren't able to defend themselves against parasites and cancers and infectious agents, such as conspiratorial groupings.

At the same time, I remain committed to the idea that we can better understand many of these issues by proper use of the mathematics developed to explore and describe matter and time and space. In fact, I'll now backtrack a little on my above discussion of human communities as being formed by forces analogical to those of biology. Internally, groupings of human beings will be like organisms but those organisms, and the greater communities or even long-lasting civilizations we form, will be like the stuff of this universe. The classic statement of general relativity due to John Wheeler is:

Matter tells space how to shape itself and space tells matter how to move.

I think there to be an analogous but much more complex statement to be made of the 'matter' of human moral and social and economic and political groupings. Matter of both sorts evolve (family lines of galaxies or groupings of animals) and develop during the lifetime of an individual (the Milky Way or Japan) but those evolutionary and developmental processes take place as that matter moves within complexly shaped spaces. (I also think that even the understanding of our moral development as individuals would benefit from concepts borrowed from the modern theories of spacetime and matter.)

## 420.1 Criminal and Not Satanic

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=843>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/05/02.]

This section is just a short addendum to the essay which forms the main part of the chapter.

At the time I wrote that earlier essay, I was looking unsuccessfully on the Internet for some overview articles I'd read, articles written by Murray Rothbard, a good, thorough, and reliable scholar so far as I can tell. This is the specific article which had impressed me most: *Wall Street, Banks, and American Foreign Policy* found at <http://www.lewrockwell.com/rothbard/rothbard66.html>. Professor Rothbard also wrote a short update: *The Conspiracy Theory of History Revisited* found at <http://www.lewrockwell.com/rothbard/rothbard170.html>.

This is my summary of the lesson to be learned by a clear-eyed view of matters:

The powerful and the wealthy form a 'class' of sorts which simply excludes the rest of us from their struggles for power, one criminal family or gang in this class fighting against another criminal operation, gathering into a united force only to protect their general realm from any possibility of reform or of 'invasion' by the common folk.

For a very compatible treatment of this issue by another reliable historian, you can read Gore Vidal's series of novels going from *Burr* to *The Golden Age*. These novels deal with various issues but give a good overview of the growth of the American elite of bankers and politicians—true industrialists, producers of wealth, such as Andrew Carnegie and Henry Ford were despised for their biases against imperialism and foreign adventures in general. In particular, Vidal's novel *Empire* gives an interesting account of the partially successful effort to convert McKinley from a hard-headed locally-biased politician into a proto-emperor and the coming to power of the uninhibited Emperor Teddy. The House of Morgan and the House of Rockefeller were on the rise along with the more ephemerally occupied House of White. Even the feisty Teddy took banker money while still talking the talk of a reformer. In any case, he was as much of an imperialist as Morgan and Rockefeller though with slightly different goals.

I repeat that the great conspiracy of the modern world isn't really a conspiracy. It's not secret if you read serious histories of the library-bound or journalistic sort. It's not unified in the way of an super- or sub-human conspiracy run by Satan or the Jesuits or the Freemasons or the Communist Party or Hitler-cloning Nazis in South America or selfish genes. This conspiracy is really just an indirect way of separating the citizens of the

modern world into haves and have-nots. We don't have an official aristocracy, at least not in the United States. As a consequence, there has been no conservative and publicly recognized class to man the bulwarks against the barbarians named Morgan or Rockefeller or Walker or Soros. The barbarians often bring fresh blood, but they should be taught some sense of public honor until the time arrives when we know how to form polities without some sort of aristocracy forming, by one process or another.

The great non-conspiracy of the modern world has been the conversion of the prosperous countries of the West into ganglands where the House of Morgan once waged war against the House of Rockefeller and now . . .

Now, the situation is more complex and probably more unstable. The West as we know it is falling. Maybe China and India will replace the countries of the West as the dominant powers. Maybe the West will recover in some way. In any case, the up-and-coming leaders of the human race, whoever they will prove to be, should take note of the way in which a self-seeking and self-defined aristocracy formed in the United States as a cancer or a parasite rather than forming as an organ of that public body.

Cancers. Parasites. Criminal gangs. Take your pick, but don't romanticize the disgusting mass as a superhuman conspiracy. And don't dismiss it because of the nervous laughter of establishment thinkers.



# 421 The Dynamic and Communal Nature of Marketplace Information

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=746>. It was finished and uploaded on 2010/12/09.]

See *this article by David Henderson* found at <http://original.antiwar.com/henderson/2010/11/28/adm-mullens-spinning-vs-prof-hayeks-insight/> for a short and clear discussion of Hayek's understanding of knowledge in light of the real-world problem of American incompetence, most especially when our governments move in to solve our problems or those of Afghan tribesmen.

Professor Henderson puts the situation simply by saying: "Who has the relevant information about your current circumstances? You do."

The article started me thinking about how I'd speak of these truths in terms of my worldview, a Thomistic existentialism updated to consider modern empirical knowledge. This article is a small step towards the goal of using the powerful conceptual tools of modern mathematics and physics to speak of the complexities of community life in the modern world. For example, differential geometry would allow us to speak of more complex paths than are possible in the 'Euclidean assumptions' of traditional thought. I've written on this general topic before in various chapters, including Chapter 252, *Mathematical Physics and Moral Philosophy* and Chapter 411, *Defining Landscapes and Possible Paths, Not Determining Paths*.

True freedom of Creation and creature, even if limited, implies strongly that all of the information 'needed' to control a situation doesn't even exist when a would-be controller would need it, but the information is

coming into existence as the situation develops—as always, I deny any true split between the abstract, such as the models of how markets operate, and the concrete, actions of buyers and sellers. The actions and the knowledge are one since concrete being is shaped from abstract being and is realized as a narrative plays out. The abstract remains in the concrete. So the knowledge of the price I can get by bringing my tomatoes into the farmers' market this afternoon comes to exist as I offer to sell them and others offer to buy them, perhaps at a lower price than I expect. Or perhaps I profit from a bidding war caused by a shortage of fresh tomatoes that day. And maybe I learn to my sorrow that a big-box grocery store has opened down the road and is selling cheap tomatoes from California or Chile or some other foreign land.

My knowledge comes into existence as I respond to my environments, to the Universe as I understand it, to all of God's Creation as I understand it. My environment is always being changed by my actions and the actions of others, perhaps the actions of corporate executives in Cincinnati and their bankers in New York City. I can write in similar ways about my knowledge of the world or of all Creation, but those are far more complex forms of knowledge and are affected by a variety of bodies of knowledge of longfar away acts and of distant structures and relationships. Of particular relevance would be the complications of modern societies where some have the power to effect the lives of human beings they've never seen and one man, Henry Ford with his mass-produced automobiles, or a small group of men, the leaders of Europe in 1914 with their mass-produced death, can reshape human lives for centuries.

Locally, there is a community at the farmers' market even if it's ephemeral, at least as a community of buyers and sellers. And we must remember what the American historian, Carroll Quigley told us:

The truth emerges in time through a communal response.

Notice the qualifications which deny truth can be held by an individual at a point of spacetime—"emerges in time" and "through a communal response."

The truth, that is—the perfect knowledge, of the current situation for tomato-sellers in the farmers' market exists in the community of buyers and sellers, in a manner of speaking. But markets are dynamic, partly because of external factors but also because of the interactions between human beings

in those markets. This sort of knowledge is only ‘truth’ by analogy because it probably never quite comes into firm existence. If it does, it will be for just a short while before changing conditions bring about a new equilibrium which itself will prove to be ephemeral. This isn’t to say that markets, or any other human environments, are so unstable as to be chaotic. It is to say that they are dynamic in a way analogous to a living creature although they might rapidly pass through more stages in a few days than a human being will pass through in 80 years. And it is to say that we need to enlarge our understanding of truth to include knowledge of narratives.

The implication is that we can’t know a dynamic creature because it will be significantly different in months or years and maybe even in hours. That’s not quite true. As I’ve noted before, Plato and the Bible agree that ‘to know’ a living creature is to be intimate with that creature. When a man knows his wife, he is intimate with her in a sexual way, but not only in that way. We can hope. If he is intimate with his wife in other ways, then he participates in meaningful ways in her journey through life, in her story which is part of the story God is telling. A man then knows not only his wife’s body but also her story. He lives her story with her and she lives his with him and they live a story as a couple.

We know reality by being actively engaged in reality, though my idea of such an active engagement is different in some ways from that of many human beings, certainly of many of my fellow Americans. Intellectual engagement, spiritual engagement by way of prayer and worship, is not only active but also more active, more true, than physical activity on the part of sleepwalking members of modern herds. Contemplating the meaning of Jacques Barzun’s history of the past 500 years in the West, *From Dawn to Decadence* [9], is active while turning on the television generally is part of a stretch of time experienced in a passive way.

Why are we losing our freedoms? Is it because we’re under attack by fanatics who hate our freedoms? Or is it because we Americans have destroyed our various sorts of human communities, forgetting that even individual freedom is exercised in local communities?

I would suggest that we have forgotten that families and church communities are composed of individuals, some of them morally mature, who come together to do things and grow things and make things. We have forgotten because we accepted the invitation of our political and economic masters to become self-centered individuals and to enjoy the supposed pleasures of life as lemmings in mass marketplaces. We have become consumers rather than

producers. We no longer even produce our own local and communal understanding of reality, choosing instead to consume one or another canned version that suits the purpose of one of our masters.

We chose not to become individuals who are citizens of flesh-and-blood communities organized to some moral purpose, raising children or worshipping God or making our livings in a way that allows us to mature and to participate in all these communities. If we accepted these roles as members of multiple local communities, if we matured to fulfill these roles, we would be able to perceive our local environments so that we could respond, as individuals but mostly as members of these local communities.

The truth emerges in time through a communal response.

We have to remember that the communal response is itself the result of acts of individual members of the same or interacting communities. In order for proper responses to be made, rather than invitations to a conflict, even a local farmers' market has to have a substantial measure of moral structure built from the moral characters and particular habits and beliefs of those who participate in that market. See Chapter 218, *Networks of Public Spaces Rather Than One Square*, for a short discussion of the research of a mainstream liberal professor at Harvard which supports this idea that communities with a particular moral structure are necessary for social peace and proper interaction. (The professor, Robert Putnam, was very upset by his discovery that you can't just throw together a variety of human beings with different beliefs and moral habits and have them spontaneously form a thriving and peaceful community. Most liberals, right-wing as well as left-wing, seem to be ignoring this work which is very disturbing to modern political and social beliefs.)

In this context, the lesson to be learned is that the sort of marketplace knowledge discussed by Professor Hayek and his follower, Professor Henderson, is not basic knowledge about reality. It is information gathered from our environments by active exploration and response of a sort conditioned by basic beliefs and habits and then organized by way of basic beliefs and habits.

# 422 A Proper Coordinate System for Visualizing Human Knowledge

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=775>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/02/21.]

As I read books on mathematics and science, I'm always thinking of issues in theology and metaphysics and politics and history. My inclination, whatever works I produce as byproducts, is to absorb knowledge as if it were background knowledge for a novelist. This doesn't mean 'research' that will produce reliable historical novels but rather the reshaping of my mind that I might tell a particular story which describes some true aspect or aspects of this world.

As I review discussions of coordinate systems in the science and mathematics books on my current reading list, I'm thinking about ways to speak of human knowledge in a unified sense as being made of knowledge-units, so to badly speak for now, which can be seen as states of being situated at specific points defined by a very complex system of coordinates which are defined by the various aspects of the issue under discussion. I'll give a specific example later. (See the freely downloadable book, *Four Kinds of Knowledge* [43] for my general views on the nature of knowledge.)

This much seems to be clear: modern forms of rationalism assume the world, Creation if admitted as such, consists of different realms describable by different forms of knowledge. Let's simplistically but usefully think of these forms of rationalism as being both Spinozean and Cartesian. From Spinoza, we learned to think of the world in terms of realms of being, each with its own realm of knowledge. From Descartes, we learned to think of

those realms of knowledge as being orthogonal to each other—in a manner of speaking. Moral philosophy and physics deal with the same reality but x-morality and y-physics meet at point (x,y) without really affecting each other. Changes to our understanding of man's moral nature don't affect our view of our physical world and vice versa.

Despite the potential, or even likely, complexity of this Spinozean-Cartesian way of thought, simplicity was the order of the day. Then again, as much simplicity as possible, but no more, is the rule for most thinkers exploring new ideas, else, they would soon be lost in many-dimensional mazes. Simplicity demanded that, at all points of contact between reality and a way of thinking about realms of knowledge, we should try to see simple geometrical objects – points or lines or planes. To make the system manageable, and to advance to a better system, thinkers had to—mostly—implicitly assume that those orthogonal knowledge-objects have flat surfaces and follow the rules laid down by Euclid. The entities and path-events we see in our world seem fantastically shaped to us, quite mysterious they be, partly because we expect to see the structures and movements suitable to an erector-set world. To be fair to Spinoza, a powerful and brutally honest thinker, and Descartes, a similar thinker with the added skills of a great mathematical thinker, they couldn't have gone directly to ways of thinking about knowledge that are as sophisticated as what are now possible because of the explosion of geometric knowledge in the 19th century which resulted in, amongst other advances, Einstein's view of spacetime.

The structures and movements, and the relationships between structures, are what they are and our efforts to understand their world—which is also our world—produce some sort of approximation to reality. Gradually, we can move towards a better approximation so that I can even say our minds can be shaped to encapsulate this world. Once it was necessary to see the physical stuff of the world in terms of Euclidean geometry. This fed into the philosophical systems of the Classical Greeks and related thinkers. Then we had the much richer world of the Newtonian-Libnizean calculus in (sometimes unfriendly) alliance with Cartesian analytic geometry. This fed into Kant and the British empiricists. The thoughts of all these schools of philosophy and science were greatly shaped by Spinoza's fragmenting of the world into realms of being, realms of knowledge, but modern science developed in a certain way partly because of Cartesian schematics and Spinozean fragmentation. Could the advance have happened so rapidly otherwise? I don't know.

In any case, the thinkers of the Age of Discovery were not only astronomers and mathematicians but also geographical explorers and even proto-anthropologists and proto-zoologists who enriched human thought by bringing samples or at least word and drawings of the exotic creatures and human cultures outside of Europe, but that didn't seem to have led to any questioning of the fundamental nature of the stuff of this world. But why should all specialized levels and fields of human knowledge advance together?

To complete this whirlwind summary of human intellectual history, we have more recently had such oddities of thought as positivism which seemed to have taken Descartes' skeptical methods and made those means into ends as well. These latter developments seem to have been also distortions and misuses of the tremendous advances in mathematical rigor in the 19th century or so. One line of advance was the explorations by Riemann, Klein, and others of more abstract systems of geometries in research papers, which papers were used by Einstein and his friend Grossman to develop systematic techniques of differential geometry and tensor calculus for use in Einstein's description of a world with a curved geometry of spacetime.

Our world is what it is and it's a bit twisted and curved to our perceptions and cognitions. We can think of it in analogy to Einsteinian spacetime where the three dimensions of space and the one dimension of time can be best described in terms of coordinate axes which are generally skewed, not at right angles. This provides mathematical ways of describing, say, the bending of both time and space at the horizon of a black hole, ways which can be labeled as 'natural'. Coordinates are handled, that is, in ways that are natural for the aspects of physical reality which are being explored, such as the problem of measuring a 12 inch ruler on a spaceship passing you at 10,000 miles per hour and another passing at 10,000 miles per second. The second spaceship is traveling, relative to you, at a small but significant percentage of the speed of light—189,000 miles per second—and the ruler will be relatively shorter by your measurement than the ruler on the slower spaceship.

At the same time, we should note that these measurements of reality, in fact—reality itself, are governed by certain invariants. The most important for this example is the speed of light which is the maximum speed of communication between entities in this universe — after all, light or electromagnetic energy in general is the medium which carries communications in this universe.

Let me take a very simple commandment as an invariant for human communities:

You should honor your mother and your father.

The problem is: how are we to care for our parents, including all those of the earlier generation in our community? For communities reasonably stable over a small number of generations and also in the concrete relationships between individuals, there is usually a traditional solution to the problem and it can be accepted, even accepted as an ‘absolute’ solution by those rigidly bound to one set of attitudes and thoughts. For example, the Puritans of Colonial Massachusetts took care of most of their elderly and others needing help within families or local congregations. At the same time, the Colonial government, and the Massachusetts government for several decades after the War of Independence, mandated that all local **political** communities provide shelter and clothing and food for all human beings in those local communities without means and without someone to care for them.

More directly in line with the problem of caring for the elderly: those who had built up farms or trade businesses, or had maintained or expanded inherited productive property, would turn those over to one or more children in return for care over their remaining years. There was no highly liquid economy to provide even an illusion of independence for the elderly from their children. The productivity of those children and their willingness to honor their commitments to their parents founded or ill-founded the security for those parents in their elder years. The parents prospered or suffered, all else being equal as economists say, from the competence or incompetence, luck or ill-luck, of their children.

Right away, we can see a more complete description of this problem would involve a complex set of coordinates dealing with the economic structure of a particular community and the larger communities of which it’s a part and also a complex set of coordinates describing the relationships between generations. The aspects of economic structure to be considered would include the ownership of productive operations (corporation or family), the level of liquidity (cash-transactions or barter), the ways of setting up offspring in life (“communities setting up other communities in the ‘Amish’ way” or “send the kid off to the mills at 12 or to college at 18 in the liberal/individualist way”), and so forth. This isn’t an inclusive list and the possibilities in the parentheses are merely examples. Already we can

see a complication and complexification—the list of aspects of economic structure includes “the ways of setting up offspring in life” which is also an important aspect of the coordinate system describing relationships between generations.

What can I conclude at this point? First of all, I’ve failed at a very basic level—that of setting up a way of dealing with the complex moral surfaces we form in our community lives. This is a well-known failure—some moral-social conservatives were in opposition to Social Security from the beginning because of this particular issue of the interaction between economic structure and the relationship between generations, but those conservatives had no way of speaking that was compelling. In my terms, they feared that an effort to deal with the care of the elderly using a tax-based, cash-based pension system would itself tear American families and communities apart by altering the relationships between generations, but they came across as being simply Scrooges uncaring about the starving elderly. Action, especially that as dramatic as altering the care of the elderly and disabled, changes the shape of the surfaces we move on as moral and social creatures. That action is also very difficult to describe and, for now, beyond being describable to any but sophisticated thinkers—which doesn’t necessarily mean those with doctorates or even those with college degrees. In any case, even those philosophers and social-scientists who are sophisticated thinkers haven’t any convincing ways to describe these problems to each other.

In general, competent historians and economists have been dealing with these issues for a couple of centuries or so, some of them in very competent and articulate ways, some of them in prose much easier to understand than that I’m producing as I suggest new ways to look at our individual and community lives. The problem remains that their prose is that of traditional thinkers, embedded in ‘Euclidean’ worlds or perhaps ‘Spinozean-Cartesian’ worlds. They don’t think or write in words and concepts more natural to the sophisticated problems of abstracting from concrete and particular human societies and of describing societies much more complex than those of pre-modern times.



## 423 Which Master Does the Modern Christian Serve?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=836>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/04/22.]

In *The Liberal Mind* [95], Kenneth Minogue speaks of misguided political and social reformers in the line of modern liberal thought:

How many visionaries have unwittingly prepared a hell on earth because their gaze was stubbornly fixed on heaven? And when hell comes—well, there is always some *ad hoc* theory of sinister interests or Judas-like betrayal to extricate the theorist from his disaster. What his illusions have prevented him from understanding are the forces he in fact served; and good intentions are quite beside the point. Stupidity is a moral as well as an intellectual defect.

Something similar could be said about Christians, not just when they are in the roles of reformers or missionaries but most of all when they think to be worshiping the God of Jesus Christ. They might claim to be worshiping the God of Jesus Christ, but they have their eyes on a different god, one who would never do what is done in Creation, would never pour down lava upon the innocent, would never send tsunamis to destroy entire towns of decent human beings, would never send upon us—his best and most morally pure servants—sufferings. It could only be Satan behind our sufferings because they think their God is a god who made a good and peaceful world for us and fallen angels and sinful men caused that good and peaceful world to become something different from what God had intended for us.

I can remember watching a documentary on earthquakes on television years ago and a geophysicist from—I believe—the University of California at Berkeley made an excellent point. He referred to the beauty and usefulness of the geographic structures of the area around San Francisco Bay and noted that all of this was created by processes which were, and are, violent beyond human imagination.

This is how God works in this world. The violence isn't something that fallen angels or sinful man introduced into a world in which San Francisco Bay and the Sacramento River and the Sierra Mountains would have come to be by gentle and peaceful processes. Even the rich soils of our best farmlands are formed partly of eroded volcanic rocks. Iowa corn and Hawaiian macadamia nuts are possible because of volcanic eruptions bringing minerals from deep inside the earth.

The universe expanded out of an extremely dense state in an explosion of sorts which stretched out space and time from a small region indeed and also created matter as we know it from some abstract stuff.

Stars and galaxies are the result of gravitational forces which are weak but become strong and violent when enough matter is involved.

Planets likely formed by some sort of crashes and smashes on a meteorite scale, though understandings of such processes are not very solid.

Life on earth likely formed from gunk-like stuff and, over the eons, became unattractive critters eating and being eaten.

Dinosaurs. Gigantic crocodiles. Saber-toothed cats. These and other monsters came to be in the evolutionary stream of events which led to human beings. And the rise of our species has brought about the newness of self-conscious moral monsters.

Continents smash into each other and into plates underlying the oceans. Glaciers sometimes sweep away huge masses of dirt and rock, Cape Cod and the eastern half or more of Long Island are the result of glaciers retreating and leaving that stuff they scraped from large regions of North America. Someday, storms will scatter the sandy stuff of Cape Cod and Long Island over the floor of the Atlantic Ocean. Volcanoes explode. Meteorites hit with enough force to leave huge craters which can be seen millions of years later.

Each of the Hawaiian islands in turn has partially collapsed as it was formed by passage over the volcanic hotspot which sends up the stuff of beautiful islands. The big island, Hawaii, is next. Scientists tell us it will collapse sometime in the next few hundred thousand years and the resulting

waves will kill all life on on the entire Hawaiian Island chain, likely sending waves that will leave mudflats in place of Los Angeles. This death and destruction is a part of the process of forming those beautiful islands, not some Satanic add-on to a gentle process of formation.

God sends life-giving showers upon the good and the bad, the malicious and the innocent. He also buries alive in lava the good and the bad, the malicious and the innocent. He sends viruses which don't just target the criminals and the sadistic brutes.

But modern middle-class men and women would inhabit a different universe, one good enough for us. We serve the bland and the soft and the gentle at the expense of the noble which often comes only by way of suffering. We ignore the evidence that God shapes what pleases Him by processes often violent. When we try to see the world in gentler terms and try to live our lives in those other terms, we serve another master than God. We prepare ourselves for another fate than life without end as companions of the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ.

God is telling the story He chose to tell. It is a story where beautiful mountains and bays and islands come into being through violent processes which leave innocent creatures buried underneath millions of tons of rock or even underneath molten rock. When we judge some of the Creator's chosen ways of acting as being evil, we are judging God as being evil, if only in part.

We worship and serve an Almighty who's responsible for all in Creation that we approve of and we have Satan to blame for all the rest. How convenient. How blasphemous.

Surely, this is no more than an intellectual mistake, an error in theology and not one with practical implications.

Not so. We worship a God who encourages a cowardly sort of prudence. We implement the dogmas of such a worship in the form of cradle-to-grave care for all. We entrap ourselves and would entrap all in our countries in webs of mandatory public-education and mandatory health insurance. We mandate the safety and security which we think God intends for us when Satan, or the Commies, or the radical Muslims, don't interfere. We don't bother to develop the tougher virtues which would help us to struggle and suffer for what is good and noble, our political freedom as well as our Christian faith.

We've messed up badly because we don't serve the God of Jesus Christ, don't even see Him or His Creation, don't read His Holy Scriptures, with the

clear eyes of a prophet and the accepting heart of a believer who accepts God and His works with an unconditional faith rather than judging the Almighty and His Creation by our cowardly standards. We want to serve a God who will take better care of us. We have served such a God and we are about to pay a high price for our cowardice and our lack of faith, for our fundamental and self-serving dishonesty. We gave up any noble virtues in the interests of a cowardly quest for safety and material prosperity and soon we'll have neither the fruits of virtue nor those of a materialistic prudence.

Meanwhile, God goes on creating not only beautiful islands in the Pacific but also that still more beautiful Body of Christ. I intend to stick with that God and to pray He carries me through to the end of this story He's telling. I'm as cowardly as other modern men but I'm willing to walk out on that limb, giving me no choice but to pretend to be brave and faithful to the Lord.

## 424 What is Politics?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=859>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/05/20.]

I've recently reread Kenneth Minogue's *The Liberal Mind* and this has raised a number of questions in my mind. For now, I've got to address the question in the title, "What is politics?" from the viewpoint of my effort to enrich and expand our understanding of the Body of Christ as it forms in this mortal realm.

In *The Liberal Mind*, Professor Minogue says:

Now what makes liberal individualism so plausible is that the individual is the only self-conscious entity whose limits appear to correspond to a physiological creature; and also that the thoughts and feelings which constitute institutions such as states or churches must be physically located in the minds of human beings.

...

Yet if we wish to learn about the military behavior of soldiers, we must study military activities, not psychology. And similarly, if we wish to understand politicians, we must attempt to understand the activity of politics, not discover whether politicians are nice or nasty men. [page 50]

For this chapter, the first part of the quote is most relevant. I put in the second part, which points more to the next question of the reality of communities, because I wanted some balance and some hints of where I'm headed. In fact, any who've been reading my writings over the previous few years would realize that the question of the reality of entities defined

by relationships has been partly addressed in my past efforts—relationships are primary over concrete entities. In a sense, human communities exist first and shape the individuals. Which comes first, chicken or egg? How about the flock? And the environments in which the flock lives?

In any case, I want to quote Professor Minogue again before moving on:

A social institution is a self-conscious grouping of interests. But we are not always self-conscious, and the study of institutions is far from exhausting political and social life. For in philosophizing we are confronted with another kind of evidence which in liberal individualism must be explained away, but which for other philosophers is itself a starting point. As examples of this evidence we may take a philosopher absorbed in a problem, an artist in a picture, or a soldier engaged in an attack. None of these people is self-conscious, and the behavior of each can only be explained if one understands the relevant activity. . . . But what is false in liberalism is the doctrine that these moments, times of concern with self-preservation and comparative status, rather than the times of self-forgetful absorption in activity, are the yardstick of reality. [page 51]

It might be that part of our difficulties in understanding the relationships of individuals to communities, institutions, etc. is that most people feel most alive when most self-conscious, not when losing themselves in a difficult and interesting task. They feel most alive when they are experiencing the pleasures of good food or music at a rock concert rather than while they're growing food in an intensive garden or playing a recorder. It would be in those two latter activities that we would most resemble those we pretend to admire, da Vinci and the DiMaggio brothers and other high achievers.

The ability to put all of yourself into a worthwhile task outside of yourself, building a clock from scratch or solving an important problem in astrophysics or worshiping God, is a necessary part of becoming God-like, even a necessary part of sharing life with God. To drive the point home, without being judgmental towards individuals, I sometimes get the impression in my own praying and in observing others praying that even the best of us will sometimes soak in our own holy and self-righteous juices and call it prayer. Prayer is getting lost in our conversation in which we learn to talk

along with God. Along with. Not to and not even with in the face-to-face sense.

The previous paragraph points towards one or more major problems we have to solve to become—so to speak—better than ourselves. What does that have to do with formation of communities or our entry into an existing community, at which time—if we truly become part of it – we become one of those forming that community.

Let me diverge to note a recent article about the loss of memories when one partner in a relationship, such as a husband or wife, falls into dementia. The article, and the underlying research and analysis, actually deals with the wider issue of the loss of memories in more general sorts of human groups. The article, *Psychologists Ask How Well—Or Badly—We Remember Together* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/04/110427171642.htm> tells us:

Several years ago, Suparna Rajaram noticed a strange sort of contagion in a couple she was close to. One partner acquired dementia—and the other lost the nourishing pleasures of joint reminiscence. “When the other person cannot validate shared memories,” said Rajaram, “they are both robbed of the past.”

...

Some findings in the field of collaborative memory research have been counter intuitive. For one, collaboration can hurt memory. Some studies have compared the recall of items on lists by “collaborative groups,” or those who study together, and “nominal groups,” in which individuals work alone and the results are collated. The collaborative groups remembered more items than any single person would have done alone. But they also remembered fewer than the nominal groups did by totaling the efforts of its solitary workers. In other words, the collaborators’ whole was less than the sum of its parts.

This so-called “collaborative inhibition” affects recall for all sorts of things, from word pairs to emotionally laden events; it affects strangers or spouses, children or adults. It is, in scientific lingo, “robust.”

...

“If a small group can reshape memories, we see how individuals come to hold certain viewpoints or perspectives,” she says. “That can serve as a model for how collective identities and histories are shaped.”

This “collaborative inhibition” might be a large part of what’s happening when human beings form into mindless or amoral herds. Alexis Tocqueville noted back in the 1830s that Americans have an odd inclination to ignore the most blunt and most obvious of facts when it conflicts with the mainstream view of things. Yet, we can be feisty as individuals. Maybe we need to be by ourselves to be able to fairly evaluate the moral implications of our actions as communities?

It’s the memories shared, and then lost, that interests me, for now. The ‘lost’ part interests me only as a pointer to the existence of shared memories, even group memories or community memories shared by large numbers of human beings—some of whom we’ve likely not even met.

Let me turn to another quote from Minogue’s *The Liberal Mind* before I try to determine some direction for my future efforts in dealing with this important aspect of the formation of the Body of Christ:

A tradition in this [second and better] sense is a knowledge of how to go about tasks, one which can only be transmitted by imitation, and which cannot be written down and summarized. In this sense of tradition, it is development rather than repetition which is the central idea. And what leads such traditions into decadence is precisely the conscious operations of reason. For reason fragments a tradition into a set of policies, ends and means, and works in terms of principles, which are to traditions just what dogmas are to ideologies—distorting fixed points outside the range of criticism. [page 55]

Development, rather than planning, is crucial and so are operations which might not even be conscious, but I’m going to tie matters together by saying that politics is the art of human community-building. A true politician, even if he’s a local dentist organizing a club for admirers of the Corvette, involves both the skills needed for a community to survive and prosper and also the stories which give meaning to the past and the dreams which give a true purpose to the future of that community.

It seems likely to me that we come together to form human communities partly because of the gaps in our memories. If we formed one-man, or one nuclear-family, societies merely interacting with other such societies as being external to our 'real' societies, we would never have the sorts of rich community lives that led to even the Bohemian neighborhoods of London and New York in healthier days, let alone the entirety of Western Civilization. In *Robinson Crusoe*, Daniel Defoe, an important thinker in the development of modern thought about the individual, did all he could to present in positive terms an impoverished community of one man living in isolation with another one-man community which was a man of different culture and language. A community as an assemblage of black-boxes. It's hard to even describe the brilliant strangeness, and perverseness, of such thought to one who believes in the Body of Christ and in that ultimate of communities—the Holy Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I'll note without further discussion that it's very odd to me that Christian thinkers, theologians and political philosophers and others, seem to expend little effort thinking about the nature of that ultimate community and what it would mean for human communities.

In any case, a community of truly free-standing individuals hasn't existed in the real world and exists in fiction only in impoverished imaginations, in books of impoverished narrative. I say this as an admirer of Defoe at his best, as a journalistic novelist who did wonders with the story of the Plague in London. I should also qualify myself. Some science-fiction writers with good imaginations, if not always the highest literary talents, have written of perverse societies of isolated individuals. The most relevant of such books is certainly the book in which Ray Bradbury got it right, as opposed to Orwell and Huxley. In *Fahrenheit 451*, Bradbury told us of a totalitarian society built from the ground up by isolated television-watchers. Sound familiar? Bradbury, in fact, thought television was the final piece in the puzzle, allowing Americans to retreat from reality, entering a state where they wouldn't be bothered by God's Creation. Tocqueville feared something like this would happen in the United States in his *Democracy in America* published in the 1830s. Hannah Arendt expressed a similar view regarding the entirety of the middle-class and countries dominated by that class.

So, let's think about three men from a reasonably rich culture:

Tom remembers some things, perhaps consciously or perhaps

just in his customs or habits or the skilled movements of his hat-making hands. Dick remembers some other things but is dependent upon Tom, not just because of Tom's hat-making skills but also because it's Tom who remembers a large number of songs from their Irish ancestors. It's Harry on the other hand who has taken up the odd habit of reading histories about these United States to which their Irish ancestors came and it's Harry who can tell them about some of the great accomplishments and some of the great failings of the land those hungry Irishmen came to, perhaps even telling of the way those Irishmen were despised and treated as animals useful only for their strong backs.

The art of politics, building a church community or a local political community or a men's club, is meshing together those memories, leveraging off the gaps in any one man's memories, in order to nurture and coordinate the requisite skills and also to construct something like a narrative which gives meaning to that community. When I speak of leveraging off the gaps in memories, I'm largely pointing towards a humbling process similar to what St. Paul spoke about in Romans:

For by the grace given to me I bid every one among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith which God has assigned him. For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

As some sociologists and historians, such as Robert Nisbet, have claimed:

We are bound together in communities by ties of dependencies.

We need each other's skills and we need each other's memories. As I've noted before, echoing others such as Nisbet, we've chosen to walk away from our smaller-scale communities and to become dependent upon the centralized powers of this modern age. We've left behind our community roles to become workers in giant corporations, citizen/soldiers in giant states,

and consumers in giant marketplaces. The problem is the nature of these top-down, exploitive communities of always self-conscious and always self-concerned individuals rather than their size since the Body of Christ, even with salvation restricted to a relative few, will be more gigantic than any conceivable human state.

Continuing to remember but to bracket away the question as to whether a community is a real entity or a mere collection of individuals, we can ask a similarly important and difficult question:

Do we also need a genius to organize us into a richer and more complex community?

I'll say no and will even claim a domineering or would-be domineering 'genius' of this sort will destroy or deform a community. We need to be patient and we need to do our work in our locality, which might actually be a region where various localities meet and form a more complex community. One way to see what I'm saying is to think of a federation which grows organically.

The governing councils for the various towns and cities in an urban area would come together to form a county. The governing councils of counties would come together to form a state. And so on. These processes once occurred naturally in our long-gone (relatively) free markets. One fairly straightforward example comes from the insurance industry where companies combined from the primary companies up through layers of the companies taking higher levels of risk to 'smooth' out those risks over time and over larger geographical areas. A very limited model of community building, but one which worked well even though it always had some levels of top-down design.

And we have to be careful about our thoughts. We think about a certain realm of human life in terms of engineering or bureaucratic system building when we should be participants in a narrative process which can't be guided if it's to remain healthy and strong. That is, we'd have to be careful not to 'guide' the process too much and certainly not to try to impose our favorite solutions upon an evolving system.

Healthy human communities evolve over longer scales of time and develop over shorter scales of time. As the historian Carroll Quigley claimed:

The truth unfolds in time through communal processes.

In my way of thought, this is an recursively entangled line of thought. You see, “Things are true,” and “Truths are thing-like.” This means that communities are true and not just ad-hoc arrangements. Moreover, communities are thing-like. The communities and the communal processes themselves unfold in time.

But entities like the United States and the so-called global economy are hierarchical structures imposed on masses of human beings and various human communities which would otherwise develop truer and more fruitful communities.

Perhaps we can say that the community evolves in time as true relationships emerge?

We haven’t gotten it right yet and we aren’t capable of fixing everything because we don’t even know what we’re fixing let alone what it’s really supposed to be like. More than that, we’re organisms, ourselves growing and developing towards futures we can help shape but can’t plan in the way that modern bureaucrats once imagined they could plan for a safer and more prosperous and more aesthetically pleasing Harlem.

Rather than trying to design our various communities, we need somehow to regard them as being more like evolving and developing organisms than designed and manufactured machines. When we so regard them, we can research them and analyze them, not for the purpose of controlling what shouldn’t be controlled but rather for the purpose of understanding them that we might move along with their development in our own lives and with their evolution to the extent we can consciously live as members of one generation in that democracy of the dead, the living, and the yet unborn.

In conclusion, I think it relatively easy to define politics as the art, drawing upon some science, of bringing together different skills and other forms of memory for the purpose of forming a community, perhaps to serve God and perhaps to get in a good game of bridge once a week. It’s harder to define even a vague range of legitimate actions on the part of the those who take on leadership roles with a ‘political’ aspect, but I strongly believe they should limit themselves to being actors who are part of more or less spontaneous processes, perhaps guiding them when a community begins to stray from all possible moral paths, but, even then, not trying to guide them down a specific path.

## 425 Moral Free-fall

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=872>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/05/27.]

You have weight when you're not in free-fall, that is, you have weight when you're kept from traveling the shortest path from your current location to the center of gravity of whatever system you're in. This shortest path, known as a 'geodesic', is described at <http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Geodesic>.

When you're weighed down, by your own bodily mass or that of other entities you are helping to support, you are experiencing forces exerted to keep you from traveling towards the local center of attraction, the local gravitational center which is found near the center of the earth.

Free-fall in physics is the state where an entity is moving along a geodesic towards the local center of attraction, itself moving towards a more regional center of attraction, right on up to the global center of attraction, the universal center of mass in a manner of speaking. Weight is the result of fighting gravity—on our part or on the part of the crust of the earth which supports us this far from the local gravitational center.

Viewed this way, gravity isn't a force. There's no force pulling that moving entity towards the center. A so-called 'fictitious force', describable in terms of a coordinate change, causes that entity to move in the way that a ball-bearing spinning around the rim of a bowl will gradually move downwards towards the bottom of the bowl. It's an interesting analogy but only if you can imagine away the force of gravity and picture the bowl stretching itself in front of the ball-bearing in such a way as to direct its movement without exerting a 'true' force. Then the ball is guided towards that bottom of the bowl because of the stretching of the very structure of spacetime. You can maybe make the imaginative leap a little easier by

thinking of the ball-bearing moving on a rubber membrane stretched over a bowl. You can see the rubber stretching and depressing itself to bring a sufficiently heavy ball-bearing towards the center and you can imagine you're seeing spacetime stretching and bending underneath, for example, the earth as it revolves around the sun.

Some say we should stay out of God's way, but they don't mean we should be passive or uninvolved but rather that we should give ourselves up to the will of God. Augustine of Hippo said that the man who truly loves God can do as he wishes. Clearly, that great saint meant to claim that the true lover of God would then be doing what is right as much as he can humanly understand the right and reach its standards. But we can get still closer to the truth by saying we should stop fighting against God and do His will as He draws us towards His Son at the center of Creation.

The path of moral right, the path of what is good and true and even beautiful, is a moral geodesic where we follow the path where we exert **no** force and, we can pray, no other entity exerts sufficient force to keep us from the Lord at the center of Creation. When we give ourselves up to Christ, we exert no force to prevent ourselves from being captured by this fictitious force and that force will then move us in a relatively painless and effortless way to the center where we meet Christ.

God, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, do all the work, creating space-time, creating the matter of which we are made and which we need to survive, moving created being and stretching the very shape of Creation to bring us to the center where Christ awaits us.

I simplify as you could guess from the discussion about movement towards a local center of attraction and then to a regional center of attraction and on up to a movement towards a universal center of attraction. We cluster first into communities of various sorts, forming perhaps complex systems of multiple sorts of communities which then move towards a center of attraction shared with other similar communities. The larger communities then move towards greater centers of attraction. By way of a self-ordering process directed by the shape and nature of Creation, we move towards that center which is Christ, the Head of the Body of Christ.

And now I feel a little more confident I can use the richness of abstractions drawn from modern physics to speak of the non-physical aspects of Creation. Much needs to be done for us to gain a newer, a richer and more complex understanding of Creation and of our relationship to the Creator, but I feel to have taken a small step in the right direction.

## 426 Who Do You Choose to Be Dependent Upon?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=875>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/05/28.]

A very important line of thought and research underlies this short article: *The Ties That Bind: Grandparents and Their Grandchildren* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/05/110513204417.htm>. Knowing that research in traditional societies in the undeveloped world had shown that children's health and longevity were improved greatly when they were under the care or supplemental care of grandparents—typically, as I recall from reading about some of this research years ago, the improvement occurred only with blood relationships—some researchers looked for and found similar advantages to grandparent involvement in caring for the children in industrialized communities as well.

Health and longevity are easier to test than the somewhat related moral traits which can be nurtured in children by constant contact with grandparents who can tell them stories of their own grandparents back in Hungary or Denmark and can give those youngsters a sense of connectedness to concrete human traditions. Those concrete, blood-based traditions are necessary as a foundation even to Christians who are called to love, in some way, human beings they've never even met. Without a firm connection to concrete traditions, even the most openhearted of evangelists or the most dedicated of medical missionaries, even the most curious of scholars or the most adventurous of businessmen, will find their minds opening so that their brains fall out. Their hearts will also melt down to puddles containing emotions more self-righteously destructive and self-destructive than truly charitable.

Grandparents are older, yes, and that means that some of the fire inside

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their bodies has burned out. Yet, that doesn't necessarily bring wisdom. There are certainly many 60 year-olds who have failed to live 60 years, instead choosing to live their favorite five or so years a multiple of times up to their 60 years on Earth. Yet, many have matured in a true way and can pass on much wisdom to their grandchildren. This is wisdom the parents might not yet have unless they took in their grandparents' stories and lessons in a way that is beyond most of us—a certain amount of experience is needed before we truly take to heart even the most obvious of moral truths, including those which seem to deal with quite mundane aspects of a well-ordered life. There is a time and a rhythm in the life of a grandmother or grandfather of proper priorities, a time and a rhythm which allows them to pass on the wisdom they might possess in some measure. Even if they aren't wise, or knowing in a more exact sense, they can pass on stories, memories, feelings, many of the bricks in the foundations of a well-ordered way of life.

Not all ways of life are worth continuing but I can recall with warmth the way of life in a small-town in Western Massachusetts when I was young. Some of my fondest memories concern relationships, some in which I took a part and some I merely observed in the way of a young boy, and many of those relationships were those of extended families. The extended families were dissipating because of the loss of the dependencies which hold all human communities together. The parents sent their children off to be formed in public schools and then to see the world as marines and soldiers and sailors. Those parents breathed a sigh of relief as Grandma and Grandpa were able to move into government-subsidized housing when they had to give up their own house. More sighs of relief came as the old folks were able to "maintain their independence" with the help of Social Security and Medicare.

It's difficult to believe our politicians and bankers and corporate executives could have planned all they carried out, yet they've acted in a consistent manner as if planning to replace local dependencies with dependencies of individuals and local political communities upon the Federal government which was seemingly thought to be independent of all the rest of Creation. In a similar way, we're dependent for food and clothing and other goods upon giant corporations rather than upon a more rational mix of mom-and-pop stores and regional or national department stores, local manufacturers and transnational car companies, local farms and giant agribusinesses in Iowa or Southern California, local hospitals with good nursing

care and big-city hospitals with fancy technology. Rather than that sort of a balance, we inhabitants of the modern West, not citizens of the West in a true sense, allowed ourselves to be convinced by the politicians and bureaucrats, the bankers and corporate executives, that they had the universe under good control. They stood upon the true bedrock of existence and could guarantee our safety and security so long as we were willing to do no more than accept their gifts, no more than to become dependent upon them.

While scientists were looking in the wrong places, Americans had discovered that all created being rested solidly upon the landfill of Washington, DC or maybe the granite bedrock of Wall St. or whatever the hell the City of London rests upon. It hardly matters at this point where these various criminal conspiracies and conspiracies of sheer stupidity were truly controlled from. What matters is that we've accepted those offers of the politicians and bureaucrats, the bankers and corporate executives. Certain they were that they were now Masters of Reality, they themselves were overwhelmed by hubris and the gods laughed at these morally and cognitively insane play-things and all the many foolish human beings who had turned their property and their food production systems and industrial productions systems and their governments—even their children and grandchildren—over to these lunatics. Starting with pioneer lunatics such as Teddy Roosevelt, we eventually reached George W. Bush and his thugs who thought they could create reality with enough firepower and then we've managed to descend further to Barack Obama who seems to think he creates a better reality by merely giving a feel-good speech. But the firepower is still deployed to kill many and destroy much, even if there is increasing doubt as to whether anyone has a clue what might be the goals of our lunatic masters.

Yes, we're dependent upon the various departments and agencies of the Federal government and have freed ourselves of dependencies upon parents and children and grandchildren and cousins and neighbors and fellow-worshippers. By allowing ourselves to become dependent upon the largess of central governments and their allied banks, largess actually funded by wealth taken from us, we've forged our own chains. Yet, there is hope in our bodies. We've corrupted ourselves, adopting thoughts and many behaviors of slaves dependent upon the central powers of our nation-states. Our minds, our souls, are corrupted to the needs of those who care for us only when we're useful to them but our bodies, though softened and stripped of many vertebrae, retain some of the instincts that lead many parents and

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grandparents to sacrifice themselves for their children, for the current benefit of those children and so that those children might have good futures. If only we can remember that our own futures would be more secure if we could integrate those children and grandchildren into viable human communities which we're part of, communities which we're willing to be dependent upon.

# 427 Killing Communities, Killing Innocent Human Beings, Killing Our Souls

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=878>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/06/01.]

In this article, *Steady Relationships Reduce Amphetamine's Rewarding Effects, Animal Study Suggests* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/05/110531180946.htm>, we learn:

Long-term relationships make the commonly abused drug amphetamine less appealing, according to a new animal study in the June 1 [2011] issue of *The Journal of Neuroscience*. The findings suggest that social bonds formed during adulthood lead to changes in the brain that may protect against drug abuse.

Prairie voles are rodents that form lifelong bonds with mating partners. In the new study, researchers directed by Zuoxin Wang, PhD, of Florida State University, found that male voles in established relationships displayed less interest in amphetamine compared with their single counterparts. Amphetamine exposure led to changes in the nucleus accumbens—a part of the brain's reward system—that differed depending on the relationship status of the voles.

Better living through our body's own chemistry. Let's form good human communities, including lifelong marriages, and get that dopamine flowing. We'll be much better people for it.

I recently reread *Fahrenheit 451*, a novel nominally in the sci-fi genre but actually a more substantial work of moral and social and political commentary. Ray Bradbury was writing about a country malformed at all levels of human communities and even in the souls and moral characters of nearly all citizens. That is, he was writing about the United States at a time when too many imagine there was moral order and even goodness. At best, Americans in 1950 were conformists in a country where there was a decaying but still substantial moral order inherited from past centuries of Christian civilization—in Europe. Our seeming goodness was no more than skin-deep niceness. Bradbury saw that this conformity, lawns were well-kept and violent crime was rare, was itself a sign of a horrible type of totalitarianism in a nearly mature form — a totalitarianism which had formed bottom-up. Our true enemy wasn't Hitler or Stalin but rather that moral coward in the mirror. And, so, our communities had become no more than ways of comforting ourselves as we built forms of human relationships which are strange and shallow and good only to shape and unite into gangs the sorts of human moral trash my Grannie from Montrose would have dismissed without so much as a word and barely a raising of the eyes.

We Americans hadn't yet reduced ourselves to moral trash but, by at least 1950 when Bradbury wrote *Fahrenheit 451*, we had become a people very good at brainwashing ourselves in the interests of the mainstream views of the world. We needed only a full schedule of television programs—and the scientists' brilliantly conceived communications network converted into the pornographed and facebooked Web—to finish the job of isolating us from healthy communities, the job of turning us into so many globs of moral trash.

I'll note quickly that Alexis Tocqueville had seen this tendency to brainwash ourselves in the interests of the herd view back in the 1830s and had written of it, though he speaks indirectly at times because he had stumbled on the modern concepts of 'totalitarianism' and 'brainwashing' without having the words to speak clearly.

There is a bit of blackish good-news that comes out of *Fahrenheit 451* and it ties in to this news of the resistance to at least amphetamines of creatures with good social lives, that is, creatures who produce good flows of the brain chemical dopamine—to usefully simplify. In Bradbury's novel, those who had seemed to be deadening themselves in pursuit of safety and comfort found that this life wasn't so good as they might have thought. The main character couldn't even remember much of his life, not even how

he'd met his wife or where she came from. And his wife was a drug-abusing mess – prone to overdoses which might have been accidents and might have been attempts of suicide. In fact, there is a strong implication that citizens of this nightmare world so similar to ours were killing themselves at a pretty good rate. Then the book ends with the effort to kill a lot of other men—a nuclear war.

Bradbury is a little clumsy as a writer but he's a man of profound insight and seems to have nailed the case. The main point of the book seems to be: Americans prefer to be dumb, perhaps because they're lazy and perhaps because they really don't see the need for all those books and all that knowledge about ancient history, like the history of the American Revolutionary War. Of course, Americans also despise the oral histories of their own families. This is a matter of great importance to me but I'm more interested, in this context, in Bradbury's portrayal of a society where social bonds have become so tenuous that an intelligent man doesn't remember meeting his wife, doesn't have a clue why they got married, and really doesn't know more about her than her name. That society is also awash in violence. Bored people of all ages jump into cars and head out to the main streets, hoping to find a nut, that is—a pedestrian, to run down. Men sometimes head off to fight in wars without their wives being concerned enough to ask where the war is being fought. People jump from buildings without their widows or widowers bothering to mourn. They simply remarry because. . . Well, actually, they don't really know why they ever marry because spouses get in the way of their friends on those interactive television programs. Drug overdoses are so common that technicians of a sort respond by going to the bedside with a device that sends a mechanical snake down the throat to clean everything out. No one is concerned. It's a routine matter, a world where drains clog up regularly with poisonous stuff and a serviceman comes to roto-root the stomach and intestines.

You see: we Americans not only prefer to be dumb, we also prefer human relationships which make no moral demands, perhaps because of a slightly different sort of laziness and perhaps because we would be gods of our own dreamworlds. True human communities disturb us as much as honest politicians do.

Not knowing much history and not being inclined to look for any answers in the past, not even the barely remembered tales of long-dead Grandpa, we Americans have weakened our social bonds to a point where they are barely such. We can no longer see that even the neighborhood bar was a

healthier community than those which form on Internet social sites. Weak social bonds leave us vulnerable to a host of problems, drug addiction being one of them. Addiction to violence, at least as a spectator and possibly as a participant, is another.

Let me switch gears a little by noting that amphetamines are sometimes used by bikers, skinheads, neo-Nazis, and others to prepare themselves for violence. It can magnify rage and eliminate healthy fear or prudence. My father was a Navy Hospital Corpsman sent to Korea with the Marines and served in a battlefield hospital unit. He said that corrupt doctors sold amphetamines to corrupt Marine officers who wanted to juice their men up for action—good way to win medals and promotions I would guess.

The study discussed in the first paragraphs of this essay indicates: “Long-term relationships make the commonly abused drug amphetamine less appealing. . .” With that reminder, I’m going to ask a highly speculative question:

Is it possible that American support of murderous wars against civilian populations, punctuated by **shock and awe** displays against poorly armed and poorly trained armies of a sort, is made possible—not caused but made possible—by our deteriorating social relationships, by our loss of community life, by our lack of desire for healthy and morally demanding communities?

Is it even possible that our weak social relationships convince American young men that it’s easy to kill? Is it possible that they find out it isn’t so easy to kill or even watch killing? Is it possible that this latter speculation would help us to understand the extremely high rates of suicides and of serious psychiatric disorders amongst veterans of combat in Iraq and Afghanistan? In a very powerful book, *On Killing*, Lt. Colonel Dave Grossman tells us that there is a small percentage of men who are morally well-ordered and yet capable of killing in a detached manner if they think the killing to be morally justified. Most men will pay a big price for killing, even under circumstances where they think the killing is morally justified. Colonel Grossman did his studies for an advanced degree in psychology by studying men not made for killing, men who had killed in World War II and succeeding ‘police actions’ and those men were suffering nightmares, seeing the faces of the men they had killed, for decades afterward.

Maybe, just maybe, if Americans were a people with morally well-ordered communities, maybe, just maybe, we wouldn't be cheering as our troops nailed more gooks or rag-heads? Maybe, we would mourn our war-dead and those enemies we killed even if we felt forced to wage war to truly defend ourselves?

Maybe.

After reading Colonel Grossman's book a good ten years ago, I stopped going out to watch the Memorial Day Parade pass by. He said those true war-heroes, those men who had killed face-to-face with an enemy soldier aiming a weapon in their direction, refused to march in or even watch Memorial Day Parades. They considered them to be celebrations of killing enemies and didn't think that was something they could be part of. So far as I can tell, we even celebrate the deaths of our own soldiers rather than mourning them. "Let's party in the cemetery. We can rest our beer-cans on the tombstones of all those brave men who died so we can be free and good and all those things we Americans are. What a country!!"

As for me, I mourn, not just for the American war-dead, and not just for the dead of all nationalities in these needless and stupid wars our leaders start and we support. I mourn also for the human communities which have died of neglect while we Americans were pursuing a life not so much different from that depicted in *Fahrenheit 451*. Certainly, Bradbury got it right when he thought we'd desert the front-porches and the parks to dive into what is now called virtual life, on the television screen and on the Internet. He was right we'd throw books away, if we're not quite ready to turn fire departments into book-burning operations. Books are one way to enter that ultimate community—of the living, the dead, and those not yet born. Books are a racial memory of sorts. Do it right and you can begin to tap into the memory of the pilgrim Body of Christ. You can begin to see the world as God sees it. You can begin to see what an ugly and evil mess we Americans have made of our country and of all parts of the world we invade.

For all our American pretenses to being Christians, we've become not just sinners who murder large numbers of Iraqis and Afghans and others without justification, we've also become a nation of the Anti-Christ, a nation which wages war against not only ancient Christian churches in other lands but also against our own human communities. Like Captain Ahab in *Moby Dick*, we hate all that constrains us, including our families and the traditions of Christianity. We hate our own not quite dead desires to enter

the Body of Christ. Not so brave as our brother Ahab, We would purge our memories of God Himself that we could be free... Free to join virtual communities and to take drugs to make up for our stunted minds and deformed moral characters, free to engage more fully in killing and partying afterward. What a country!!

# 428 Be Obnoxious and Be Our Leader

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=888>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/06/09.]

I shudder a bit at the results of the study discussed in the article, *Breaking Rules Makes You Seem Powerful*, found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/05/110520092735.htm>. We learn:

What happens when people interact with a rule breaker? Van Kleef and colleagues had people come to the lab, and interact with a rule follower and a rule breaker. The rule follower was polite and acted normally, while the rule breaker arrived late, threw down his bag on a table and put up his feet. After the interaction, people thought the rule breaker had more power and was more likely to “get others to do what he wants.”

“Norm violators are perceived as having the capacity to act as they please” write the researchers. Power may be corrupting, but showing the outward signs of corruption makes people think you’re powerful.

The ever insightful Tocqueville was shocked when he came to the United States in 1830 or so. Having heard stories from his father’s good friend, the Marquis de Lafayette, about the high caliber of American leaders, he found the Americans holding leadership positions in 1830 were no better than self-serving scoundrels. Why do we prefer self-serving scoundrels and “norm violators”? Why do we think sociopaths make good leaders? Is it a simple matter of thinking bad behavior to be a sign that a man or woman already has power? If that were true shouldn’t morally responsible human

beings refuse to submit to that sort of power? Don't we have the moral responsibility to recognize our tendency to follow sociopaths and to do something about it? If we can't recognize such morally disabling conditions and do something about them, we can't be morally responsible voters, we can't be self-governing in a morally allowable manner.

In any case, we are particular sorts of physical animals. We become true persons, human persons of higher moral standards, by shaping ourselves to be such, by proper responses to our own given natures and to what lies outside of us. This requires some effort. In slacking off, heading for the television rather than—for example—reading Jacques Barzun's *From Dawn to Decadence* [9] or similar sorts of intelligent narrative histories, we've chosen to be self-governing creatures of a willfully ignorant sort. We certainly aren't taking on the roles of morally responsible human persons. At the risk of seeming an elitist, I'll state without qualification that anyone who can't intelligently and critically read historical narratives or biographies (of Abigail Adams and not some movie star) shouldn't be voting in this complex world. Anyone who knows we're waging a variety of wars, large and small, in Asia and North Africa, and threatening more wars in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa, and doesn't even take the time to browse some geographical works at their local library or to browse various Internet sites (such as that of *National Geographic*), shouldn't be voting and shouldn't be opening their mouths in support of the rule-breakers in Washington or London or Paris.

If such efforts are beyond the capabilities or time-constraints of most American citizens, we should consider whether we, as a nation or nation-state, have any business interacting with, let alone devastating regions of the world when we haven't a clue where Iraq or Afghanistan are, what ethnic groups inhabit those countries, what the histories of those countries are, or how they make their livings. We, the American citizenry, are generally incapable of stating even the simplest of coherent understandings of what Clinton or Gore or Bush or Cheney or Obama or Biden were trying to accomplish by killing so many innocent human beings in other countries. But, so far as I can tell, these leaders also have not a clue what's really going on in those foreign lands and they fight those wars partly to provide jobs in the war-industry and partly as a result of Washington politics. Many Vietnamese children were maimed or killed so LBJ could show he was tough enough to be a manly President and, apparently, many were maimed or killed in Iraq so George W. Bush could push his legislation through

Congress. Rather expensive political games from the viewpoints of those on the ground.

Even the low American government estimates of “collateral damage” in Iraq and Afghanistan indicate we’ve now killed more than 100 innocent human beings for every innocent human being who died on 9/11, a rather horrible and damning—literally damning—situation for American Christians who line up behind Pilate and Caesar as they try to make peace by creating deserts about the world. It’s not just the proportion of 100 to 1, but the very fact that we Americans were willing to unleash murderous firepower upon innocent men, women, and children because of crimes committed by Saddam Hussein even if we should have known those crimes existed only in the lying imaginations of Bush and Cheney.

We kill a lot of innocent human beings and destroy a lot of infrastructure when we invade and occupy. We leave behind poisoned ground and very high birth-defect rates when we depart. Robert McNamara has confessed we were systematically killing or seriously injuring thousands of Vietnamese civilians a month—each month we created multiple 9/11 piles of civilian casualties. Vietnam and some regions of Iraq, such as Fallujah, have extremely high rates of birth defects because of the poisons we shot into their land. And how big a cost have American soldiers paid in the power-games played, from comfy Washington offices, by these thugs and mass-murderers we elect to the White House, the Senate, and the House of Representatives? Rather than terms like “rule-breakers” and “norm-violators,” we should just go right to “war-criminals” and “mass-murderers.”

We certainly prefer “rule-breakers.” Heck, we even seem to adore a serious amount of ignorance and stupidity and incompetence on the part of these gangsters and mass-murderers who are threatening the health and even the very existence of Western Civilization.

But who put those rule-breakers into power? The American voters. Are there some who bear a greater share of responsibility? Paraphrasing St. John Chrysostom, the road to Hell is lined with the skulls of those priests and ministers and rabbis and teachers and scholars and publishers and others who had the responsibility of applying serious moral critiques to society and government and the responsibility of guiding the development and education of the mass of citizens of the West. Those non-political leaders bear a great share of the guilt if not quite so great a share as the political leaders, but there’s enough damnation to go around and a goodly amount remains with the willfully ignorant creatures who proudly vote for their favorite well-

groomed thug after spending months watching the occasional debate with no content and not even coherently expressed sentiments, but mostly those proud voters are busy channel-surfing that they might catch some good rock-and-roll videos and exciting parts of that show about efforts to survive on an exotic island at the expense of other human beings.

Maybe we American adults think the disordered children of *Lord of the Flies* are to be admired and emulated rather than to be feared and steered into better paths?

# 429 Moral Narratives and Differing Scales of Time and Space

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=895>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/06/14.]

As matters currently stand in theories about physical reality and in philosophical analyses of those theories, there are no signs of homogeneity over the vast differences of scales in spacetime studied by scientists.<sup>1</sup> In general, created being at the quantum level (think of ‘subatomic’ levels of energy changes rather than small as such) seems sewed together with created being at the macroscopic level and there’s at least hints the universe might have its own nature apart from what it ‘contains’. See Chapter 193 , *A Universe is More than it Contains* for a discussion of a well-founded theoretical claim that the conservation of energy might not hold in our universe as a whole even if it holds at the macroscopic level as a true physical law.

Symmetry-breaking is a useful metaphor and seemingly a literal truth in some cases. Symmetries have been broken so that one elegant entity becomes two or more entities of greater concreteness or particularity. Modern cosmological physics and particle physics have produced strong evidence that the electroweak force shattered into the electromagnetic force and the weak nuclear force. Symmetry-breaking might have been involved in many of the events which led to our universe being in its current state. Created

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<sup>1</sup>Of course, we do have the unity from our common-sense: the stars and human beings and subatomic particles are parts of the same universe and do interact and even contribute to the being of each other.

being was probably strongly unified, at least in many of its aspects, when the universe was so dense that it took up less space than an atom takes in this current stage of expansion – being has frozen and has shattered in various ways that can be compared to a large body of water freezing and cracking or shattering in various places. See Section 184.1, *More on Symmetry-breaking as of 2011/06/13*, which is an update included as a separate section under Chapter 184, *Symmetry-breaking, From Physics and Mathematics to Metaphysics*, for a discussion of this issue. In this way of thinking, the beginning of the current expansionary phase of the universe was largely a phase change, from an extremely hot state to a relatively cool state.

But I'm conjecturing that something stranger has occurred. This shattering of symmetry has split being along lines that we can't perceive directly, only with our minds. Space and time don't add up to form larger scales of spacetime, though, as I noted above, many assume or hope that the universe is just a gathering of macroscopic chunks of spacetime which are themselves somehow built up directly from the strange entities explored by subatomic physics. That is, the macroscopic realm of concrete being in this universe seems to be something more than, or different from, a mere assembly of large amounts of subatomic being. In Chapter 193, *A Universe is More than it Contains*, I point out that the universe is its self, it has properties that don't seem to correspond to a mere building-up of large amounts of macroscopic stuff.

At least as a speculative adventure, I'll take seriously the lack of evidence of homogeneity of spacetime, perhaps the very nature of matter and energy, across different scales. I'll claim:

There are cracks in created being, in a manner of speaking, and the very small, the medium-sized scale where we live, and the very large are somehow sewed together. (A bad way of speaking, but mathematicians do sometimes talk in such ways when putting together strange geometric structures or spaces.)

What does this mean? I don't know and I'll admit it might not prove to be literally true. Someone might come up with a brilliant theory which can tie together the 'quantum' realm, the macroscopic realm, and the cosmological realm as one homogeneous physical structure. Based upon the current state of our understanding of the physical world, I doubt this can happen.

At the same time I do remain convinced that the universe is a coherent entity, in itself and as an assembly of other entities, just as a human being is a coherent entity while being composed of a variety of organs and materials, each of which can be understood separately in coherent terms though 'coming to life' only when part of the entire human organism. My claim that the universe seen in light of God's purposes forms a world, unified and coherent and complete, isn't dependent upon a strong form of homogeneity or isotropism.

The problem of tying together quantum theory and the general theory of relativity has drawn the efforts of many bright physicists and mathematicians and has resulted in exotic and insightful, but far from fully successful, theories such as various string theories which often hypothesize this universe as being a 4-dimensional 'surface' of a realm of being with more dimensions than that.

On the whole, the results of these sorts of theories don't pass the 'smell' test for future success, seeming more like the ingenious theories being developed prior to Einstein to deal with the problems he dealt with in a surprisingly direct way—he accepted reality as being what it seems to be in terms of the best descriptions based upon solid investigations. Einstein inherited a lot of the pieces from Newton and Maxwell and Poincare and Lorentz, the latter two having been among that group of Einstein's older contemporaries who had worked themselves into dead-ends.

Accept reality.

Now I'll seemingly switch course by suggesting a symmetry break is involved when the concrete stuff of this universe emerged from a more abstract stuff, but the symmetry is different from any that would give a set of laws which would 'shatter' directly to Schrodinger's equation in quantum mechanics and Einstein's field equation in the general theory of relativity. More accurately, the symmetry-breaks which resulted in the quantum and cosmological realms are examples of a more general event, the particularization of abstract forms of being. I don't see any reason to believe that this particularization had to occur in such a way that 'dimensionality', the nature or even number of spacetime, would have to be the same at all scales of this universe.

If we consider all that we know and all the open questions, we're probably farther from developing a theory of created being in its wholeness than Aristotle was from developing a valid theory of gravity. The best news in this field is the fact that we understand what is at issue, we have a vari-

ety of interesting and difficult questions, and we can make some intelligent statements about various aspects of this realm of created being—this realm which can be explored by empirical means or by various sorts of analyses allied with empirical investigation.

I'll suggest here that we know not much more about the realms of being we can directly perceive than we do about the small and the large, as incomplete as our knowledge also is of those realms. What we do know is that the macroscopic realm is, in a manner of speaking, more intensely narrative. The universe is itself a narrative and, as it is seen as a world in light of God's purposes, has a life-story, but it's at the level of macroscopically observable entities, stars and galaxies as well as frogs and humans, that we see the emergence of some actual entities, and some plausible but as yet undiscovered entities, which are fully moral characters and not just things in a story.

How does this level of thing-like being, complete with living things, come into existence and maintain its existence? We readily admit the miraculous nature of life, but we err by not realizing how remarkable it is that this macroscopic level of narrative exists. If some disembodied intelligent creature from another universe were to be told about quantum levels of reality and about what we might call the Einsteinian universe, would he be able to posit the existence of our macroscopic realm? Would he be able to hypothesize that such a macroscopic realm would give rise to self-aware creatures, evolving in family lines and developing during individual lifetimes and sometimes even being self-aware and morally purposeful?

This macroscopic realm might result largely from matter and energy surging up from the quantum realm into the spacetime structure of this universe, but—I remind the reader—something else seems to come in from more abstract realms of being, something which differentiates this scale of being in this universe. Moral stories don't come about by adding up quantum events nor do they take on only shapes dictated by gravity.

Again: how does the macroscopic level of thing-like being come into existence and maintain its existence? Let me start by conjecturing that the raw stuff of things pours into this universe from some vast sea of more abstract stuff. This is at least somewhat in line with the re-interpretations of quantum theory proposed by Louis de Broglie and David Bohm. In their systems, quantum events are seen as having somewhat more traditional casual relationships though my understanding is that it's not necessarily true that determinism is re-established as even a possibility, not even at

the most basic level of physical events. In a manner of speaking, this sea of raw stuff could be icy so that we could skate on it. That would give us a gliding motion and an ability to turn with little effort that would be a limited freedom, a freedom easy to over-estimate but real nonetheless. More generally, I actually think we'll need to generalize our concepts of causation but I currently have no speculations in this area. Some sort of hyper-cause and hyper-effect relationships will hold in Creation, but that's hardly more than a restatement of the problem.

For now I'll limit myself to claiming that the macroscopic realm, the narrative realm in which human moral narratives occur, isn't just some meeting point of the quantum level of reality and the cosmological level of reality, though it is in large part exactly that. It isn't just made of what bubbles up from the great quantum sea of Bohm and de Broglie nor is it shaped only by the structures of Einstein. This isn't to imply occult forces operate at any scale or level of this concrete realm of God's Creation. It is to say that those three realms of created being which form the foundations of our human beings all draw separately—if that is the right word—upon more abstract realms of being. They come together to form a universe, which itself becomes a world, unified and coherent and complete, when seen in light of God's purposes. None of this forces us to believe the universe is homogeneous over those three realms so far as the properties of spacetime is concerned. Nor are we forced to believe in homogeneity with regards to a variety of other aspects of concrete reality.



## 430 Are Conspiracies Self-organizing?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=901>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/06/21.]

Are conspiracies self-organizing, at least in part?

In general: yes. There is no centrally-controlled conspiracy run by Satanic servants or omnipotent bureaucrats. There are networks of those who inherited wealth and power and those networks are sometimes refreshed by new blood of the ambitious and talented. There are also tightly organized operations with a specific result in mind, such as the murder of President Kennedy seems to have been. In countries with a more publicly respectable class system, we can even see open domination of governments by networks of blood-relatives, marital-relatives, and school-chums. What some Americans see as a all-encompassing conspiracy, and many see in occult terms, seems to be no more than the operations of an American class system which we prefer to remain invisible. Even those who do see this situation in more realistic terms have to speak crudely in terms of insiders and outsiders because there is no socially acceptable way to speak of the classes of American society, not even in New England so shaped by the blue-blood families whose ancestors allegedly came over on the Mayflower.

In chapter 2 of *The Anglo-American Establishment*, Carroll Quigley gives far too much detail for most of us of Lord Salisbury's dominance of the British government and of Oxford through that network which Quigley calls the *Cecil Bloc*. This Bloc, which was very strong from about 1885 through 1930 or so included only a small fraction of the aristocratic class of England, but it's the sort of development to be expected in a nation where it is, or at least was, accepted that some are more equal than others,

especially when it comes to access to sources of power and wealth. The situation is similar even in the New World, but far less rigid.

*The Anglo-American Establishment* and other books by Quigley are available for free download at a website devoted to Carroll Quigley, <http://carrollquigley.net/>. Quigley, who was a rational and sometimes admiring historian of these power elites, was a professor at Georgetown University and, amongst other activities, taught a course in “how to think historically” which was apparently required for State Department and CIA employees studying at the School of Foreign Service.

I’ll remind my longer-term readers and inform my newer readers that my interest in exploring conspiratorial theories is centered around their nature as pathologies of human moral systems, including social and political and economic systems. I study pathological developments that I might understand the healthy forms of the entities. I’m following a path like that blazed by Louis Pasteur who came to richer understandings of biology partly by the study of disease. In this case, I’m studying a rather spectacular disease which has helped to destroy the possibilities of peace and prosperity which seemed within our grasp in 1910 or so, then miraculously reappeared around 1990. It would take one heck of a miracle for those possibilities to reappear in the next few decades. We may even be entering a century of war and stupidity as civilization bottoms out (we can hope), a situation brought about because of the morally irresponsible actions of Western leaders and the morally irresponsible ignorance of other Western men. The power-elites of the modern world seem to be addicted to brinkmanship and to the wars and other disasters which result and we the common folk applaud them, at least if they’re leaders of our good political party rather than those bad men who lead that other evil party.

I perhaps have written too often about so-called conspiracies without yet being able to propose a good way to think and talk about them in terms acceptable to my worldview, something of a Thomistic existentialism updated to account for modern empirical knowledge. Yet, I was inspired to travel this circuit once more by an article, *Information flow can reveal dirty deeds* at [http://sciencenews.org/view/generic/id/330731/description/Information\\_flow\\_can\\_reveal\\_dirty\\_deeds](http://sciencenews.org/view/generic/id/330731/description/Information_flow_can_reveal_dirty_deeds), which tells us “The flow of the famously corrupt corporation’s (Enron’s) electronic missives suggests that dirty dealings tend to transpire through a sparse, hub-and-spoke network rather than a highly connected web.”

We’re also told that:

And the work suggests that networks aren't just static conduits for information.

"It's intriguing," said Aven. "We've treated social networks as contained plumbing systems directing the flow of information, but we should think about them as water that carves river beds of social relations."

In other words, sophisticated criminal operations are self-forming, dynamic networks rather than rigidly structured bureaucratic regimes of the sort that we lesser folk are supposed to inhabit with smiles on our faces. The far more complex 'conspiracies' which are actually the operations of our hidden class system are still more dynamic than the specific criminal conspiracy in which the owners and top employees at Enron tricked themselves into forming.

This idea of self-organizing networks is implied by Adam Smith's speculations on the *Invisible Hand* and also by modern work on self-organizing systems. I've written about Smith's *Invisible Hand* doctrine as being morally neutral, it can work towards evil or good—see Chapter 419, *The Invisible Hand, Good and Evil*.

When human communities form, whether a social club intending to support little league and other local charities or a criminal gang or a corporation turning to illegal exploitation or a political machine masquerading as an open political party, networks of various sorts will form. How do the members of a lodge of Elks or the local VFW decide to support a new athletic group or a community pantry? Well, they'll vote eventually, but it's likely that the more energetic and more involved members would have already discussed matters, exchanged information and opinions, in various informal ways, when they crossed paths at the local supermarket or when they met at the bar during a wedding reception or a political fund-raiser. Criminals? Did Boss Tweed or Lucky Lucchese communicate action-plans by way of office memos? Did they gather information from reports produced on schedule by the research department? It's likely that Boss Tweed's desires were expressed to the boys gathered in his office and also likely that Lucky Lucchese's research department consisted of barbers and bartenders and bookies and the cops on the beat.

The situation isn't so much different with more exotic conspiracies or the general conspiratorial air of American political and economic life caused by our refusal to see that the Emperor indeed has clothes, the purple toga

of a man behaving as the superior of the vast majority of us. We don't yet have a Caesar but we have a society separated into Patrician clans and plebeians who are being reduced to a proletariat state. The modern-day Patricians aren't so tough and virtuous as those ancient Romans, but they can be just as ruthless, just as nasty, though most can't handle weapons themselves. There are plenty of plebeians willing to sign on as mercenaries for the opportunity to loot their fellow plebeians or to stomp on their faces. Or at least to grope their genitals and breasts.

Ruthless and brutal but usually genteel even when speaking to the common folk. And they know which fork to use at state banquets. They even know the rules about which neighbor to converse with and for how long. They might not have much to say of interest, but they know how long to dwell upon it before turning to the Senator's wife across the table. And many even know how to switch to the small-talk appropriate at the corn-cob booth at a state fair.

The idea that the good, as defined by some, might be served by the murder of a national leader, American or Congolese, might be discussed on the deck of a sailboat or the green of the 1st hole at a golf-course. The destruction of a local banking system in the interests of central banks and big-city banks might be planned during dinner at an elegant restaurant in Midtown Manhattan or even at a backyard celebration of a baptism or a bar mitzvah. The lower level workers, the servants of the powers-that-be, have their own networks of information and their own ways of planning the tasks which fall to them by various formal or informal paths. Undoubtedly, much of this discussion and planning takes place at second-tier country clubs or tennis clubs, at backyard barbecues in neighborhoods of houses awfully nice but less than mansions. They don't just talk about the Red Sox and Yankees during their cocktail parties, waiting for a formal request for proposals on how to deal with a difficult country. Each banklord who has an opinion or a stake in the results will contact Congressmen or friends in the State Department to push for another war or against a war or for construction of a dam in Africa. Kill an African leader or build a dam to supposedly raise living-standards in some region of Africa. The entire globe and not just the West, is but an exploitable realm for the Western elites. This doesn't mean that they march in lock-step though they seem to develop fixations in a way indicating some factor of mob psychology is at work.

And I repeat, the elite is an underground aristocratic class which some-

times engages in criminal behaviors or sometimes just behaves in secretive ways as they try to protect and enlarge their own wealth and power. What always remains true is that the rest of us are excluded.

Unfortunately, the vast majority of Americans collude in maintaining their own status as exploitable sheep so long as they are allowed some basic luxuries and a life where they don't have to exercise initiative or use their minds. Even historical facts are ignored if they conflict with that oh-so-comforting view of American history dished out in public schools. What will they do when the luxuries disappear? Will they grumble and continue to fill their roles as an underclass so long as the new television season looks promising?

In fact, I don't think the model of *network* is quite rich and complex enough to describe the structure of the 'secret' American class system, though it works for systems of communication. I think the proper model would be one similar to that of curved spacetime in modern theories of the universe. And yet there is a major difference in that the curvature of spacetime in this universe is caused by gravity, a force which—so far as we currently know—is only attractive while the forces of what might be called social-spacetime also involve repulsion of a certain type. Those in the power-elite don't want to drive all others far away only the proper distance; they're useful if only as oil-rig workers, farmhands, or compliant politicians or government bureaucrats.

Yet, I'll invite readers to contemplate the words of the American physicist, John Wheeler:

Space acts on matter, telling it how to move. In turn, matter reacts back on space, telling it how to curve.

In social or moral terms:

Social-space acts on human beings, telling them how to act. In turn, human beings react back on social-space, telling it how to curve.

Class systems set up different regions of social-space so that some are excluded. At the same time, the regions of power-elites exert a strong force on many other regions, forcing members of lesser classes to orbit the upper-class system, even though not allowing them to come too close. No,

Ernest, the difference between us and the rich, at least the established rich, is greater than having money or not. They have money, more importantly power, but they inhabit a different world than the world of the poor and the powerless.

Only the smallest of baby-steps and I'm far from happy with it, but it's worth thinking about in order that we know how to move forward in describing our current situation in our moral, social, political, and economic structures. Such a description is important not for pure 'academic' reasons but so that we know how to create better structures, perhaps resembling the moral, social, political, and economic structures so many Americans imagine to already exist.

# 431 Your World is a Narrative—Don't Let it Be Written for You

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=914>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/07/02.]

You travel a path through a story, your life, which is intertwined with a variety of other stories at different levels, all of them coming together in that story which is this world, the growth and development of the Body of Christ in this mortal realm.

The path you might prefer to follow will often threaten to curve away from you. Maintain a high state of awareness. There is evidence from a variety of scientific studies which warn of the dangers which arise when you don't explicitly take care of your movement through Creation, the growth process of your own self and your children, a growth process of an organism with moral and intellectual and spiritual aspects.

False memories can be implanted in your minds so that you can't even remember truly where you've been, even so mundane a false memory as that of holding a glass bottle of Coca-cola in a stadium which bans glass containers: see the article *Ads Implant False Memories* at <http://www.wired.com/wiredscience/2011/05/ads-implant-false-memories/>. This is a frightening possibility in a world where governments and corporations and other powerful entities have plenty of reasons for you to accept their false histories of important historical events and of the very ways in which wealth is distributed and power is structured. They have reasons for you to live a life profitable to them.

There are a variety of studies in which the scientists 'read' minds in

one way or another, for example, to predict which songs will be popular with teenagers by scanning the brains of test subjects as they hear new, unreleased music. There are others which are showing an ability to predict our actions in the near-term future by scanning brains. The scanning of brains is a powerful technology and a dangerous technology. It can help us a lot and lead to medical miracles, but it can most certainly be misused. In general, the more powerful a technology is, the greater the harm it can cause. And we should remember that prediction can lead to causal or correlative models that can then lead to control mechanisms. As it is, sophisticated marketers, such as those at Coca-cola, have found weak but effective steering mechanisms.

The philosopher Ian Hacking wrote an important book, *Rewriting the Soul* in which he concludes that the multiple personality syndrome was the result of the creation of barriers between different blocks of memories, some of which were false memories and some of those may have been implanted by therapists who were trying to help troubled human beings. Some of the so-called “recovered memories” which tore apart families and tortured human beings who needed help were implanted by incompetent therapists. Some of the spectacular claims of child-abuse in institutional settings turned out to be the result of memories implanted by incompetent investigators. I remember reading of a case of alleged large-scale child-abuse where competent investigators came in later and said they thought something bad had occurred but they couldn’t get at the truth because of the false memories in the minds of some of the children. By that time, they were group memories. The children were remembering together what had never happened.

If you can control someone’s memory, you can control, or at least influence, many of the thoughts and actions of that human being. Stalin knew that but wasn’t so good at rewriting memories as the American politicians, marketers, and entertainers.

Are we the targets of campaigns to shape our memories of important events, murders of national leaders or entire wars? Are we the targets of campaigns to shape our memories towards someone else’s desired understandings of the economy, of actual and possible ways to make livings?

We Americans, and some other peoples as well, have remained remarkably complacent during a period when vast amounts of wealth were destroyed by needless, criminal wars and by a profitable sort of incompetence on the part of Wall St. So far as I can tell, a large percentage of the remaining wealth was transferred from productive members of society to politicians

and bankers. Was our complacency partly a result of these campaigns in which false memories were implanted, memories intended to lead us to see the scoundrels of our power-elites as serving our interest and as being good men and women? At least we consider as good the ones on our side of the football spectacular being played between the Donkeys and the Elephants. If we're Elephants, the Donkeys are evil though they all seem to have trunks instead of snouts. If we're Donkeys, the Elephants are evil though they seem to have long floppy ears sticking up from the tops of their heads.

How many Americans could think straight enough to realize that our wars to "defend ourselves" after 9/11 have killed at least 100 innocent civilians for every one innocent victim in those towers? How many Americans remember we were—quite systematically—killing or seriously injuring thousands of Vietnamese civilians each month? Yet, when someone carries out a nasty large-scale crime against us, we declare them to be agents of evil and we wage wars across the globe.

I'm going to end with a link to an article about a study showing researchers can predict some future actions by scanning our brains: *Researchers Can Predict Future Actions from Human Brain Activity* at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/06/110629171228.htm>. There is much potential good in this technology, as they note at the end of the article, but it's dangerous technology in a morally disordered society in which nearly all human beings, including many in the power-elites, take on the passive role of clay to be shaped by external forces.

A true human person is a human animal who tries to shape himself by intelligent responses over time to external reality. Those intelligent responses begin when we're young with firm guidance from parents and other adults with a concrete relationship to us. As we mature, those intelligent responses should increasingly be the result of our own understandings and voluntary actions towards a state of human being we'd like to occupy.

A human animal which allows itself to be shaped by whatever external forces grab hold of him is nothing like a moral person.



# 432 Liberalism and the Struggle Between Will and Mind

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=923>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/07/08.]

Let me propose a new definition of a liberal:

A liberal is one who values will greatly and thus is inclined to exaggerate his power over the thing-like world, over his own nature and the nature of other human beings, over a merely factual world, and—maybe—over truths.

This seems strange in light of the teachings of the very early liberals. Most, such as Locke, taught moderation in any efforts to impose your will upon the world because you would then be limiting the freedom of others, at least in many cases. Hobbes even seemed to teach that men are powerless as individuals; good men can't even protect themselves or their loved ones against the violent amongst us – without the help of Leviathan. Yet, we have to remember that other liberals, Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill, have been very optimistic about the power of the individual to take care of his needs and proper desires—however 'proper' is defined—in a world which can descend into chaos and mindless violence.

I think there is some sense to be made of this Modern Age, this Liberal Age, if we think in terms of this optimistic doctrine about the power of the human will. Hobbes willed to escape the turmoil of religious wars. Rousseau willed to escape certain sorts of moral responsibility which seemed to him to be better handled by a polity. Adam Smith willed to seek a proper gentleman's prosperity and life within the context of what might be called a 'bourgeois moral order'. John Stuart Mill was interesting in that he willed

an individualistic freedom seemingly compatible with Smith's marketplace and he also willed radical, and not necessarily empirically sensible, political reforms seemingly compatible with Rousseau's polity.

I noted recently that I've finished reading Norman Cantor's *Medieval History: The Life and Death of a Civilization* and he ended with the story of the Oxford Franciscans, most prominently Duns Scotus and William Occam, waging war upon the Thomistic concept of the mind and its importance to mankind in our relationship to Creation and Creator. Even the most brilliant of liberal thinkers, even Hobbes and Rousseau and Smith and Mill, seem to me to drive their thoughts forward not by any process similar to the Thomistic process in which a human being develops organically—mind develops as the human being responds to external reality and begins to properly re-shape himself in that response.

I might be speaking in a clumsy way as I try to summarize a lot of thought into a few words but the idea is that will, in the conception of Duns Scotus and his liberal descendants, is a pre-existing faculty which can be directed towards. . .

Towards what?

In a complex world, such a faculty would be guaranteed to get most human beings in trouble and would also be guaranteed to destroy a liberal society. If will exists, it's not capable of engaging the world in such a way as to understand our circumstances or to project possibilities. Will, unless it's a human aspect controlled by a disciplined mind, is capable only of attempting to dominate and control.

I'll stick to my views that we're born as human animals and shape ourselves, in ways appropriate for organisms, to develop aspects which can be labeled 'moral' and 'mind-like' and 'soul-like' and so forth. With this sort of an understanding, will isn't an independent faculty and neither is a mind. Yet, mind is the relationships a human being has with some plausible and honest understanding of a reality which is itself objective, in fact, a manifestation of some thoughts of God. Mind is a human being who develops a plausible understanding of objective reality and responds accordingly. Some who aren't called to lives of intellectual work or mystical contemplation still give a sense of some sort of deeper understanding of what it's all about.

The point I'd like to make is that a cognitively and imaginatively sane understanding of reality, especially but not only the part we directly interact with, is what directs morally purposeful action and the plans we might have for better and further shaping ourselves and those under our influence.

We don't live in a world where sane choices present themselves clearly. A great deal of planning and purposeful activity of a general sort is needed to become the sort of moral creature who can begin to make moral sense of this world, including our small regions. We develop habits and attitudes. We acquire the skills to understand better and to act better.

If we are morally well-ordered creatures, will is likely an illusion of sorts, a result of some with simple views of their own selves trying to justify their organic selves as being ruled by their self-conscious aspects. Organisms act as organisms, not as mere residences for agencies and faculties which exist independently of liver and toes and so forth and act accordingly.

It is the mind which can help us to move through life in ways which are morally sane. Will is mostly an illusion, the light reflecting off our wakes as we look behind and try to understand our lives. To see our moral natures in those optical displays of what lies behind us is to have already sunk into a form of insanity.

The punchline, perhaps already anticipated by my regular readers, is that I consider nearly all modern political thinkers and doers to be liberals. The anti-mind crowd has swept the modern fields in nearly all endeavors. Now begins the counterrevolution, or so I can pray.



## 433 The Final Frontier of Our Modern Moral Journey

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=933>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/07/16.]

The so-called World War I, was actually the beginning of a war not yet over in this year of 2011, though now consisting of the hugely expensive American military bumbling about in a number of countries as our political leaders dance and speak their chosen roles of blood-soaked buffoons. That first phase of the ongoing War of the Modern Age, the phase called “World War I” was perhaps the worst if only because the European leaders who blundered and blustered into war and many of those in the masses who charged forward to the horrors were seemingly civilized human beings, a cut above those more obviously barbaric creatures who followed them. We can even claim to be their victims to some extent, that is, we became more deeply barbaric because of their stupidity and credulity and cupidity. After that first phase of our ongoing war, Winston Churchill, saw the horrors though he did little to return Europe to a civilized state in the remainder of his career. But he did speak darkly and wisely in these words quoted in Martin Gilbert’s biography of the English bulldog and requoted on page 3 of *The Present Age* by Robert Nisbet:

All the horrors of all the ages were brought together, and not only armies but whole populations were thrust into the midst of them. . . Neither peoples nor rulers drew the line at any deed which they thought would help them to win. Germany, having let Hell loose, kept well in the van of terror; but she was followed step by step by the desperate and ultimately avenging nations she had assailed. Every outrage against humanity or interna-

tional law was repaid by reprisals—often of a greater scale and of longer duration. No truce or parley mitigated the strife of the armies. The wounded died between the lines: the dead mouldered in the soil. Merchant ships and neutral ships and hospital ships were sunk on the seas and all on board left to their fate or killed as they swam. Every effort was made to starve whole nations into submission without regard to age or sex. Cities and monuments were smashed by artillery. Bombs from the air were cast down indiscriminately. Poison gas in many forms stifled or seared their bodies. Liquid fire was projected upon their bodies. Men fell from the air in flames, or were smothered, often slowly, in the dark recesses of the sea. The fighting strength of armies was limited only by the manhood of their countries. Europe and large parts of Asia and Africa became one vast battlefield on which after years of struggle not armies but nations broke and ran. When all was over, Torture and Cannibalism were the only two expedients that the civilized, scientific, Christian States had been able to deny themselves, and they were of doubtful utility.

We modern, civilized, scientific, Christian men—especially Americans—have overcome another inhibition, no longer denying ourselves the expedient of Torture, though American leaders have instituted procedures to keep it better hidden. I guess we have only to stop denying ourselves the expedient of Cannibalism and we will have completed our transition into what we wish to be. We will have fulfilled our heart's deepest desire—to be the Lords and Judges of Creation, to make ourselves into what we wish to be and not let ourselves be limited by God or Nature.

## 434 Am I an Eggregationist?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=946>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/07/22.]

While reading an abridged version of the cosmological sections of Pierre Duhem's massive study of Medieval science, *Medieval Cosmology*—published by the University of Chicago, I paid closer attention to some mathematical discussions by later Scholastics. As Duhem noted, those discussions were very sophisticated anticipations of the concept of limit which matured in the 1800s though it was probably somewhat implicit in the writings of mathematicians of the 1700s who were developing Newton's ideas. Those discussions by the Scholastics were sophisticated but unconvincing in some unsettling way...

And I realized they were verbose and clumsy because of a lack of proper terminology, perhaps a lack of concern for the seas of words they were generating. To be fair, it's not clear they were in the position to develop the fundamental concept of 'set', but I'll put aside that major difficulty for the sake of making a point. Some of the discussions would have hit the bulls-eye if they'd had concepts and words corresponding to 'open set', 'closed set', 'least upper bound', and 'greatest lower bound'. Someone who's been through an advanced undergraduate course in analysis, or better, could easily understand the difficulties that would cause in discussing limits. Add to that the problems caused by lack of modern algebraic symbols and you've got the sort of prose that was ridiculed by Renaissance thinkers who were intellectual children compared to those late-Medieval Scholastics. Yet, the children had a point that the language was simply too much in several ways.

That led me to think about an apparent language problem in my occasional discussions about decentralizing political and economic systems. I've read some discussions, especially on libertarian sites, where some read 'dis-

tributivist' and think it means top-down distribution of power. I doubt if Hilaire Belloc, author of *The Servile State* would have defined his political and economic self-description that way. If there are some who call themselves distributivists while believing a central authority 'distributes' power, so be it.

Yet, maybe the term raises suspicions for good reasons? Or maybe it's at least inadequate? Maybe those suspicions could be alleviated, those inadequacies addressed, only by floods of words of the sort the late-Medieval thinkers generated in their efforts to discuss certain problems within their explorations of the concepts of 'infinitely small' and 'infinitely large'.

Let me assume there is a problem that can be solved, opening the possibility of more sophisticated ways of discussing and analyzing human communities.

The 1913 Webster uses phrases such as "To divide among several or many" and "To dispense; to administer" and "To divide or separate" to define 'distribute'. There is a hint of top-down organization, that is, a hint we start with some sort of given whole and then divide it, perhaps for the sake of administrative efficiency.

Can the word 'aggregate' better fulfill my goal of speaking of a complex bottom-up process, local and concrete communities forming dispersed and abstract communities—without drawing in each and every member of the community to life in a "greater" community? That greater community might be—in fact, often should be—no more, and no less, than a set of relationships between business and political and religious leaders from the smaller and more concrete communities.

The 1913 Webster defines 'aggregate' by way of phrases such as "To bring together" and "To add or unite, as, a person, to an association." So far, so good, but I'm still not happy with aggregate.

I need a word that takes in the sense of aggregate and allows for some degree of conscious, bottom-up planning but mostly evolution in a largely Darwinist sense. Evolutionary developments can be recognized pretty quickly, sometimes as they are occurring. I would bet that one mark of a society giving birth to a successful nation or even civilization is that it has knowledgeable and insightful leaders who recognize the nature of emerging structures and attributes, nurturing some and trying to head off or just delay others. The need for such leaders would increase as the human race advances. A relatively primitive and small-scale farming community might develop into a more complex community, manufacturing tools and furniture,

trading food and tools for cottons, financing that trade in goods, without a lot of prior awareness of what's emerging. So long as the community leaders nurture what is emerging, it might matter little that they can't really anticipate what might come from these new ways of living and making a living.

I'm not good at coining words but it's an interesting puzzle. How about: *eggregate*. To *eggregate* is for entities to come together in a larger-scale association of entities by natural developments, including evolution, not by centralized planning or other top-down means. So, a group of local bankers getting together to plan for a multi-community industrial complex might well be within my definition of natural association but not if a far-away government comes in to participate in any substantial way.

A group of communities developing by natural means into some association of communities would be a type of *eggregation*.

The 'e' in evolution comes from 'out' and 'volve' brings a sense of unrolling. Evolution is an unrolling or unfolding, which is somewhat false in Darwinist terms, but these sorts of coinages rarely have pure pedigrees. The 'gregate' in aggregate comes, roughly speaking, from a term meaning to gather a flock.

**Eggregate** we 'gather a flock'. Out of what already exists, a greater community is gathered by natural means including bottom-up human planning.

The collection of letters, 'eggregate', doesn't seem to be in use as a word, so I'll continue.

*Egregation* would typically be a type of evolution but there are certainly some forms of evolution which would fall outside of 'eggregation' as there would be *eggregations* which are not evolutions. For example, the formation of colonies and then multi-cell organisms from single-cell organisms would be an evolutionary development and an *eggregation*. The arising of modern human animals from hominids would be an evolutionary development but not a *eggregation*. Certain human organizations, such as a chartered bank or a chartered social services club, might be formed by *eggregations* which aren't evolutions, though they might be part of a more general evolutionary process.

I don't know if I like 'eggregate' but we need new words to navigate between those who see only those forms of natural evolution without pur-

posefulness and those who see only those forms of political organization which are planned by a team of bureaucrats and engineers working under the direction of a committee of politicians.

I'll think about it as I go about my work of developing new ways to understand this world, including the human realm.

# 435 Maybe Low-Information Voters Shouldn't Vote?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=962>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/08/02.]

Here's an article about a mildly interesting finding that low-information voters are more likely than others to vote for the best-looking candidate: *Face Value: Looks of Political Candidates Are Key Factor Influencing Low-Information Voters* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/07/110718121726.htm>.

In more blunt terms, these low-information voters can be described as willfully ignorant and morally irresponsible. I'll make an impolite request to these voters (not that any such creatures would be reading my works): please stay home on election day and then maybe, just maybe, the votes of more responsible citizens would be worth something. By "responsible citizens," I don't mean those who read the pamphlets from the major national parties or the unions or the AARP or the national business groups. I don't even mean those who listen to speeches by one of the small number of politicians who don't stink of corruption. I mean those who might take the time to go on the Internet or—still better—go down to the public library to find out something about the latest country invaded by our evil bozos in Washington. Is it even a real country or just a paste-up job by a retreating British Empire? Is there any verifiable reason to believe that country is any real and imminent danger to the United States or any of our allies or does this seem—at least possibly—to be another discretionary war to the benefit of the military-industrial complex, including the war-mongering foundations and the 'charitable' foundations set-up and run by the power-elite? There are lots of such questions that will start to pop up in the heads

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of those who learn something about the world and then try to make sense of what they've learned.

I tend to fear that many Americans who are proud of having voted in recent national elections probably don't know what continent Afghanistan is on and probably have an image of a country populated by evil wretches created by Satan for the specific purpose of killing us morally pure Americans. But we can-do Americans can rescue them. We can-do Americans can turn those Afghans into good people, if only they'd stop shooting at heavily armed American soldiers who suddenly show up in their villages with weapons pointed in the general direction of the villagers' children.

# 436 Fictitious Forces in the Moral World

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=980>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/08/09.]

Slowly do I move forward in my efforts to develop words and grammatical structures and concepts adequate to describing the social and moral setting of man as he learns to shape himself, his societies, his technologies, to better reflect and take advantage of the richness and complexity of God's Creation. This richness and complexity can even be described—to an extent—as being itself a result of the human mind's development as men explore more deeply and more widely into Creation, sometimes managing to respond in ways that seem to be appropriate in practical or moral terms, terms not to be ultimately separated and not to be fully separated even in the short-term by those who wish to be wise, that is, to act and think in ways anticipating a greater and more accurate knowledge than we currently have.

The knowledge we have of Creation, and the wisdom we need to exercise even as we no more than aspire to the true and complete knowledge of which that wisdom is but a pale reflection, can be seen as having developed in our past and to be developing now as man explores and otherwise responds to that Creation, a manifestation of thoughts our Maker wishes us to share with Him. As I've said before, "God is smart." When it comes to the thoughts of God which resulted in spacetime and stuff, God knows more than freshman mathematics and freshman physics. He knows at least as much as the physics faculty at Harvard and so we should expect it to be hard work to understand what God did as Creator.

And so I turn, for a short while, to more prosaic matters of the sorts un-

derstood by those professors at Harvard and many other physicists around the world.

The so-called fictitious forces in physics are the result of forces which don't exist in all frames, coordinate systems, to the perception of all observers. (I'm being loose and colloquial in my language.)

In *The Nature of Science: An A-Z Guide to the Laws & Principles Governing our Universe* [134], the physicist James Trefil provides some technical background for this discussion and does so in clear and understandable prose:

An observer watching from the outside [as the car you're riding in takes a sharp turn, would say] you were simply continuing to move in a straight line, as any object would if not acted upon by an external force, and the car curved away from you. To this observer, in other words, it's not that you are being pushed against the door—it is that the door is being pushed against you.

There is nothing inherently contradictory between these two views. They lead to exactly the same description of events and exactly the same equations describing those events.

...

Because not all observers see a force acting, physicists often refer to the centrifugal force as a *fictitious force* or *pseudoforce*, but I find these terms somewhat misleading. There is, after all, nothing fictitious about the force you can feel pushing you against the side of the car. The reality of the situation, though, is that you are still trying to move in a straight line and the car is turning away from that straight line and so pushing against you. [page 67]

Centrifugal force can be fictitious in that various descriptions can be given of you being thrown against that car door but it's not imaginary, as Professor Trefil tells us. A broken arm or wrenched shoulder is real by any of the various descriptions.

Arguably, the force most often labeled 'fictitious' is the Coriolis force. Professor Trefil has this to say:

It is the Coriolis force that produces the swirling cloud patterns we associate with satellite pictures of storms. Air starts

to flow in a straight line from areas of high pressure to areas of low pressure, but the Coriolis force deflects it and causes it to move in a spiral path. (Alternately, we could say that the Earth rotates underneath it so that it appears to move in a spiral to someone on the planet's surface.)

Again, we can label this force 'fictitious', but anyone who's experienced the damage done by the swirling winds of a hurricane, or even seen it on television, will wonder at the use of this term.

Just to nail down the reality and importance of fictitious forces, gravity is also a fictitious force in general relativity and—so far as I know—all other mainstream theories of gravity. It is 'fictitious' because gravity, in Einsteinian theories, is a result of bending of spacetime, which is itself what is being described by frames of reference. You aren't pulled by the earth but rather do you slide down where the earth has bent spacetime by its relatively large mass. This is why you feel weightless on certain carnival rides or on an elevator which starts its descent rapidly. In that frame of the ride or elevator, you are weightless, you are moving freely in the earth's gravitational field. To "move freely" in this sense is to be standing still in the common-sense understanding.

In the same way, if you were standing on a train flatbed as it curved sharply, you'd be moving freely and feel no forces for a few seconds as you went flying off in a straight-line. You wouldn't feel any force until you slammed into a tree or scraped along the ground. Very suddenly, you would have entered a different frame of reference in which you will feel a great deal of force as you collide with something or the other.

I'll move to my main topic by quoting myself from Chapter 403, *Differential Geometry and Moral Narratives*:

The American physicist John Wheeler once summarized general relativity by telling us that matter tells space how to shape itself and space then tells matter how to move. Maybe we can play around with this metaphor:

"Human beings tell moral space how to shape itself and moral space then tells human beings how to move through life—how to act."

Following Hannah Arendt and others, I've spoken of the modern middle-class which went about its various works, engineering and administra-

tion and chemical manufacturing, oblivious to—or perhaps struggling to suppress—any perceptions that they were helping to commit large-scale crimes against a variety of innocent human beings: the Jews of Central and Eastern Europe in the 1930s and 1940s, the Ukrainian peasants in the same general period, the North Koreans and the Vietnamese and the Iraqis in the period of American self-destruction. We Americans, perhaps the junior-league imperialistic countries of Europe as well, are likely to suffer soon, at least within a generation, from the same emotional humiliations and physical hardships which a harsh reality inflicted upon the Nazi-era Germans and Soviet-era Russians when their imperial carnival rides ended.

I've noted before that Adam Smith retreated from his cheerleading for British-style capitalism long enough to ponder the frightening possibility that the sort of commercial society described in *The Wealth of Nations* might well produce citizens quite genial but lacking moral integrity not because they're willfully immoral but because they have no innards to speak of, just a pleasant smile and gentle habits.

Let me take a look at this situation from a slightly different angle to see if we can learn something or at least start developing a new way of speaking about such matters, a new way that might help us to understand how and why we get into our modern moral messes—such nice men and women sending their armed forces overseas to kill children directly and by way of destroying sanitation systems and hospitals and so forth. Maybe we could even find some possible ways out of these modern moral messes. It's unlikely we can avoid our imminent disaster because we're too cowardly, most of us, to have been riding loosely on the equivalent of a railroad flatbed, but being inside won't protect us because our train isn't just going around a sharp curve; it's being thrown off the rails and heading for a nearby field littered with boulders.

Let's switch from physical spacetime to a different sort of space, the space of social relationships. In these short pieces, I sometimes feel a need to be repetitive and I'll remind the reader again that I consider created being to lie on a spectrum of abstract being to concrete being, of the most abstract truths which are those God manifested as the raw stuff of Creation through the likes of mathematical truths to those more particular mathematical truths we can see in quantum mechanics and particle physics and on to the thing-like being of this world. I speculate that social spaces belong to a more abstract group of spaces which includes spacetime—let's call it spaces

of relationships for now, including relationships of an entity to its context.<sup>1</sup>

It's not just that our paths through life start curving beneath our feet as Dante the pilgrim recorded at the start of *The Inferno*. Those paths and the ground around them are twisting as we enter a phase of human history where some complex possibilities of Creation are now appearing, often without our conscious participation in their emergence. The very space in which our trunks and heads move are being twisted in ways often different from the twisting of the ground beneath our feet. And, yet, we're bringing on these changes ourselves by exploring Creation and responding to it, rightly or wrongly. We're bringing on many of these changes by the acts of creating civilization and exploring greater moral possibilities as well as powerful technologies.

I'm still thinking matters through and will probably outline an entire book on this subject of expanding our language and concepts for describing and analyzing our moral natures and moral lives, but I'm working on general concepts now and trying to set up my explorations of this topic. Let me go wandering about a little, as is my habit.

Assume something like an orthogonal coordinate system, a retreat from the goal of setting up coordinate-free systems as is done in general relativity and also in certain complex but non-relativistic and non-quantum branches of science and engineering. Let's assume that the y-axis is some sort of a measure of the acts of a human being which result from individualistic desires, urges, etc. The x-axis is the measure of the acts which result from communal ties, duties, etc. Be careful about literalizing these natural ways of talking as if desires belong to us as individuals and duties to us as community members. Also be aware that I'm consciously writing in a way not fully in conformity with my claims above about the nature of the individual (stuff or matter) and human communities (the 'spacetime' of our moral and spiritual lives). I'll say no more about these complexities and complications for now. In fact, I may not ever reach the point where I have a set of concepts and words and grammatical structures adequate to the task. There will be plenty of work for future generations of thinkers. And, so, I'll return to the main line of discussion.

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<sup>1</sup>Lest there be confusion, I'll note that I don't claim that abstract truths are all mathematical, but I'll not go into details here. The main claim of this book is that being lies on a spectrum from the fully abstract—not being just mathematical abstractions, to the fully concrete—not being just physical stuff.

Imagine a circle which defines regions of individual-community mixes which are proper for a man who is the member of a certain community, say a village of pre-Celtic natives in southern England a few thousand years before the birth of Jesus Christ. There is no easy way, so far as I know, to say that the possibilities in that region are “more individualistic” or “more communal” than what I experience in the region of Ludlow, MA, USA in 2011. The ways in which they were individualistic and the ways in which they were communal were different from the ways I experience. The ways of those longfar agoway human beings combined to form a total human situation, so to speak, which was undoubtedly much different—again—from what I experience in my various communities. One obvious difference is that modern men are probably members of a variety and number of smaller communities within larger communities to an extent which would bewilder a man of 5,000 years ago.

I’m about to place a big burden on your visual imagination even though mine isn’t really so strong—it’s one of my weaker cognitive talents.

So, take on the burden as you imagine this graph of individual vs. community moving into a new direction perpendicular to the axes, individual and communal. That region defining an appropriate mixture of individualistic and communal characteristics for southern England moves through the centuries as if it were reflections in a fun-house. Worse. Unlike most assumed spaces for discussions of the physical universe, this space isn’t likely to be well-behaved. Drawing analogies to the analyses of physical space to be found in books about general relativity, post-Newtonian gravity theory in general, there are likely to be rips and tears and other distortions in the shape of that region so that singularities, and maybe other serious problems, will arise. I suspect the definition of causal regions will be far more complex where I consider causal regions for now in terms of timelike regions and spacelike regions and null-lines of special relativity. In any case, there will be great stresses which twist and turn any entity in these moral-social spaces.

I’d like to stay with that image of that region of “appropriate mixtures of individualistic and communal characteristics” as it moves forward in time, twisting and turning, tearing and—in some localities—disappearing into black-holes of a sort. In addition, new regions will appear on that graph. To the extent this analogy works, vague and poorly-defined as it is, our lives are paths through those graphs. And some, including those of us alive in 2011, suffer and enjoy rapid change, that is, great deformations to that

region within short periods of time. As we move forward, we might find ourselves moving from a 'mainstream' spot deep in the heart of that region of individualistic-communal characteristics to a marginal spot or even one outside what is considered appropriate in a world which suddenly seems so brave and so new.

As we move into strange regions, we'll feel forces upon our innermost selves even if we're moving in the straight lines we might have learned from morally well-ordered parents, teachers, clergymen, Boy Scout leaders, and others. Our moral-social space is twisting about as we try to move through it. And it's twisting about in a way undecipherable in any but very abstract terms which I believe to be above the level of abstraction of the mathematics used by modern theoretical physicists to describe the various shapes, contorted and otherwise, of possible spacetimes. From that level of abstraction, there are various lines of descent toward concreteness, one line leading to the relationships of spacetime and matter-energy, another line leading to the relationships of human communities.

One point I'd like to emphasize is that abstract being is for real. Abstractions aren't just descriptions of concrete created being. They are what concrete created being is shaped from and they continue to inhere in that concrete created being. Those moral-social spaces aren't just a bookish description. They are a reality inherent in our nature and realized by our development as a race, by the development in particular of the human mind and all that comes from the mind: technology and culture and whatever other categories of human civilized life you might like to use.



## 437 Should We Now Fear Good and Noble Scientific Research?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=997>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/08/30.]

This article, *Hunting for a Mass Killer in Medieval Graveyards* found at [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/30/science/30plague.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/30/science/30plague.html?_r=1), informs us that:

Modern [bubonic] plague is carried by fleas and spreads no faster than the rats that carry them can travel. [And this modern plague can be defeated by eliminating fleas and/or rats.] The Black Death seems to have spread directly from one person to another.

and

Victims sometimes emitted a deathly stench, which is not true of plague victims today. And the Black Death felled at least 30 percent of those it inflicted, whereas a modern plague in India that struck Bombay in 1904, before the advent of antibiotics, killed only 3 percent of its victims.

It's easy to understand why scientists think it might be important to recover the DNA for that earlier plague from graveyards in London. They are motivated largely by a desire to protect us from a re-emergence of this other form of the bacterium—the only part of the DNA sequenced so far is identical to that of the modern bacterium, *Yersinia pestis* for those who wish to know the name of the little beast. Scientists might find it to be

very likely that the horrible version of that bacterium would emerge by mutations in the wild or they might find it would be likely to happen under certain conditions or they might find it wouldn't be likely.

So, let's say the DNA for that horrible bacterium is sequenced. A vaccine and maybe other helpful medicines are developed. That could save many lives, even entire peoples, if a mutation in the wild brought back that earlier form of *Yersinia pestis*.

That's the good side of the coin. Unfortunately, we live in an age where the citizenry—I speak of the United States—are gentle and submissive barbarians and they're ruled by political machines which choose for them candidates for leadership positions who are a much worse sort of barbarian. With very few exceptions, the political leaders of the United States and several European countries, act as if under no significant moral constraints when it comes to unleashing death and destruction upon foreign countries.

If the full DNA for *Yersinia pestis* of the more dangerous sort is sequenced, we'd have the possibility of a truly dangerous biological weapon being developed by forcing a mutation of the modern and less dangerous form of the bacterium. It would then be available for use by these moral monsters who are the political leaders of the United States and many other countries. At this point, I have horrible visions in my head. I won't try to so much as sketch out the scenes—check out Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* or any history book covering the 14th century.

What's really bad is the simple fact that a scientific research project with good goals raises fears of this sort. How far the West has fallen from even the pretense of being either Christian or a civilization. We, through our increasingly evil leaders, can misuse even knowledge gained to understand God's world and to protect human beings against a possibly great danger. We've proven capable of corrupting the most noble of ventures and then we return to the regularly scheduled program. And so much of what we do is irrational and unprofitable and seemingly done for no purpose other than the domestic political points to be gained by the politicians who can murder the greater number of innocent human beings in distant countries.

## 438 The Essence of Liberalism

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1003>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/09/02.]

In *The Liberal Mind* [95], I think Professor Minogue dismisses the query “What is the essence of Liberalism?” for reasons which are proper, but I’ll discuss it anyway because I think it to be one of those ultimately futile lines of inquiry which can lead us to better ways of understanding human nature, especially in its communal aspects, because of what we’ve learned—or should have learned—from modern empirical knowledge-gathering enterprises, especially physics and mathematics. We can start with Minogue’s warning about some approaches to understanding the modern views of human politics (nearly all of those being ‘liberal’ or other choices which are mostly far worse):

If we seek, rather pointlessly, for some essential liberal position, then we might find it in the belief that happiness and individual freedom are always in harmony. Just as liberals believe that the good of the people may always be identified with what the people want, so they also believe that we can have variety without suffering. [page 78]

Perhaps some who don’t consider themselves to be liberals also share this “belief that happiness and individual freedom are always in harmony.” And perhaps we can guess at one of the reasons many human beings speak well of freedom and do nothing to gain it or maintain it – they prefer to be happy. Happiness to most physical creatures is tied more closely to safety and comfort, to protection against suffering or early death and to a full stomach and a chance to relax and not have to work hard with brain or back. For example, nearly all the American Christians I know seem to think

that God owes them a safe and prosperous life in return for not committing the worst sorts of sins and for praying and worshiping. I'll speak no more of this difficult situation here, though I'd like to see my fellow Americans and others wake up and become aware of the terrible situation we're in, not just created by failures of regulation or some glitches in banking or manufacturing. We've let much of the foundations of Western Civilization decay underneath us and we show little sign now of being capable of dealing with this mess.

The unwillingness of Americans, perhaps most modern human beings of the West, to face reality and to respond to it was a much discussed problem and historians and other analysts, from Tocqueville and Hawthorne through Nock and Ortega Y Gasset through Barzun and Kennedy, have seen the signs and tried to warn us. In recent years, we were too busy watching television and prior generations had excuses just as strong.

We must move on, understanding what we currently are—formless puddings rather than evil brews—and then moving on to better things. If you wish, you can think in terms of C.S. Lewis' image of hollow-chested men. One sign of our decay is that we have absorbed some ideas from liberalism, mostly from the optimistic wing of liberalism and mostly ones which release us from the responsibility of taking care of our own selves and those in our families or other local communities. We believe we can have it all, freedom and happiness and we just assume one of the central powers, political or business or charitable, will be there to make sure we have it all.

But...

I'm going to head in a radically different direction, questioning whether we even understand the components of human nature and human community life well enough to have meaningful discussions based upon such aspects of human life as 'freedom' or 'happiness'. My goal is not to produce another critique of political thought and behavior in the modern world, though I have to engage in those sorts of critiques at times. My goal is to provide a framework and language for discussing human moral communities of all sorts, including political communities. That might not be a goal to be achieved in a single lifetime nor by one man. In fact, this new understanding of Adam in what is truly a new phase of God's story, our world or even the entirety of Creation, is a substantial part of what needs to be attained to build a foundation for a new civilization.

I'm in the process of writing my first list of assumptions for a run at providing for richer and more complex discussions of human social, moral, po-

litical, and economic structures and our paths of development as we respond to these structures and to other realms of being. For now, I'll make public some of my ponderings about the nature of human moral development—key to the entire human organism in so far as he is a potential person, that is, an entity which is unified, coherent, and complete in the way of the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit.

I consider created being as, in one sense, a spectrum running from abstract truths to concrete things. That is: “Things are true,” as St. Thomas Aquinas claimed, and “Truths are thing-like,” as I've claimed. It's also necessary to bear in mind that concrete being is shaped from more abstract forms of being grounded ultimately in truths God chose to manifest for this particular Creation. It's unclear how we can talk about the different layers of created being, that is forms of being with different degrees of abstraction and concreteness.

In line with both Aquinas and modern brain-scientists, I consider mind to be not an entity but rather a set of relationships between the human organism and its environments, including itself in some recursive ways. This mind is shaped, at least in a healthy and robust form, by active responses to its environments, maybe the entire universe which I call this world when seen in light of God's purposes, or even—miraculously, the entirety of Creation.

With that in the background, the idea behind my slowly ongoing efforts to develop these new ways of understanding human nature, in its individual and social aspects, is to borrow from the sophisticated analysis physicists and mathematicians have made of spacetime, matter-energy, fields, and so forth, abstract to an appropriate level where we meet up with the abstract forms of being which we draw upon in forming our minds, abstractions still present in the most mundane of physical things.

I think a good qualitative understanding of our human moral natures has to be built first on the recognition of the true developmental nature of an organism, goal-oriented development, intentional development. This is true not only of the human brain and our skills in moving through the world but also of our social and moral relationships. Obviously, there is a great, almost recursive, mess here with mind and human moral development and social relationships not so separable. Some extreme individualists, especially modern liberals of the left-wing or centrist or right-wing variety, will have problems with my way of speaking now that it's becoming clear that I'm claiming human individuals aren't some sort of free-standing

metaphysically-defined entities but rather complex entities intertwined with their societies and physical environments and formed by active response to specific environments. As I've claimed before: Einstein didn't have a paleolithic mind stuffed with the schematic knowledge of the 19th century but rather did he have a mind shaped to a more complexly considered knowledge of that 19th century. He was more of a German and a European than he himself might have admitted.

I'm writing about qualitative understandings at various levels of abstraction and concreteness. Here's a very crude diagram to make my goals a little more explicit, especially to those who haven't been following my work for the past few years or more:

Something like that.

Physicists and mathematicians have given us an understanding of the abstractions at Node Y1. I think their work includes at least an implicit understanding of what might be at Node X. If we can clarify that understanding of Node X a bit, we can move to Node Z1 and then to Node Z2. The abstractions at Node Z1 won't be mathematical in terms of quantification, so far as I can anticipate matters. But I suspect that mathematics, even including its quantitative fields, is grounded upon abstract forms of being which are more qualitative than quantitative. Relationships are primary and entities, even mathematical truths, come into existence because of a relationship. (Pending relationships cause the fuzziness of quantum mechanics rather than any absolute uncertainty.)

The language is fuzzy and necessarily so. I'm trying to develop language for talking about more abstract realms of being and am forced to twist and re-use existing language to do so. I think I can do better as this project moves forward but I know there are others out there who will be able to do better, perhaps some reading this essay soon after I post it. In any case, I have a very preliminary list of assumptions about the properties of that realm of being in Node Z1 and will try to move all the way up to Node X.

I'll end with a simple warning not to take the diagram itself literally. I don't think there is anything wrong with it so far as such charts of knowledge go, but my own view of knowledge would imply the situation is much more complex, recursive, interactive, iterative. . .

Chose your own favorite buzzword from those which populate serious and popular works telling us about modern empirical knowledge. This essay itself could be considered to be somewhat recursive—I'll now point back to the starting-point. I think liberalism, at least in its more classical form, is

composed of efforts to answer questions raised by new empirical knowledge of human nature (Node Z1). However poorly formed some of the questions of liberal thinkers might be, as bad as some of their answers have proven to be, they were intelligent efforts fairly early in this era of great expansion in empirical knowledge. Most of the answers proposed by the other schools of modern thought were worse, for example, various schools of socialism and fascism. Conservative and traditional forms of thought couldn't, on their own resources, provide direct answers, being so inclined toward protection of what was perceived as good in inherited knowledge and attitudes and ways of life as to be largely closed to new opportunities and inclined to retreat into various sorts of ghettos when facing those opportunities in the form of problems or outright threats.

What we need, in terms set by this essay, are thinkers who can move up to higher levels of abstraction to figure out how our human natures and communities become more complex and richer in possibilities (even the most passive of individual human beings have natures which are more complex just because of our more complex communities). I'm suggesting that we can learn many tricks from modern physicists and mathematicians and might very well be able to borrow directly from what has been learned from the exploration of spacetime, matter and energy and fields, and even the most abstract regions of mathematics.

Slowly, so slowly as to be quite frustrating, I'm moving forward and have already written out a very tentative list of assumptions as to the structure of Node Z1 in the diagram above. It will likely take months, perhaps a year or more, to settle on a good list of assumptions and to do much with them. Don't worry—I'll be pestering my readers with preliminary versions.

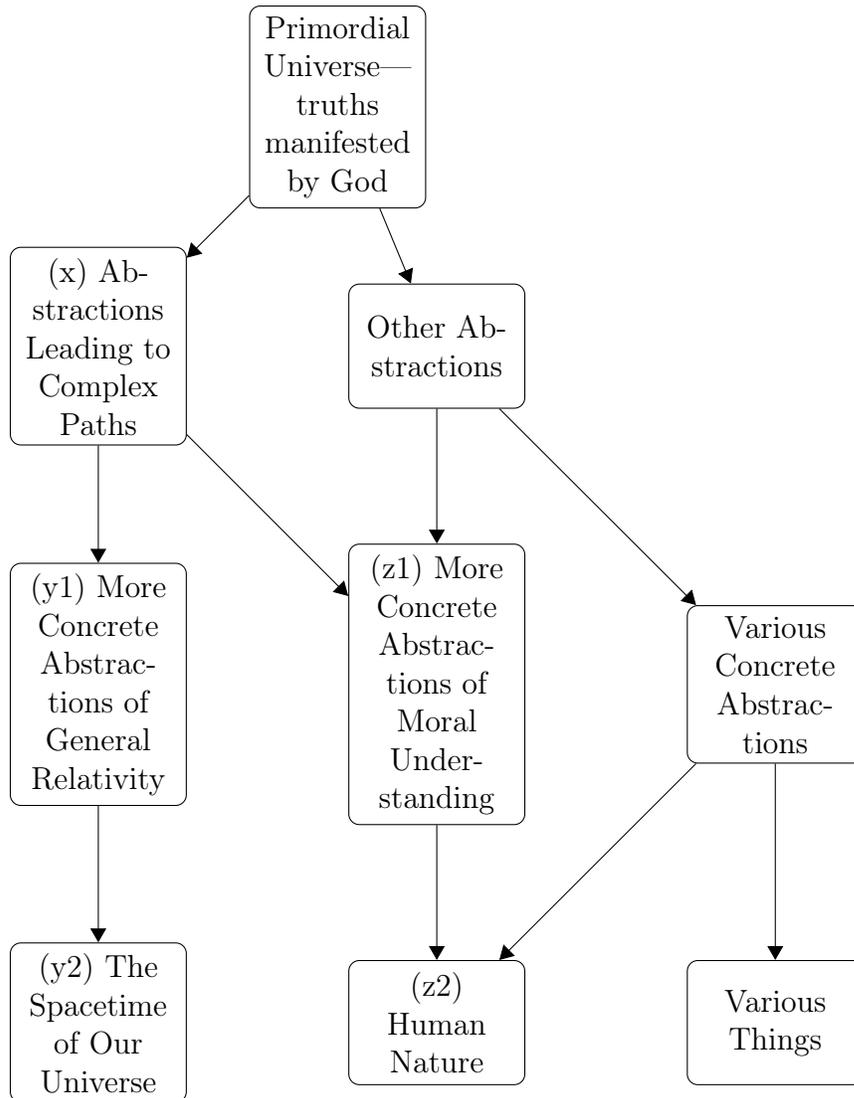


Figure 438.1: Simple Relationships of Abstract and Concrete Levels of Being

# 439 Economics and Politics: We're Retreating into Barbarism But We'll Advance Anew

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1007>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/09/03.]

I've been reading Albert J. Nock's biography of Thomas Jefferson which is available for free download at <http://mises.org/books/jefferson.pdf> through the generosity of *Ludwig von Mises Institute*.

In that book, Nock deals with lines of thought in Jefferson and his colleague, friend of his younger and older years, John Adams. Jefferson (almost) saw the American Constitution as having been engineered to make possible a grab for power by the non-producer class, the exploiters as we might label them. The qualification is because of Jefferson's refusal to quite conclude in a clear manner that the political activism of most of the Founding Fathers was tied strongly to their economic interests. He kept separating the issues and writing, acting as if the Federalist leaders wanted a country suited to financiers but their Federalist politics was driven by separate political beliefs.

Whatever incompleteness there was in Jefferson's overview of matters, he saw that the financiers, speculators, stock-jobbers, etc. were the dangerous interests in a country sitting on the edge of a vast continent of unclaimed wealth. For a good century and a half, the American greedy elite were able to satisfy their desires while leaving enough for the American producer classes. We may be seeing the end-game of this grab for power as bankers, politicians, certain types of industrialists, academics who support the power elites, and various others may well be in the process of destroying the disci-

plined and skilled laborers, the farmers, the entrepreneurs, the small-town bankers who toiled honestly—for short hours sometimes to be sure – to turn local savings into local mortgages and loans for local businesses. These producer classes, though they have been remarkably and frustratingly passive in the face of abuses of power, are perhaps the last remaining components of a true republic.

I'm going to try to step back and to look at matters I've written about before with a fresh view, though it's hard to do this when I'm living through an ongoing crisis which might lead into a total collapse of the West. My emotions are at a high level, though that is perhaps not bad according to some modern brain research which indicates emotions can help drive and focus rational thought.

Let me start a short journey which will zig and then zag...

In some of my writings, I've proposed that our modern governments, as corrupt and exploitive as they've become, are mortal versions of organs which will be part of the Body of Christ in the world of the resurrected. I've also proposed that truer forms of governments, corresponding more closely to those organs of the Body of Christ, will arise by natural processes. There will be evolutionary processes of a sort, Darwinian selection processes which will destroy those political forms, economic as well, which aren't developing towards that Body of Christ. We and our descendants may not see more than a hint of the organs of the Body of Christ and, even if we do see hints of the form of those organs, they're not likely to develop properly in this mortal realm. So why is it worth the effort to develop this sort of view of human politics?

Let me try to summarize some of my claims which underly my efforts to understand man's role in God's Creation:

1. Man is born a human animal, a bit on the unique side but part of the animal kingdom in all important ways, including in his mortal nature.
2. Man has a brain which he can shape by responding actively to his environments, to environments he can learn about, to the entire earth, to the universe, to all of Creation. By properly responding in this way, a man is forming a mind which can, in principle, encapsulate God's manifested thoughts.
3. Human communities evolve through long expanses of history and develop within their own lifetimes.

It is a matter of Christian faith that some of us are being formed into members of the Body of Christ but we know little about what that really means. I take this to a radical conclusion: all human beings, including any who will not be saved, are members of a number of communities which are part of a selection process not so much different from that of the earth-bound biological realm, and I include those nasty aspects which can be described as “red of tooth and claw.” The selection process is at least somewhat like that of early single-cell creatures coming together in colonies and learning to live as one organism.

Yet the selection process must be much different from the formation of multi-cell organisms. Those who become members of that Body of Christ won't be fully merged to become no more than a heart-cell to be used for the good of the entire organism. We will each be used for the entire organism, for sure, but we'll also remain morally well-ordered individuals.

There are exploiters and producers, according to Jefferson and many others—including me. The exploiters are largely morally ill-ordered people filling legitimate, or plausibly legitimate, leadership positions. I think many libertarians and anarchists would agree that the exploiters are morally ill-ordered but would balk, to say the least, at any claim that the roles filled by those exploiters are legitimate, though we may not yet know exactly what those roles are. To be clear, I'm claiming something for which there is no strict analogy I know of, but imagine the space where your heart should be but it's filled with a cancerous mass of cells which does some pumping of blood but will eventually destroy the entire organism.

This is how the situation might have been summarized by two well-informed men of high intelligence: Isaiah and Jeremiah.

God's story will move on. Our modern efforts to form something which might be called the political organ of the earthly Body of Christ have failed. It's not hard to see why and it's quite hard to see how humanity will move in the right direction to make another good try.

I can make a few more plausible comments, at least plausible to those of us who accept the Biblical (mostly Pauline) view of the Body of Christ as referring to a real entity which will arise: a creaturely equivalent to the Holy Trinity, but much more highly populated. There will be many human persons in the Body of Christ but only one Body in a manner analogous

to the Trinity where there are three Persons in one God. Now for the comments:

1. The Body of Christ and its individual organs will evolve from the bottom-up in a process at least somewhat similar to biological evolution, natural selection intertwined with the processes of chemical evolution of genes and regulatory processes that can set existing genes to different levels of activity. The detailed processes will be different but the complications and complexity will be similar.
2. A promising organ of politics in the evolving Body of Christ still has to develop properly and that requires morally well-ordered human agents who make at least adequate responses to the problems and opportunities they face.
3. We of the modern West (say 1800-2011) failed to form a stable and morally well-ordered political organ in our efforts to build a democratic, bottom-up, approximation to this organ. The predatory activities of the gangsters who flowed into the top levels of the hierarchies of our centralized governments and centralized banks and centralized corporations and so forth was an important factor in this failure but the most important reasons were the inability of the common citizens to fulfill the duties they claimed to take on even as they sought to take advantage of the rewards of being citizens of countries which were formally republics.
4. It's not likely in my opinion that the proper political organ of the Body of Christ will be structured according to our current catalog of political forms. In any case, we Americans perhaps made our effort a bit absurd by trying to build what was alleged to be a bottom-up system by top-down planning carried out by an elite gathered in Philadelphia behind locked doors and with the agreement that no private notes would be kept and no information given to non-participants.
5. There is the additional complication that any gathering of political activists will serve particular purposes, as the Constitutional Convention of the United States served the centralizers of power and—eventually—those who would gain power and wealth by the ways and

means of centralized banking, such as financing debt for governments, allowing them to spend more money than they truly have. To be sure, I do believe there were a few moral giants amongst the Founding Fathers and the regular guys amongst them, even most of the scoundrels, were more constrained in their self-serving ways by moral habits and custom. It remains true that they had feet of clay and a few had feet right up to their necks.

6. Over time even in morally well-ordered countries with centralized governments, we can see the impact of the fact noted by Lord Acton: Centralized and powerful governments attract men with the moral character of gangsters.

As is true of all the organs of the Body of Christ, the political organs in their earthly form will evolve and develop by the processes which are part of God's Creation. We can see those processes at work in biological evolution though we must go through the hard work of abstracting from our concrete being towards that domain of truths manifested by God, the domain I've called the Primordial Universe in prior writings. Once we have some of those abstractions in mind, we can move back down towards understandings of our moral natures and of our communities.

In Chapter 438, *The Essence of Liberalism*, I talked of one proposal for dealing with the increased complexity and richness of modern human communities and of the modern understanding of man as an empirical creature. We must develop new concepts and words and wrote, as I have before, of borrowing from modern physics and mathematics. After all, I imagine a creature such as man is at least as complex as the stuff of which he's made and the spacetime he moves through. The interested reader might wish to check out the diagram I put in that chapter to show what I mean by abstracting from the concrete and to show why I advocate doing this.

This is the work of those who are the abstract-thinking members of the Body of Christ. And this work of achieving an understanding adequate to our modern situation has to be done before the general citizenry can understand their own communities well enough to find ways to select better leaders and to force straying leaders back on track.

I often speak in harsh terms towards all of us in the modern world and it certainly is true that the simplest of men should detect something is deeply wrong with modern human communities, yet it's the intellectual and spiri-

tual explorers of Creation and those who make sense of those explorations in the form of philosophical texts and novels who have failed just because they have to do their work first.

And I think the work is being done, a bit late and a bit slowly. In some future age, perhaps it's even opening now, that work will be done and the citizenry can do its work. God's story will advance as we move forward towards a better, but still incomplete and defective, earthly version of the Body of Christ.

# 440 I Have a Problem with Many Conspiracy Theorists

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1016>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/09/12.]

I'm speaking of rational 'conspiracy theorists' which means those who claim, rightly, that power-elites develop and are quite capable of engaging ruthlessly in focused criminal conspiracies when their interests are threatened. I don't even know how to make a pitch to those who think there is a tight-knit conspiracy run by Satan or Jesuits or Freemasons or the like. To carry out such a conspiracy would require that the central managers would be able to fully understand and control this world. It would require they be as smart as the Creator.

Something of a rational and more limited conspiracy is not only plausible but likely in a world where some might be able to control many for their own purposes. In terms used by Thomas Jefferson: exploiters divide themselves out and try to form a class that dominates the producers. Jefferson seemed too willing to assume that some Providence or providence would protect American producers and keep the exploiters under control. His friend, then non-friend, then friend again, John Adams, agreed about the division between exploiters and producers but didn't think there was much chance the exploiters could be controlled unless the United States recognized an aristocratic class of some sort and put specific constraints upon them, even if only the constraints of honor which have sometimes done a fair amount of good in channeling the exploiters in somewhat better directions. Of course, when Vikings are attacking there is an obvious role of honor for warlords. It's not clear what legitimate role there could be for our modern-day central banks and big-city banks. They seem to exist only

for their own purposes.

Our modern bankers and other financiers who sit heavily in the centers of our modern day spider-webs have no skills, at least none they exercise, but those of wrapping governments, companies, and individuals in fibers of debt. Let the victims sit in those fibers until they soften up, rot a little. That works better for a hungry, liquid-sucking spider than it does for an entire banking industry. Predatory bankers tend to destroy the societies they would use for their own enrichment.

I, of course, am not speaking of honest banks that still, even in this age of corruption, try to turn local savings into local mortgages or business loans. I'm not speaking of banking operations which finance ongoing or new companies by loaning on inventory or by offering even risky loans. I'm speaking of banks, and other investing operations, which seek control of wealth created by others. Kodak and Apple aren't likely as start-up operations nowadays. If some corporation doesn't back-engineer and steal their product, an investment banker will steal the company as soon as it needs a loan to meet payroll. Local savings banks aren't set up for that sort of work. Maybe they can help the local grocer through cash-flow problems but not a start-up manufacturer.

There have been other periods when bankers, and their allies amongst high-spending politicians, were dominant. There were still other periods dominated by warlords or by tribal or nationalist politicians more interested in expansion of various sorts than they were in looting their own people. There were even periods dominated by the producers, such as the Colonial Age of North America and the succeeding century or so. That even led into a mixed period when we had, in a manner of speaking, Henry Ford and Andrew Carnegie mixing with J.P. Morgan and John D. Rockefeller.

Bankers have not always been dominant, not even in sophisticated societies. There are times when the men with guns, or the barbarians with spears, will rule. Still, it's true that rich societies eventually get soft and corrupt so that bankers of a certain type can obtain vast sums of money and gain great power over productive assets and also governments. We're children of our age and even rational observers tend to think the ways of our age are the ways of every age. We live in a corrupt age, an age of moral decay, when bankers and corporate cams and political cogs rule.

So, I'm going to firm up a recommendation I've made in a loose manner before. I'll break it down into a few points.

1. Humanity tends to separate into at least two classes: exploiters and producers to use the terms of Thomas Jefferson.
2. The exploiters fight against other exploiters for power and wealth, mostly being united in their belief that the common folk are there only for the skinning.
3. The failure to recognize and properly constrain powerful families has resulted in an illusion of secret conspiracies though a little knowledge of history would tell us that members of the exploiter class regularly have committed crimes out of passion or to achieve their private goals. They are what they are partly because of the belief that they own the earth and the rest of us are tolerated to the extent we can serve them.
4. There is no occult, superhuman, supernatural core to these social processes. The exploiters are human beings from families founded by aggressive men of some high levels of talents. They are human beings. Often the talent of the founder isn't transmitted to sons or grandsons.
5. I repeat: the men from exploiter classes commit crimes. In some periods, they have no reason to pretend otherwise. Warlords can freely murder peasants or have their way with the daughters of the tradesmen in villages. In such periods of history, there is no recourse that doesn't involve death to those in the lower classes. Nowadays, the exploiters have good reasons to commit their crimes, say the murder of President Kennedy, as mafioso-style criminal conspiracies.

So what does this mean? A lot of the conspiracy theorists are intelligent and well-read men and women who know a bit of history. Yet, they concentrate fully on the present danger at a time when the present danger might be disappearing to make room for the next danger. In terms from military strategy: We should be careful about putting our greatest efforts into preparing to fight the last war. While I would like to believe we will be heading into a period dominated by producers, it seems likely to me we'll be entering a period dominated by local warlords who can provide police and military protection. The would-be bankers might have to return to honest work as merchants and traders, even having to bear risk themselves without having politicians on the payroll who can cover losses with taxpayers' money. I make no claims to be reliable in my predictions, but the main

point is that we should try to anticipate the future well enough to see the dangers we'll be facing there rather than concentrating on the dangers in the rear-view mirror.

# 441 The Exploiters Are Setting Policy

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1032>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/09/20.]

On a regular basis, commentators of various viewpoints will re-evaluate what we Americans have done in Afghanistan and other occupied countries, wondering whether we could have acted more effectively. Some even express a bit of concern for the impact of our actions on the innocent civilians who have been killed or injured or impoverished in what seems now to have been a useless war against an enemy which was likely never that dependent upon an Afghan base, an enemy whose leader—one leader anyway—had stated a desire to bankrupt the U.S. by drawing our country into wars expensive in financial and moral terms and maybe expensive in lives.

The thousands of Americans killed, the greater number maimed or otherwise injured seriously, is—in ‘realistic’ terms pretty cheap compared to the losses of in the Pacific Theater of World War II and trivial compared to the price paid by the Russian peoples in the European Theater of that same war. Yet, each of those dead or maimed was a son or daughter, husband or wife; in a word—human beings. The same can be said of the far larger numbers of Afghan and Iraqi civilians and soldiers killed, maimed, or injured.

We Americans, and the allegedly ex-colonizing peoples of Europe, have entangled ourselves in various countries of Asia. Perhaps it is only coincidence that we particularly concern ourselves with countries rich with oil or natural gas or with those countries which can provide routes for getting oil or gas out of a landlocked country in such a way that Russia, China, and probably India can be cut out of the action or forced to pay our price. I

doubt it's much of a coincidence.

Let me leave moral issues in a state of suspense to ask a question which most, not all, commentators ignore:

If the issue is access to oil and natural gas and perhaps some other natural resources, why don't we deal with this important economic issue by way of economic means? We claim to believe in economic freedom. Why don't we enter good-faith negotiations to buy the oil and natural gas and whatever else?

When a brutal dictator or an elected leader makes a plausible attempt to defend his country's interests, we invade and conquer, typically making the situation much worse for the common folk of that country. We spend lives and wealth to get what was often provided to us in the oil markets. Maybe we drive the price down but I'd be hard-pressed to believe that our savings in that way come close to paying for the bases and soldiers and weapons systems which help us save pennies at the gas-pump. And those savings might be imaginary.

Of course, we can say that Saddam Hussein was a bad man who needed overthrown because he supported al-Qaida. . . Well, he didn't really but he had weapons of mass destruction and factories for making more. . . Well, he didn't but he used some of those weapons of mass destruction, the ones he couldn't make, in the war against Iran. . . Well, if he used what he couldn't make himself, that raises the potentially embarrassing question: where'd he get that poison gas? And that might lead to just enough research to tell us that Hussein had avoided assassination attempts over the years because he knew all the tricks of the jackals, professional murderers in the employment of the Western governments and banks—he had been trained as a jackal himself by the CIA in the early 1960s. (See the books of the economic hit-man John Perkins for a frighteningly plausible, and historically consistent, tale of the brutal though cheaper ways in which the West got its way in less powerful countries. It was in a quick browse of Perkins' *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man* where I read that the term 'jackal' is used for the professional murderers, employed by the CIA or other agencies in the West or sometimes contracted from outside gangster organization.)

Let me cut through a lot of trash-talk and sloppy thought, even by those who see the basic truth of the situation. I'll diverge a little, of course, by referring to the two previous chapters in which I spoke of the claims of

Thomas Jefferson that human beings can be roughly sorted into the two classes of exploiters and producers – Chapter 439, *Economics and Politics: We're Retreating into Barbarism But We'll Advance Anew*, and Chapter 440, *I Have a Problem with Many Conspiracy Theorists*.

The Western powers, most certainly the U.S., are ruled by politicians and bankers and corporate executives whose skills, and probably basic inclinations, lie entirely in the sphere of exploitation.

Somewhere in the American Empire series of novels, I believe in *Empire*, Gore Vidal tells us that John D. Rockefeller and J.P. Morgan, bankster equivalents of Attila the Hun and Louis XIV and N. Lenin, despised the likes of Henry Ford and Andrew Carnegie. Those poor, deluded fools were interested in becoming rich, and leading rich lives, by creating wealth. What idiots. It's far better to steal control over the wealth created by others, particularly since it can lead to control over the very minds and souls of other human beings. If an exploiter works things right, he'll even be able to stomp on the faces of other human beings or to do the equivalent in the psychological or political realms.

As I've discussed before in various ways, this is a situation where legitimate roles in the developing Body of Christ, bankers and political leaders, can be filled by parasitical organs. Alternatively, we can say that invaders turn legitimate organs into cancerous masses inside that Body.

Henry Ford and Andrew Carnegie might well have negotiated with Hussein or with more decent and more legitimate rulers who were destroyed by the Western powers. The give-and-take of free-markets were home to such men, though they certainly were capable of lesser abuses than those of Rockefeller and Morgan. A free-market can be corrupted by lesser sinners but it can still retain at least some of its moral order so long as the participants are morally well-enough formed. This means the greater and lesser entrepreneurs have to be dedicated to making wealth by way of legitimate means and the citizens have to be strong enough and insightful enough to resist the lure of bribes offered by the exploiters—bribes to be paid back at high rates of interest by future generations.

The West is at war with much of humanity because the West is ruled by those who like to rule rather than those who lead, which class includes those businessmen and bankers and lawyers who are part of wealth-producing enterprises. Moreover, the common folk of the West – for various reasons including truly lousy school systems—are incapable of understanding these issues of human morality, of human politics and economics. So far as I

can tell, the ‘non-ruling’ leaders of the West, religious and intellectual and others, haven’t a clue about these major realms of human reality.

For now, I’m only interested in the understanding and not in the ways in which we can use a better understanding of human community life, in good and bad forms, to do better in the future. As I’ve said before, this is a long-term effort. Rome wasn’t built in a day and Western Civilization wasn’t either. The very speed with which the United States was built might well explain the instability and the rapidity of corruption. Various commentators were speaking of deep moral defects in the American citizenry and the American republic very early on. As I noted in Chapter 408, *The Need for Abstractions in Moral Self-understanding*, serious defects in moral reasoning and the consequent behavior were to be found in the New England mind by at least the time of King Phillip’s War, in the 1670s—see [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/King\\_Phillips\\_War](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/King_Phillips_War) for some background information. Though thinkers from the American South are often spot-on in discussing the moral defects of Northerners, they had their own blind spots, effectively ignoring not only the moral but also the practical problems of slavery. The difficulties of assimilating, at any level, a radically different people is the most important of the practical problems. There were even Southerners who saw that problem arising and kept on buying slaves.

The United States was the most likely center for a rebirth of Western Civilization, being both marginal in geographical and cultural terms and also substantial in wealth and population. Early on, we Americans refused to take on that responsibility. Our general refusal to take on serious responsibilities showed in the leaders we chose, men who like to exercise centralized control over that which they don’t understand and can’t build. We chose to be ruled by exploiters rather than producers and it would seem that much of the world is paying for our moral irresponsibility as a people.

I’ll write here as if I were a Biblical prophet. After all, we learn from Isaiah and Jeremiah about how to speak about a Creator who remains active not only as the God of His individual creatures but also as the God of human communities and human history. At least we Christians should learn how to so speak from two prophets who were intelligent and knowledgeable about not only the earlier books of the Hebrew people but also about the politics and history of their times.

The Creator isn’t through with the peoples of North America. We are being humbled, though we are just beginning to realize something is going

wrong. We are in the early stages of what seems to be a pulverization, a crushing, a smashing of a sort which would frighten those who saw the riches of Babylon, the power of Rome, the glories of Beijing destroyed. Rome and Beijing have been destroyed more than once, but historical forces were focused on those locations and the peoples who lived there. They could suffer for their stupidity or moral irresponsibility, sometimes for their plain bad-luck, but they couldn't escape the fate of being fathers to greater civilizations. We North Americans will also suffer to keep alive the possibility that our children or grandchildren will exercise moral responsibility though we had chosen to remain perverse and self-centered adolescents.

The prior paragraph is a prophecy and not an attempted prediction. I think it is quite plausible, and it might prove to be a true picture of the future but I'm merely stating a morally well-ordered goal toward which my work is targeted. As a Christian, my morally well-ordered goal is centered upon the Creator and my understanding of the story He's telling.

I'll quote Thomas Szasz as quoted in a recent weblog entry by Jim Bovard at his blog-site, <http://jimbovard.com/blog/>:

People dream of making the virtuous powerful, so they can depend on them. Since they cannot do that, people choose to make the powerful virtuous, glorifying in becoming victimized by them.

Producers, though they might be morally sleazy in their own characters, are engaged in an inherently moral enterprise. Exploiters, though some might well be admirable in their personal characteristics, are engaged in an inherently immoral enterprise.

Make of the above stew what you will. I'm still exploring and testing lines of thoughts as well as ways of speaking which will allow me to make a greater sense of human communities, past and present and future.



# 442 Is Power for the Sake of Power the Same as Power Earned by Productive Achievements?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1036>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/09/21.]

The article, *Power Corrupts, Especially When It Lacks Status* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/09/110920121608.htm>, explores a very important subject and extends a line of research which is decades old or centuries old if you wish to consider the work of Jeremiah and Plato, Tacitus and Augustine, Dante and Goethe, and so on. That older understanding is substantial but poorly focused in many ways. This might be an area where disciplined science can add to the works of those philosophers and theologians and poets.

The research discussed in this article, which the scientists wisely recognize to be preliminary, tells us much and points to further questions and possible lines of analysis. In the article, we read:

In a new study, researchers at USC, Stanford and the Kellogg School of Management have found that individuals in roles that possess power but lack status have a tendency to engage in activities that demean others. According to the study, “The Destructive Nature of Power without Status,” the combination of some authority and little perceived status can be a toxic combination.

...

According to the study, possessing power in the absence of status may have contributed to the acts committed by U.S. sol-

diers in the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq in 2004. That incident was reminiscent of behaviors exhibited during the famous Stanford Prison Experiment with undergraduate students that went awry in the early 1970s. In both cases the guards had power, but they lacked respect and admiration in the eyes of others and in both cases prisoners were treated in extremely demeaning ways.

...

Social hierarchy, the study says, does not on its own generate demeaning tendencies. In other words, the idea that power always corrupts may not be entirely true. Just because someone has power or, alternatively, is in a “low status” role does not mean they will mistreat others. Rather, “power and status interact to produce effects that cannot be fully explained by studying only one or the other basis of hierarchy.”

I’ll suggest a new idea to be explored as scientists go forward in exploring the uses and abuses of power by one or more human beings over others: power tends strongly to corrupt when it is gained by the struggle to gain power and may not tend so strongly to corrupt when it comes as a result of productive achievements.

## 443 If You Seek Power for the Sake of Power, You Should Keep Fear and Stress At High Levels

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1054>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/10/01.]

Soon after writing the weblog entry upon which the previous chapter, Chapter 442 was taken, I responded to an article published on the Web, *Who's the Best Leader: The Saint or the Scrooge?* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/09/110928105720.htm>. This article deals with a different but similar question: When nastiness threatens, do human beings prefer to be led by men of moral integrity or ruthless and unscrupulous competitors? As usual, I'm addressing a study under the assumption it's set in the framework of what I consider an inadequate view of our world, a world which is showing itself to be greatly more complex, very much richer, than that inadequate view can allow for. I'm heading toward a richer and more complex way of speaking about our world, especially our human communities, but that way is itself built upon a foundation of a richer and more complex and more complete understanding of created being.

In fact, the title of this essay reveals I'm making no unique claims so far as a basic understanding of the facts goes. Novels such as *1984* and *Fahrenheit 451*, serious history books about Stalinist Russia, or journalistic history works about the United States from at least World War I can tell us a lot about the manipulation of fear levels by leaders wishing to guide a human herd into wars or into persecution of some alleged internal enemy. A serious reading of some good general history books will start to reveal some

fuzzy patterns in history. I'd recommend Jacques Barzun's *From Dawn to Decadence* or the works of John Dahlberg, Lord Acton. Start with books by or about such serious thinkers and follow the trail of references as suits your tastes and interests. We shape our minds by such active responses rather than becoming "invincibly ignorant" by adopting a "perverse literacy" in which we accept mainstream accounts of reality and never strive for a different or deeper understanding. (The quoted terms are those used by Thomas Jefferson to describe a problem he already saw developing in the American mind during his lifetime.)

Let me make a claim which will allow me to pull some of these ideas into a greater coherence. The common traits of systems labeled as 'fascist' by knowledgeable commentators are the schematic and artificial nature of the authority structures and the way in which authority is imposed from above, imposed by those who wish to hold power. If we live in a dynamic world, a world in which family-lines of organisms and family-lines of systems evolve, a world in which individual organisms and individual systems develop over their lifetimes, then we should be patient, holding mostly to behaviors and attitudes which overlap those of libertarianism and even anarchism. We should be unwilling to hand family authority to any governments, reluctant to hand local authority to centralized governments, inclined strongly to local agricultural and manufacturing enterprises while engaging selectively in larger-scale and wider-scale enterprises when appropriate. We should always be ready to trade with other local regions and to engage in fairly open cross-financing with other local regions, biasing such activities to nearby regions.

To start, we should invest in and participate in activities which we can understand and which are likely to serve the purposes of our local citizenry in living good lives, morally and socially well-ordered lives. We shouldn't be oblivious to the needs of those farther from us but we should be humble about any assumptions we can help them to live better lives because such thoughts usually have led us to forcing others to live like us. We should refuse to become human materiel for the great plans or simply the grasping ambitions of those men who seek power for its own sake and wealth for its own sake rather than accepting them when they come and using them to serve moral human purposes.

Speaking more directly to the referenced article, we should place our faith in God or at least in some system of virtue and we should refuse to fear that which our masters or would-be masters would have us fear. In

this refusal and in our positive behaviors and attitudes which serve nobler human purposes, we gain our liberty and cast off our chains. Even if we are conquered and have chains put on us by forcible means, we can remain true men while our acceptance of the fears nurtured by central powers make us the most despicable of creatures: man-like but spineless critters seeking the safety allegedly found when we accept the rule of men whose only right to rule comes from their ambition and their greed.

In any case, God is moving His story forward. No one can stop the formation of the Body of Christ but we can find ourselves being crushed and pulverized by the forces of history when we refuse to try to understand them and to move with them. Sometimes we can find ourselves being crushed and pulverized even if we understand and try to cooperate with God's story. We should learn how to think about history, about human communities and their relationships to Creation and its Creator, from the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah.



## 444 What is Politics? (Another Take)

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1063>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/10/08.]

In Chapter 424, I addressed the obvious question, “What is Politics?”. I covered a lot of ground to start off a line of reasoning tightly tied to my current goal of enriching our store of words and concepts for discussing our moral and social lives. While it’s true that man hasn’t changed in some basic ways, that’s pretty much irrelevant because man is—within some vaguely defined but strong constraints—a self-shaping creature, that is, he shapes himself by responding to his environments, to the universe or even the world which is the universe seen in light of God’s purposes. Man can even shape himself by responding to the entirety of Creation, including realms of abstract being.

We know more about realms of being beyond the simple concrete realms accessible to our Neolithic ancestors and even more than was accessible to our early modern ancestors with their growing stock of scientific knowledge, of historical knowledge, of technology for exploring and exploiting the realm of concrete reality. We are shaping ourselves, however slowly and reluctantly, to a richer and more complex Creation than our ancestors knew about.

We have raised the level and increased the depth and breadth of our conversation with Creation and its Creator. We have a chance to shape ourselves to be richer and more complex creatures than were our ancestors. To a certain extent, we’ve been forced to take that chance.

So, I’ll continue dancing around the question, “What is Politics?” until I’m ready to provide some sort of a broader understanding of this aspect

of human communities. In fact, a complete answer would have to first deal with the question, “What is a human community?” I’ll simply assume a naive understanding of community though I’ll be speaking of communities of the sort which are relatively large and complex, communities which have a need to care and nurture for their members **and** to protect against dangers within and without, say, from internal criminals and from external enemies. This is to point to talk of communities as entities which have need of something akin to an immune system. That means communities which have some awareness, probably a mix of conscious and unconscious, of themselves as communities. For now, I’ll put that line of thought aside but it should be kept in mind.

Does such a community necessarily have something which could be labeled a ‘common good’? Does it even have a unity of perhaps multiple goods which form a single common good? We can perhaps view this as a basket of individual goods which are compatible at least in the sense that different sorts of independent communities can at least share a public square.

Professor Minogue tells us, in *The Liberal Mind*[95]:

[A]nything genuinely recognizable as the common good so seldom occurs in political activity that politicians have to be calculators. [page 86]

I also won’t be speaking of turf battles in the attaining of goods by individuals, families, voluntary organizations, local governments, central governments, or other entities. I’ll not speak of either moral responsibility or moral right or efficiency involved in a particular entity or level of government claiming it can best deal with a particular common good or bundle of common goods. I will instead stick to the issue: Is there something that can be considered the common good, or even a common good, for larger-scale communities, those with political structures?

In a world of evolving and developing entities, we should expect that there will be no such thing as a “common good” speaking in the sense of a basket of common goods which cover a substantial amount of what might be called a rich and worthwhile human life. When a common good can be seen, it will likely be a readily perceivable good, such as the need to defend ourselves against invading enemy forces, or it will have disappeared before we know it exists or it might disappear more slowly but the instruments we

had created to nurture the common good will have turned into self-serving institutions which simply won't go away.

The communities of the human race are evolving. Individual communities develop or fail to develop, perhaps simply fail to survive. As a Christian, I believe this to be all directed to the formation of the Body of Christ, where all who belong to Christ will fully belong to that Body while remaining individuals in a manner similar to the nature of the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God while remaining individual Persons. We have a desired state of being ahead of us and, even if all men were Christians, that doesn't really define for us much in the way of an overarching common good. After all, the point of this paragraph is that we must develop into individual persons and retain that individuality for the Body of Christ to be what it's promised to be. Moreover, I'm struggling to speak rationally about the Body of Christ in terms of our modern knowledge of Creation. How could I possibly speak of a basket of common goods which are good for all those individuals and also good for that Body?

It would be hard to believe that many of the things which seemed to be common goods in Elizabethan England would be common goods in 21st century England unless we speak in terms of meaningless generality. Even those which have remained common goods, mostly having to do with physical security and with justice systems, have changed drastically in many ways.

I'll repeat the quote from Professor Minogue's *The Liberal Mind*[95]:

[A]nything genuinely recognizable as the common good so seldom occurs in political activity that politicians have to be calculators. [page 86]

Politicians, said Minogue in the early 1960s, have to be "calculators" to try to handle issues with any alleged "common good." He has admitted in a forward to the reprint by Liberty Fund that he would not be so optimistic if he were to write *The Liberal Mind* in more recent years. He was speaking about his general view of liberalism which is that of a political philosopher and, under this rational way of thought, Ronald Reagan was as much a liberal as Ted Kennedy. I'd think it'd be likely he would now say that politicians nowadays, since at least President Johnson in the United States, imagine common goods into some sort of false existence by taking similar or analogous goods which exist in particular forms for, say,

Italian-American small businessmen or Norwegian-American dairy-farmers or Mexican-American ranchers or even Anglo-Saxon lawyers and investment bankers. I doubt that Johnson set out to destroy American social order and the American economy and I also doubt his desire to provide benefits for poor citizens was more than the shallow feel-good sort of sentiment. Mostly, he was out to win a game of politics, to grab more power.

Setting up a common good is good politics, so long as you consider politics to be a game of power rather than a means of serving the community. Defining a common good for any rapidly developing human community isn't easy, if it be possible at all. Certainly, it doesn't seem doable for a community complex enough to have political systems which wield any true power, even so much as controlling the finances for a small police force and the contributions into a regional school system.

Let me take the example of education, including vocational training. Certainly, this is something of a common good, even a necessity in a complex human community. There is no one educational system, no path of intellectual or vocational development, which is appropriate for all children in all ages of man. Some need to acquire some basic skills and knowledge in various topics, including mathematics, and also some basic skills in self-learning so they can become scientists or engineers capable of dealing with change rather than just having a fixed store of knowledge and skills from their college years. Some students need to learn how to read business contracts and how to write a clear, straightforward business letter. Some need to learn some basic mathematics well enough to read blueprints and specs for a custom designed mold or machine part. And so forth.

We're looking at a rather diverse system of needs which imply a great variety of educational goods. The situation gets worse when we admit, as educational bureaucrats refuse to, that some children need to be released from school for a year or more just to let them get the physical movement their bodies crave.

There is no common good beyond the raw need for some sort of a basic education for life in a complex society. That implies governments, as local as possible, might have a role in providing infrastructure which can then be used by, say, parents contracting with individual teachers or groups of teachers which are not public employees. The parents would be providing for the educational needs of their diverse children with diverse environments and diverse opportunities and diverse desires.

There is so much diversity so long as human beings remain true individ-

uals that I'm not even sure if the Body of Christ will have any well-defined basket of common goods. Or perhaps I should say it will be a pretty large and diverse basket of goods.



# 445 Are Serious Historians Conspiracy Nuts?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1072>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/10/13.]

I've started reading some of the works of John Dahlberg, Lord Acton, sometimes given honorary titles such as "the historian of liberty." Being largely cash-free, I downloaded pdf files of some of his works from Liberty Fund which has made available for free a good number of classic books on history, political theory, philosophy, science, and other topics—see *The Online Library of Liberty* at <http://oll.libertyfund.org/index.php>. This foundation has done remarkable work since its founder, Pierre Goodrich, set out to make available works of liberty which had gone out of print, including some of the writings of the Founding Fathers of the United States or writings from that period, such as John Marshall's biography of George Washington and the history of the American Revolution written by Mercy Otis Warren, a woman who was said to be a formidable intellect and was opposed to the development of a commercial republic and was hostile to the Constitution from an Anti-Federalist perspective.

For a couple of decades, I've been working to develop richer and more complex ways to speak of our moral, social, and political natures in this age when our human communities—not by coincidence—have grown richer and more complex as we've learned more about the richness and complexity of Creation. I've been led to a serious effort to learn some of the physics and mathematics I should have learned more than 30 years ago in college and also an effort to read good literature and solid works of history. I'll speak of one of my discoveries while reading serious histories which probe into the relationships between, say, kings of different countries or a king and a pope

or an American president and the American citizenry. There are other sorts of histories, such as some of Michael Grant's histories of the ancient world which give broad-brush overviews, but I'll speak of those with what might be called a political edge, not an agenda, but an edge.

Acton's writings certainly have an edge of this sort as do the writings of Jacques Barzun or those of John Lukacs or—though I've not yet read them—those of Mercy Otis Warren. I would imagine that Churchill's historical writings have both an edge and an agenda. There are many good history books out there and not enough time to read them, especially with the competition in literature and science and philosophy.

Acton's knowledge was most certainly not thin, nor is that of Barzun or Lukacs or Warren or a number of other good historians. History is a subject where references and bibliographies in one good book provide a good way to find other good, reliable works by the same or different authors. Physics and mathematics are in a similar position as is modern neurosciences.

With all of the above as background, I'll state my main point: Acton most especially in my recent experience but good historians in general take viewpoints on political and diplomatic and military activities which are far closer to those of moderate conspiracy theorists than to those of public school textbook writers and writers of most popular history books. In my admittedly limited experience, even most of the seemingly more serious books on topics such as American wars and American presidents are naive and shallow in their attitudes towards the types of events considered by those moderate conspiracy theorists. I'll say at this point that the ones I'm calling 'moderate' tend strongly to rely on verified facts, sometimes refusing—for reasons on credibility—to mention plausible but unverified facts in their more formal writings.

Lord Acton had said, "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely," and also had noted that powerful and centralized governments tend to attract men with the moral characters of gangsters. Gangsters would, of course, be willing to murder political leaders and others who endanger their wealth and power and some would even be willing to commit false-flag acts, even murdering a number of their fellow-citizens, to start a potentially profitable war. Selling weapons or weapons-manufacturing equipment to soon-to-be enemy countries is another activity of the stupider sort of gangster – see Barzun's *From Dawn to Decadence* [9] for the verification that the United States did sell Nazi Germany, circa 1936, the machinery to build modern weaponry. Years ago, I'd read a collection of es-

says by the French philosopher Jacques Maritain years earlier, one of those essays written in the late 1930s and translated into English for publication in the United States in the early 1940s had mentioned the badly-kept secret that Americans were committing this act as notable for its stupidity as for its criminality. American history is actually loaded with large-scale war-crimes, large-scale crimes against innocent civilians, treacherous abuse of American military personnel, and murders of politicians at various levels of government. That is, our history is loaded with crimes of the sorts committed by power-seekers for the past 5,000 years or more.

In one of his essays, Lord Acton notes that an honest study of history will lead to a depressing view of mankind and he believed that a more optimistic view can be derived only from a faith in God, a God who knows what He's doing and whose purposes are served even by the plentiful crimes of the greedy and ambitious, abetted by the cowardly compliance of the self-blinded common folk. Both Acton and Barzun, and many another historian, speak of the need for students of history to develop a proper detachment—Acton had trouble with this. I'm not one of those who believe there is no progress showing in human history but any progress in our understanding of moral order, certainly any progress in our institutional and legal implementation of order, will always be subject to attack by the ambitious and greedy amongst us, those labeled 'the exploiter class' by Thomas Jefferson and labeled in similar terms by many since then and before then for that matter. We seem to be in a period when those attacks have resulted in great damage to a moral order already in bad shape because of the moral irresponsibility of those with a duty to maintain and enrich Western Civilization.

I've not discussed a large number of historians or of serious political actors who recorded their thoughts, but the point is clear and will bear up when you read much in the history-books aisles at your public library or your favorite bookstore: those who seek power and wealth are far too often willing to commit various sorts of crimes, small or large, to get what they want. The American government has been remarkably confident about releasing information about some of its crimes, usually many years afterward. It's likely the politicians and bureaucrats know that Americans have short attention spans and are always willing to accept today's propaganda and to ignore evidence of past criminal activity. For example, see the article on *Zapata Corporation* at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zapata\\_Corporation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zapata_Corporation) for a discussion of

a company involved in CIA conspiracies against Cuba. Zapata was, shall we say, closely connected to the powerful and wealthy Walker family and their relative, George Herbert Walker Bush, named after his grandfather, a powerful investor in the so-called House of Rockefeller. For a more extensive overview of this powerful family group and their suspicious activities, see the book *Family of Secrets* by Russ Baker or see Russ Baker's website at <http://russbaker.com/>. It must be said that these activities, even including possible involvement of a future President of the United States with the murder of President Kennedy, are little different from many acts committed in history by men who are honored by at least some.

At the risk of beating a dead horse, I'll also give a couple of other links about criminal activities of the United States government.

In the article on Operation Northwoods found at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation\\_Northwoods](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Northwoods), we learn it "was a series of false-flag proposals that originated within the United States government in 1962. The proposals called for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), or other operatives, to commit acts of terrorism in U.S. cities and elsewhere. These acts of terrorism were to be blamed on Cuba in order to create public support for a war against that nation, which had recently become communist under Fidel Castro." In essence, these proposals amounted to small-scale events of the same sort which occurred on 2001/09/11. So much for claims of some that the United States government would never be willing to murder their own citizens in order to start a war.

In the article, *Repatriation àÀ The Dark Side of World War II, Part 3* found at <http://www.fff.org/freedom/0495a.asp>, we can read of the despicable treatment of some Russian soldiers who can be said to have betrayed the Soviet Union but also fought against the Nazis to help liberate Czechoslovakia. (The entire series of articles is worth reading.) The Wikipedia article on Operation Keelhaul, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation\\_Keelhaul](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Keelhaul), makes reference to the more general set of crimes against millions of refugees who were repatriated by way of deception or force to the Soviet Union with full knowledge on the part of the Western leaders that Stalin intended to either murder these refugees or use them as slave labor, mostly in Siberia. Roosevelt promised Stalin at Yalta to do this and Truman kept the promise perhaps because Stalin held American and British POWs from German POW-camps and wouldn't release them until the refugees were given to him. As it turned out, he never released those POWs – they also died in Siberia. Julius Epstein, an

investigative journalist-historian, published an authoritative book on this topic in 1973 to mostly resounding silence on the part of the self-censoring and self-brainwashing residents of the modern West.

Russ Baker is one of a number of investigative journalists who set high enough standards that they can be labeled as ‘historians’ though it will be decades before we see the writing of authoritative histories on the events, criminal or otherwise, of our times. But, though time will give us better explanations and more facts, we have enough in the way of solid facts to be sure that our age is no different from other ages—we have not only criminals of the ordinary ‘mugger’ sort but also criminals of the ‘higher type’, presidents and prime ministers and generals and bankers and so forth. They have engaged in criminal conspiracies on a more or less continual basis, more frequently in recent years with the breakdown in moral order and the closely related breakdown in historical knowledge and literacy skills and thinking ability on the part of citizens, butchers and bakers and professors and priests and engineers.

I don’t think historians who study this age in future generations will be any more optimistic about the crimes of human beings than was Lord Acton in the second half of the 19th century. They will still be studying not only the noble acts and legitimate progress of the human race but also the crimes, high and low, of human beings including those in political or financial positions of power. Yet, our Western governments, our banks, our corporations, are greatly out of control by the standards of any but the dark ages of history.



## 446 What is Political Discussion?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1125>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/12/17.]

In *The Liberal Mind* Kenneth Minogue, the British political theorist, tells us:

“Need” belongs to a particular language of political and moral thought arising from the conception of generic men. Once we have entered into that language, we can only say individualist things. It is a language which has grown out of the liberal movement (and some associated movements) and it has, like all languages, its particular blind spots, the things which it cannot say. Once inside, no matter how much we thresh about, we shall be hard put to it to escape. A great mistake has been to imagine that an ideology consists of a set of answers to neutral questions; whereas in fact, it consists in the questions.

In a strong biological sense, I do need food, clothing, a warm place to work, a comfortable bed in a warm room. Some of this could be partially given up at the cost of health, physical and emotional and mental, but I’m not volunteering to lead an ascetic life.

I’m left with that confession that I need food and shelter and clothing, in common with those who are driven to eat out multiple times a week and those who desire houses with a thousand square feet per inhabitant. I need some entertainment and some stimulation, in common with those who think the Beatles were the equal of Mozart and those who act as if the availability of new audio or video technology will inevitably lead to some sort of worthy esthetic feats. I need a sense of belonging, of membership in a substantial body of my fellow human beings, in common with those who imagine recent

American presidents to be more than political gangsters of the sort drawn to powerful, centralized governments. I need a way to worship my Creator, in common with those who honor Christian leaders who pander to power rather than speaking truth to power. I need some peace and order in the streets, in common with those who support the destruction of civil and political rights in the interest of promises of safety and security.

We have an ideologically formed language of needs which is only partially determined by our biological needs and which helps shape both the modern nation-state—the welfare-warfare state, and its citizens.

Which questions do we ask so that we think the answers offered by the modern nation-state seems normal and inherently desirable?

The questions being asked in the United States since World War II seem also to lead to answers involving movies about cannibalistic psychiatrists and to concerts starring 70 year-old men still singing about adolescent angst. They seem to lead to answers involving gigantic sports stadiums and a surprising number of young men who are well over six feet tall and weigh more than 250 pounds while being as agile as 180 pound athletes of an earlier age. The questions being asked seem to lead to answers involving a huge number of American military bases throughout Asia and Africa and Latin America and the replacement of American citizen-soldiers by Rambo. The questions seem to lead to answers involving the strip-searching of elderly ladies in American airports and the acceptance of the mass-murder of men and women and children in Waco because their leader was said to be a nut.

When I find a good insight or a great way of expressing an insight I'd already imbibed, I tend to repeat it for a while. I apologize if it's annoying to any of my regular readers, but. . . In *The Quiet American*, Graham Greene said that we Americans feel the world exists to give us opportunities to feel good about ourselves. And so I claim:

The main question Americans, and far too many other modern human beings, propose to the world is: What can you offer to make me feel good about myself?

We Americans have become hollow-chested human beings in the terms of C.S. Lewis or genial creatures lacking any true moral character in the terms of Adam Smith. We seek to feel good about ourselves rather than to be good men by objective standards, whether those of virtuous paganism or of Christianity.

We have deformed our own minds or souls, our moral characters, by the strategy, workable for only a short while, of forcing the world to seem to be something it isn't, something which gives back feel-good answers to that question: What can you offer to make me feel good about myself? We are paying a big price, Americans and others in the West, as the world is revealing itself to something different from what we assume it to be. The world isn't something to be shaped to our desires but rather something to which we should respond, thus shaping ourselves to that world, that is, shaping ourselves in response to those manifested thoughts of our Creator. In a simplistic phrase: we should seek to be good rather than to feel good about ourselves. There is a world of difference.



# 447 Overwhelming Our Moral Characters

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1138>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/12/24.]

I've just listened to the former CIA analyst, Ray McGovern, as he spoke about his moment of cowardice—when he learned of a memo from General Creighton Abrams which revealed the Army commanders in Saigon were deliberately lying about enemy strength. Mr. McGovern was a young CIA analyst and thought about revealing it to the press, which was willing to speak inconvenient truths at that time. McGovern admits he retreated from his moral duty because of concerns about his family and about his own career. Like Daniel Ellsberg who could have blown the whistle earlier, he reasoned he be able to do more good if he followed his career and gained enough prestige so that he could one day even tell the truth face-to-face to the President—the audio of the interview can be found at <http://antiwar.com/radio/2011/12/23/ray-mcgovern-34>. Mr. McGovern went on to an honorable career in the upper regions of the CIA and is now engaged in various battles to combat abusive use of government power especially by the American and Israeli governments.

I wish to propose:

If certain forms and levels of power are such as to overwhelm the moral courage and strength of a typical human being, then we should be cautious about allowing those forms and levels of power to develop.

At the same time, I think that we shouldn't adopt a view that all forms of authority and power are wrong. As a Christian, I believe in the Body

of Christ and believe those who will live with Christ in the world of the resurrected will be a part of that Body while remaining individuals.

We, as individuals, are pilgrims in the mortal realm, pilgrims traveling through our own world towards a world which is a perfected and completed version of this world. The Body of Christ is, in an analogous way, developing in this mortal realm and grows, intends – in Thomistic language—towards its perfected and completed state which it can reach only in the world of the resurrected. The Body of Christ is currently riddled with entities which are cancers or parasites. Some of those malformed entities are classified in modern thought as criminal or terrorist and some are classified as political. I have little respect for the American government in Washington and I have a low opinion of it in nearly all of its manifestations since the passing of the Founding Fathers—and they weren't perfect for sure. Even at that, my belief in the developmental nature of the Body of Christ forces me to acknowledge some legitimacy on the part of governments of even the worst sort—as Christ did though I don't think He gave the all-out endorsement to the authority of mortal political entities which some have read out of His few words on that subject. As Lord Acton once pointed out, those who believe in the Christian Creator have to believe that these evil men who are so powerful and so prominent in history serve some purpose of the Creator. As I recall from my readings of Tolkien, he made a very similar point, at least in one of the 'background' histories.

How can Nebuchadnezzar or Genghis Khan or Stalin or President Bush-clinbushbama serve God's purposes?

I certainly don't have a good answer in the usual terms, as was true with Lord Acton, a historian and—I'd say—philosopher of history with deep and wide knowledge and the intelligence and skill to put that knowledge into the form of true histories.

I can say a little on the topic from my viewpoint which combines short-term pessimistic with long-term optimism.

We should be careful that we not allow power to concentrate in a form or to an extent that it can be handled safely and morally only by creatures with greater ability and stronger moral character than we mortal men have. If I'm right that the Body of Christ is forming to some extent in this mortal realm, as is true of individual saints, then there will be some forms of concentrated power in our future as a race. Those forms of power will evolve and develop by natural means, in ways beyond our capacity to plan or even to anticipate. It is my very optimism about this aspect of human

communal life that leads me to advocate modesty and humility and to deny that I, or any of my fellow human beings, can see much beyond the next step.

Let us learn to take that next step in all modesty and humility, moving slowly along the path of development of the Body of Christ or at least toward some reasonable idea of better human communities after recognizing the evolutionary and developmental nature of this world. Evolutionary and development processes do include the possibility of catastrophes or positive events of a dramatic sort, but they're mostly unpredictable. Even when we can reasonably predict some great change is coming, as is true in this year of 2011, we can't be sure when it will hit or what form it will really take. For example, we don't know if it will immediately cleanse human communities of the worst of these cancerous and parasitic men and gangs of men or whether we'll collapse into some dark age when they'll rule.



# 448 Predators, Producers, Sheep, and the Love of Liberty

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1141>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/12/27.]

I'm trying to deal with a problem I feel to be at the foundation of a body of thought which I generally admire—libertarianism of the Old Right and Rothbardian sort. On the whole, my attitude is similar to my attitude towards Jamesian pragmatism. For a discussion of that attitude, see my responses to Walter J. Freeman's *How Brains Make Up Their Minds* [35] as contained in: Chapter 83, *Is Christian Morality a Natural Morality*, and Chapter 84, *Pragmatism and Thomistic Existentialism*. In the second of those chapters, I state:

I consider myself a Thomistic existentialist and most certainly not a pragmatist, though I think that pragmatist methods are the same as the 'first-stage' methods of Thomistic existentialism. I've criticized pragmatists, even those that I admire—such as William James or the brain-scientist Gerald Edelman because of the inadequacy of a pure pragmatist approach to understanding the universe. Their bottom-up approach is the proper 'first-stage' to understanding Creation but they refuse to admit it works only if there is a world to meet them, a world in all its unity, coherence, and completeness.

Libertarians are not really homogeneous in their doctrines, though it would seem to me that they have a shared belief in something called 'liberty' which is alleged to be a metaphysical right of man. Liberty is more than just a sum of particular freedoms; it's a general freedom from past

repressions which are assumed representative of the ways in which human beings can be enslaved if only partially. Libertarian versions of liberty seem, by a naive analysis of historical timing, to be founded upon what I'd call a semi-metaphysical principle sufficient to ground their pessimistic attitude towards government, which attitude seems to be a reaction against the strange monsters which arose in early efforts of predators and idealists and realists and simple folk to develop governments suited to the needs of modern complex societies.

Obviously, I'm closer to the views of Michael Oakeshott than to those of Ludwig von Mises. Oakeshott was one of the very few true conservative intellectuals in the 20th century. Amongst his other peculiarities, he considered the claims of the *Declaration of Independence* to be mere silliness, the stuff of delusions. It wasn't the case that Oakeshott had no principles and no respect for rights of some substantial sort. It was the case that he grounded his beloved Englishman's freedoms in flesh-and-blood, dirt, and history.

History is an interesting part of the puzzle. I believe that human history is a part of the story God is telling which we know as the world which I define as the universe viewed in light of God's purposes.

I can't take seriously many claims about human needs or rights unless they can be seen in concrete men and in human history. This is a problem to be sure since history, as Lord Acton noted sadly, seems to be greatly influenced by evil men. Some of my recent efforts are directed towards writing a human version of God's story in which those gangsters also play a role. I'm learning, as a child-like author, to imitate my Maker as He goes about His tasks in Creation. The actions of those evil men, some of them prominent in recent American history, are mildly described as despicable, but this is God's world, God's story. The Almighty did what He did and we should try to understand what He did and not what we imagine He should have done.

For now, it's most important that I claim man is an empirical being in an empirical world. Again I don't 'reduce' man and his world to a simple empiricist chaos, but there is much work needed to be done before we can have a modern Christian view with the contextual explanatory power of the view St. Augustine developed 1500 years ago, a view which largely held until the early modern period and a view I'll partly—and only partly—revive as part of my effort to contribute to a modern Christian understanding of Creation.

We can make all the claims we wish about the desirability of liberty for men but those claims will be plausible only if the human race is composed predominately of those who wish liberty and can handle it. In fact, a metaphysical grounding of liberty, such as that read into Jefferson's claims, would require any true human being to be—at least in potential—as much a lover of liberty as that redheaded Virginian himself.

In fact, I think what I have to say wouldn't have surprised Murray Rothbard of libertarian fame or Albert Jay Nock of the Old Right at all, though they might have differed to some extent or other with my conclusion: the typical human being doesn't seem made for life in a libertarian society. In effect, most human beings are more concerned with safety and comfort rather than liberty for themselves or their children. There is also a small group of human beings who aren't suited for that life of 'radical' liberty because they have no respect for the liberty of others. They like to accumulate wealth and power.

Perhaps we human beings aren't made of just a producer class and a predator class as Thomas Jefferson taught. Maybe there is another vaguer class of truly sheep-like creatures who might be predatory in a cowardly way or productive in a submissive way but aren't about to show any initiative in pursuing good or evil goals. And maybe we're all partly made of predator and partly of producer and partly of sheep-like creatures. Maybe many of the producers and even many of the predators wish to live in political communities which provide them with certain sorts of structures for their good or bad activities.

In any case, producers are only a part of the human race or—more plausibly—part of each of us. I'll assume the simple case for now, that each of us is predominately of one type: producer or predator or sheep and there is likely a good amount of truth in that assumption at least with respect to our particular concrete beings as they develop in specific contexts. I'll assume for this chapter the ultimately inadequate but interesting suggestion of Jefferson that we are producers or predators. (I'm sure he knew he was oversimplifying and knew well that was often a mistake to usefully make on the way to a greater truth.)

We have to realize it likely that only a part of the producer class is made of those who wish liberty. Much productive work can be done, if less efficiently, under conditions of political authoritarianism of some sort and that's good enough for some tradesmen and doctors and even ambitious entrepreneurs. In any case, there are highly productive individuals, those

who can take some initiative, who seem comfortable compromising their liberty and that of their fellow-citizens so long as they can do their work in a well-ordered society.

There's much uncertainty in all of this. We don't know if those who act the roles of predators are truly different from us or whether they might be strictly us responding to different opportunities, to different environmental conditions in general. This is to say, I don't know if we can better understand men by thinking in terms of well-differentiated classes or in terms of a line drawn through the soul of each of us. Let's slide by that problem for now. After all, this is a preliminary work directed towards the long-term goal of understanding men in the context of politics.

What about the sheep? Recent research have shown, at least for mice, lack of proper nurturing by the mother will leave her youngsters as anxiety-ridden. Likely it would be that we are similar—lack of proper nurturing by a mother would leave her children to grow into cowardly, anxiety-ridden adults who would consequently be passive, sheep to some lesser or greater degree. There are undoubtedly other ways a fearful human being could be produced even if his genetic code allowed for better character traits.

Speculations upon speculations upon. . .

In any case, I don't present this argument as one who believes in liberty as a plausible goal for human beings. I'm not complaining that men don't value liberty however much they might claim such when they wish to gain a particular freedom, such as that of watching trashy movies. I present this argument as one who believes human beings are what they are and that can only be determined by empirical evidence, not all of it of the sort to be tested in the laboratory. In fact, much of what I'm discussing has to be evaluated on the historical record as well as by observations of behavior in town government, at the church picnic, in the malls and the stands of professional sports stadiums, on the battlefield, in the various workplaces, and on the playground.

What I can say for sure is that there is plenty of strong but not absolutely convincing evidence that only a minority of human beings have the character attributes suited to the dangerous life of liberty, if such a life were possible as more than an idiosyncratic existence on the edge of structured human communities, including one or more political communities. More frighteningly, most men seem to have little concern for any of the specific freedoms necessary for any sort of republican form of government. This is almost a commonplace observation, as we could learn from

two serious observers of Americans during the same period early in the life of the American Republic.

Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote an introduction for the first edition of *The Scarlet Letter* in which he confessed to feeling unmanned when working as a government employee in the customs house in Salem, circa 1850. Hawthorne also stated a belief that Americans, in those days when we imagine such creatures as rugged individualists, wished to sell back their liberty in return for promises of financial security—a government job was often sufficient in those days before modern welfare systems. Hawthorne was forced to believe the United States had become a republic advocating personal liberty only because of a small group of brave and dedicated men.

(According to Gore Vidal, see his historical novel *Burr*, Aaron Burr admitted that the Founding Fathers, some at least, were lawyers trying to create a country in which lawyers would prosper. I believe the best interpretation of history usually lies between idealistic and cynical understandings. In the period 1770-1800, there might well have been a period when the idealists were closer to the truth—the plutocratic families which had dominated colonial times had been at least partially pushed aside and men who were at least courageous and energetic came into power and held it for a generation against the growing numbers of opportunistic scoundrels.)

Tocqueville, circa 1838, published *Democracy in America* in which he tried hard to be optimistic about what might be called the ‘American experiment’ but was forced to admit Americans held their mainstream opinions to an extent that they could ignore facts in conflict with those opinions, not even seeming to realize their views were contradicted by the real world around them. He predicted Americans would eventually create a new type of country for which he had no words but we might call it a benevolent totalitarian country, one formed by the herd itself and not by those “great men on horseback” who are so influential in history when the circumstances are right. In 1950, Ray Bradbury published *Fahrenheit 451* which explored the possibility that television would provide the technology for completing this process, allowing the herd and maybe most leaders to make a still greater effort to ignore reality, an effort which would lead to a true disaster—the large-scale destruction of much of Western Civilization capped by a nuclear war in his particular tale.

There is much truth in libertarian criticisms of the modern state, particularly in the words of those such as Nock and Rothbard who honestly describe the events and structures of our modern states in terms that at

least implicitly admit that many men, probably most, seek security and companionship of the sort not much consistent with radical principles of individualism or even of more modest forms of political freedoms based upon intermediary institutions. In fact, there will always be those who are willing to betray family or church, perhaps for reasons we should sympathize with, and cooperate with the central powers who offer short-term relief in return for our allegiance.

Is this lack of respect for our own liberty a matter of bad formation? That would raise the question as to the better formation of masses of men and such a question would then lead to the sorts of political solutions denied by many, probably most, libertarians. That is, they might be tempted—against their better natures—to argue, essentially, for the formation of a new people to replace the inadequate people formed by nature. In my opinion, we should be heading towards an understanding of political institutions in which power is properly distributed. In fact, power should be jealously held at the highest level at which it can be morally and safely exercised, and no higher. And that level is determined by human nature and by the level of development of their political understanding and skills in at that time.

I often quote the historian Carroll Quigley: “Truth unfolds in time through a communal processes.” What’s important is to see the communal nature of even our better understandings of Creation, including we human beings who are part of it. In fact, this emerging truth isn’t merely abstract knowledge to be recorded in the works of philosophers and historians and chemists. It’s a truth in the fullest sense. Things are true and truth is thing-like. That is, truth is manifested in things and their relationships, including our political and economic and social and spiritual relationships with other human beings.

We can coherently describe human beings only as organisms, biological entities—living things, whose higher attributes and desires are potential rather than in their DNA or their abstract principles. In Thomistic terms, we should intend to a better state of being. It’s hard to imagine how this process could even proceed in a true individual given the vast amount of formation necessary. Again: “The truth unfolds in time through communal processes.” We are, in truth, members of communities and all of those communities have political aspects. Our own human beings are true but reach a level of higher truth when we cooperate with that unfolding of truth which is a communal process, one form of which is a political process.

There are most certainly political aspects to the processes by which

all human beings form themselves. We see these political aspects even as early as those playground days when one energetic or charismatic fellow decides if it'll be baseball or soccer today. This might give us a hint about the nature of the political process—politically inclined men might have a calling of sorts to draw us out of our tendencies to retreat to too small a life or too passive a life. In Thomistic terms, some of us need leaders to help us respond actively and properly to God's world. Having written that, I'll point to the problem Lord Acton saw so clearly—when political power becomes too great and too concentrated, it draws men with the moral character of gangsters.

Acton had a vast and deep knowledge of history and seemingly of human nature and, like me, considered governments to be something greater, perhaps far greater, than necessary evils. He was right and so am I. The goal shouldn't be to eliminate government but rather to realize the political life as a natural part of human life. We have to be modest in the short-run, not letting the ambitions of even the better sort of men, certainly not the ambitions of men with the moral character of gangsters, to impose upon us political systems which are inherently bad or even systems for which we aren't yet prepared. From one angle, we can say we shouldn't let political systems or the underlying political communities grow too large or too complex until we're prepared for that greater system and the greater community. Eventually, says some muse of history, we'll learn how to govern something as large and complex and powerful as the United States. But we won't learn it in the positivistic way of the Enlightenment intellectuals, including the Founding Fathers of the United States. We'll learn it when several relatively large and complex human political communities come together to share many of their political duties and responsibilities, come together to form a greater political community. This greater political community will be associated with a body of knowledge, including speculations in the tradition of Plato's *Republic* and Voegelin's *Order and History* but also including the most concrete of practices and the entirety of that body of knowledge won't really be known even to the best political thinkers at the time it develops. In fact, it's probable a greater understanding of the nature of this political beast will mature only by the time the human race has moved on to a different, richer, and more complex state of being.

Yet, we should be capable of recognizing a truly bad situation. The United States is a failed experiment and it's likely the case that the best and most peaceful solution is a voluntary breakup into a number of more

coherent entities which can then start learning how to form a better version of a greater republic. As a Christian, I also believe, and have stated in the past, that God might well pulverize the United States and then rebuild this country to be what it should have been. This would be a painful and degrading process and I believe it's likely to happen because the United States remains the most plausible realm for the revival of Western Civilization, a civilization which might yet have a lot of ruin left in it, maybe even some good in it.

Do I believe all I'm claiming in this essay which has grown beyond my original plans? Mostly, though there is much uncertainty due to both an inadequate understanding of human beings and an inadequate understanding of this world, indeed an inadequate understanding of all of Creation. When we look at our race and speak of 'predators' and 'producers', we engage in a simplification which is useful but only so far as we don't take it as literal truth. The same is true when we speak of nearly any aspect or attribute of a human being, even the most sharply defined of virtues. I could make similar comments about our understanding of this universe seen as a coherent narrative. Much of the problems in this area come from our Spinozean tendency to fragment our knowledge into sorts of knowledge to be handled by specialists. Those realms of knowledge have become representative of realms of being in the thoughts of modern men. Humpty-Dumpty has fallen off his wall and we look on as various specialists examine the remains. What chance have we of also making sense of the world in a single coherent narrative, even with the help of Plato and Augustine and Wordsworth?

A man is an organism which develops within certain inherited constraints and he develops properly when he actively responds to his environment and more. A man's environment includes his human communities, starting with his mother but certainly he doesn't emerge from his childhood as a freestanding individual but rather a dependent rational animal, in the words of Alasdair MacIntyre. Dependent. Dependent creatures forming complex communities need political structures, even government.

Man is a creature of flesh-and-blood, a creature of a particular type. Man is intertwined with his environment, most especially human communities. Man is an empirical creature and he is not to be truly understood by way of metaphysical principles as thought many in the past few centuries including Jefferson and perhaps some other prominent Founding Fathers. Nor is man to be understood by theological principles as too many of my fellow-Christians believe, explicitly or implicitly. Man is also not best understood

as an individual who is ideally free from all forms of government. We can't even say man is best served by a minimal government. We can only say that we need to pay attention to the best research of anthropologists and historians as to man's behavior and apparent nature in past years as well as to the best research of neuroscientists and others with something to add to the understanding of our racial nature. Then we Christians, in particular, should engage in intense study of the books of the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah knowing they were well-educated men who were knowledgeable about the political situation of the rulers of Israel and also the situations of the rulers of the surrounding pagan empires. We would benefit greatly from such a reading of the political world of creatures shaped at the racial level by Darwinian processes and at the individual and community level by processes described by modern brain-scientists and historians and evolutionary biologists. In the context of this essay, there will be little support for theories of minimal government, let alone anarchy and much support for the ideal of a humble and modest cooperation with God's story as it develops. Rather than setting the goal of tearing down, we should aim to build slowly and with modest aims, working along with natural processes of development.

The world itself develops and often in unexpected ways. Our understanding of the world develops in a still more unexpected way since we're always catching up to what we didn't understand in the past as well as struggling with the emerging aspects of God's story.

That God is a clever Fellow. Awfully creative as well. And always surprising. And it is God's thoughts which we should be trying to understand rather than making assumptions drawn from our preferences. This is true when we try to understand human nature or human history or spacetime or matter. It's God's thoughts, manifested as created being which are the proper study of mankind.



## 449 Another Take on the Human Being as Individual and as Community Member

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1151>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/01/06.]

I've used a chunk of the following quote from *The Liberal Mind* [95] by Kenneth Minogue in Chapter 424, *What is politics?*:

Now what makes liberal individualism so plausible is that the individual is the only self-conscious entity whose limits appear to correspond to a physiological creature; and also that the thoughts and feelings which constitute institutions such as states or churches must be physically located in the minds of human beings. A prime minister is undoubtedly at various times an individual self standing in competitive relation to other selves; especially, indeed, when he is struggling with political rivals. But there are other occasions when his thoughts and acts must be taken as State-thoughts and State-acts, and when they cannot be reduced to the psychological operations of an individual. In its extremer forms, liberal individualism is a fallacy which since Mill has been called Psychologism: the doctrine that each individual may be psychologically explained, and all social institutions must be explained in terms of individuals. This mistake is endemic in liberalism, though its presence has in recent decades been camouflaged by adding to the basic model of generic-man various sociological components—class membership, social norms and so on. Yet if we wish to learn about the

military behavior of soldiers, we must study military activities, not psychology. And similarly, if we wish to understand politicians, we must attempt to understand the activity of politics, not discover whether politicians are nice or nasty men. It is not that psychological (or sociological) knowledge is in these cases of no account; it is simply that the distinction here between psychology and military art or psychology and politics is a false one, and that the starting point for explanation must not be the rationalist essence of the individual, but the complex situation we are trying to explain. [page 50]

The simplest of us is a most complex beast, though some saints, Buddhist as well as Christian, are said to be simplified towards a state of unity. We take on roles in life and may even have not only different ways of thought but also slightly different blocks of memory which are activated or de-activated when we move from one room where we are a son of an aging and mildly demented parent to another room where we have to deal with an overloaded schedule at a local community of worship to another room where we have to answer to a boss and clients. I've generalized freely from findings discussed briefly in a podcast from the *Scientific American* website: see Chapter 121, *Rooms of Memory*, for my take on these findings as well as a link to the podcast.

Let's say there's no true 'ego', no true center of 'self-consciousness', no center of an inborn 'person'. Where is the true 'I' to be found? Or is there no 'I' if there is no inborn substance, however metaphysical, to be described as 'self-conscious', no inborn substance which simply existed from some magical moment forward for time without end. Perhaps that magical moment is the instant of conception or perhaps an instant of ensoulment—if we wish to return to a Medieval idea which had the virtue of being rational and part of a coherent and consistent understanding of human nature in the context of a world also subject to a coherent and consistent understanding.

Where is the somewhat free individual to be found that he might be me? I'd claim strongly he's not to be found in some metaphysical incantation which speaks of the undetectable to explain that which is detectable and subject to exploration and maybe even testing. I'd also claim he's not to be found as a citizen of a realm filled with entities which can act upon an empirical world without being empirically detected. He's not even to be found in a listing of some encoding of the human mind.

I'd suggest the individual, free-thinking and free-willing and free-acting in a highly qualified but concrete manner, is to be found where human beings are found—in human communities. This introduces problems to be sure. We're learning from scientists and historians what we should have already known from the Bible and from our various human traditions—we are shaped in communities. I guess this is a painful thought for those who seem to have forsaken their traditions or to have been forsaken by those traditions—a situation found in all periods of radical, and often rapid, transition in the structures and maybe contents of human cultures or even of an overarching civilization.

We're in trouble but our goals should be relative to our situation. We should seek to understand what our situation truly is which means understanding our own selves in the best available terms and that points to what the true problem is. Our situation is horribly complex and immensely complicated relative to what was properly anticipated by those who gave us our current understandings of our individual human natures, our communal human natures, and the basic structures of Creation. While retaining a respect for what is absolutely true and complete in its truth, we should realize that reality has to be defined as the best understanding of some partially viewed Creation, best being defined by our current capabilities for exploring that Creation and for making sense of it. Due to a variety of factors but mostly the great success of the exploration of this empirical realm of Creation in recent centuries, we are capable of a far better understandings of all of Creation than the understanding we've inherited.

Such an understanding has to be faith-based, not because dogmas need to be imposed upon what-is but rather because what-is has to be taken on its own terms and a greater reality has to be extrapolated from the relatively small human stock of knowledge and skills, small at all spacetime intervals however immense our knowledge and thinking skills might be relative to those available even in classical Greece let alone in the growing community of Jericho 10,000 years ago or more.

At this stage of this imaginative journey into the largely unknown, it makes some sense to retreat to the more limited, less truth-seeking, effort to understand the freedom of man viewed as an individual creature. In Chapter 219, *What is Freedom*, I wrote:

In the modern world, we tend to think of freedom in terms of satisfying desires. To be sure, even many who live for that

false sort of freedom seem to realize that we then become no more than our desires or, more horribly, the thwarting of those desires—a terrible and humiliating state in either case. Hannibal the Cannibal is the most free of all modern men because he has become his desires and he has gained the power to satisfy them. Hannibal the Cannibal is the role-model for our politicians and our lawyers, our investment bankers and our corporate executives, our athletes and our entertainers. He may even be a role-model for many clergymen.

Let me move in a different direction with a quote from a modern philosopher [11]:

“[W]e are free when our acts spring from our whole personality, when they express it, when they have that indefinable resemblance to it which one sometimes finds between the artist and his work.” [page 172]

Let me provide another quote, this one from a prominent brain-scientist [35]:

“An intent is the directing of an action toward some future goal that is defined and chosen by the actor.” [page 8]

As Freeman discusses, intention is the movement of an organism into the future. If we intend to be free, we will take one tiny step after another towards the goal of having a “whole personality,” which can only occur in a human organism which has taken on the properties of a true person: unity, coherence, and wholeness <sup>1</sup>.

Here’s what it comes down to: though forced in many of his actions by the needs of his land and his animals, a true farmer in his role as farmer is free in a way radically beyond the false freedom of a passive television viewer who can choose from 20 movies, seven football games and three soccer games, five so-called reality shows, and so on. Horowitz playing Beethoven’s *Moonlight* sonata is playing notes written a century before and yet he exercises freedom beyond my imagination as I try to choose from a bookcase filled with CDs with a variety of musical styles and performers.

They are part of a community and work as members of a community. In the case of American farmers, they have typically had clearly visible but informal cooperative arrangements with neighboring farmers as well as

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<sup>1</sup>Usually, I’ll use the term ‘completeness’.

invisible but more binding arrangements with those who farmed that land in the past and the ones who will follow. Horowitz is in a community stretching over the centuries and it includes composers and arrangers, accompanists and conductors, as well as pianists. Farmers are bound by the needs of the crops and animals bred by past generations, pianists by the very design of their instrument and the way that composers sought to use its potential.

But again: that farmer and Horowitz the pianist are free when they truly intend to be what they only pretend to be at the start of their careers, what they become step by sometimes painful step.

There is a problem here that I've only partly solved, a problem caused by our inability to shed older ways of thinking and speaking—not always a bad thing since it can prevent changes for the worse or maybe useless changes for the no better. So it is that we can be easily led astray by a language and a set of concepts which grew to explain and justify an ending era of feverish and unbalanced prosperity, that is a prosperity of things and the activities which gain those things which was accompanied by a paucity of well-formed human beings, farmers or pianists, writers or politicians, home-builders or clergymen.

A rich community life is necessary for the development of men of substance and high achievements. Men of substance and high achievements are necessary for a rich community. There is a reciprocal relationship which can be excluded by our modern language and our modern conceptions of man and his communities for that language and all of those concepts were formed by the battle between liberal individualists and various sorts of collectivists. In analogical terms from physics, the liberal individualists would evaporate the streams of human history, liberating drops of water to be particles of gas which would be free from the other particles. The collectivists would freeze those streams into crystalline structures while claiming to be moving bravely into the future.

Water isn't a compromise between ice and vapor but rather a remarkable substance with properties unpredictable to those who know only ice or vapor. Even in this physical substance, we see peculiar properties arise because of the characteristics of the entire universe, such as its thermodynamic path—from a indescribably specific state, it is expanding into a more general state, one with higher entropy though allowing for the development of highly specific states, such as life, at the expense of throwing still greater entropy into the surrounding environment.

This world is specific in a way that can't be simply defined by the

starting conditions of a physical system as we can currently understand it. It's specific in a way that can only be described as 'narrative'. It's a highly specific story in which water arises because of some peculiarities in the union of two hydrogen atoms with one oxygen atom. Water is a very useful stuff and has a different relationship to ice than most liquids have to their corresponding solids. This isn't the place to discuss matters in which I'm barely conversant but the point is: Water has to exist for us to know water. My own thoughts would indicate the likelihood that there are general principles which could allow us to predict the existence of water and its strange relationship to ice at the transition points between states of matter, but if we learn those principles in this mortal realm, it will only be because we first knew water. In this analogy, which might prove dangerous, we are water molecules but we have the full properties associated with such an entity only when we are part of a large stream of other entities like ourselves.

We are born as human organisms with the potential to become some true sort of individuals but we can only become human persons, rich and complex in the way of a small world, in the context of human communities. And a human community reaches a high level of complexity and richness, a level necessary for serious accomplishments, only when there is at least a significant minority of well-formed human persons, human individuals who are worlds in themselves but not separate from those communities.

# 450 A Poet Lends a Helping Hand

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1154>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/01/09.]

In the poem *The Sycamore*, Wendell Berry straddles some no man's land between metaphysics and theology and poetry to give an interestingly aslant and insightful definition of narrative:

It [the sycamore] has gathered all accidents into its purpose.

As characters in the narratives which are our individual lives, we should gather all accidents into our purpose. We should respect and try to understand as others are gathering in accidents into the various purposes in the many stories inside this world. If others seem to be merely befuddled, if there is no such gathering and seems to be no intention to a purpose, we can only be sad for those others. If some are gathering the accidents of others toward an exploitive purpose, we should be angry but also should wonder how God might be gathering even the accidents of His evil creatures into His purposes.

We who are Christians, believers in an all-powerful and all-knowing Creator, should realize this narrative understanding of reality allows a harmonization between Moses and Darwin. Darwin describes the processes by which the accidents are generated to be gathered into the purposes prophesied by Moses.

God is even now gathering all accidents into the overarching purpose for which this story, our world, is being told: the birth and development of the Body of Christ, born in the cave in which the crucified Jesus Christ was buried and from which He emerged. This Body is growing yet through time

as its various parts evolve and develop. The Almighty gathers all of our accidents and our purposes into that greater purpose. Even our purposes are but accidents within that greater narrative.

From the same poem, on a related topic, the very next line reads:

It has become the intention and radiance of its dark fate.

This seems to beg for a Thomistic understanding of ‘intention’ as a growth process of an organism rather than a subjective thing which overlaps with desire and motivation.

Because of centuries of neglect of Western Civilization—no, the ‘pagans’ didn’t take it away from us, we just abandoned it—we have a paucity of ways of speaking the Christian truth. I’ve claimed before that poets and novelists and artists and musicians have to give us a new vocabulary to speak of the new concepts which are just on the other side of our cognitive reach. Perhaps there is at least a part of such a vocabulary already existing in the works of some of our modern poets, such as Wendell Berry.

## 451 The Busybody Chicken and the Naughty Egg

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1159>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/01/11.]

Here's a link, <http://www.testosteronepit.com/home/2012/1/9/the-systemic-nature-of-medicare-fraud.html>, to a good article, *The Systemic Nature of Medicare Fraud*, about some specific problems which have developed in the Medicare system, resulting in fraud.

Some of us are crooks for sure. Why do those crooks all of a sudden have the power to bankrupt our society and destroy our middle-class prosperity?

Years ago, I had a conversation with a former Assistant Director of the FBI. He told me, nearly 25 years ago, that the United States had once been a country of citizens with good moral habits and behaviors. Little in the way of policing was needed for the average citizen but only for those truly inclined to crime and that police work was done after crimes were committed.

Police generally didn't snoop though they perhaps didn't have to snoop about the most important matters since a good part of the American population, and many others around the world, lived in stable small communities where people knew each other and—as I recall even from the 1960s and early 1970s—kept watch on each other's children and houses. The policemen in town knew which young men were inclined to draw a knife or throw a punch in anger, which women didn't respect the property rights of others, which children and parents needed a talk every so often to remind them of the future of someone who goes bad. And, of course, everyone knew where and how the town's bankers lived and could be suspicious about sudden displays of wealth which might indicate embezzlement. They knew if the

town's grocer with a liking for games of chance was suddenly desperate for money. Money wasn't just siphoned away by the mechanisms of an abstracted banking system and the town's potential exploiters didn't live mysterious lives in rich men's towns several stops up the railroad line.

Our country worked not because we had amazingly efficient police forces and technologically advanced regulators but rather because most citizens—including policemen and bank regulators—were doing their modestly defined jobs and had good reason to go about their business mostly trusting their neighbors and bankers and lawyers and co-workers and so forth. And they had good reason to believe they would know if someone went bad or ran into problems which might lead them to desperate acts.

Things got away from us. We were so successful in many ways that we developed rich and complex banking systems and manufacturing systems that we didn't understand well and didn't know how to control. Most Americans were oblivious until recently that problems were developing though historians and others have been warning for several generations that our societies and our technological capabilities were growing and developing faster than our abilities to understand and control them.

I'll throw out a suggestion which comes from my grandfather who was a small town police chief from about 1936 to about 1954. He died when I was young so I never really knew him but I've been told that, back in the 1930s, he predicted that the rate of violent crimes would rise greatly in the United States in the ensuing generation. I doubt it was his only reason for such a fear but my grandfather did believe the rise of the FBI and other police agencies in the centralized governments would take away the freedom of regional leaders to make arrangements with criminals such as the establishment of combat-zones where rational criminals were allowed to control gambling and sex-trade activities in return for policing those zones themselves and in return for protecting visitors to those zones from undue harm.

I've been trying to deal with this general issue of a world grown too rich and complex for us. I deal with some of the issues in Chapter 447, *Overwhelming Our Moral Characters*.

There has been a general decay of human nature, in its individual and its communal aspects, into a disordered state in the modern world. This doesn't mean that we're evil as isolated creatures though some of us are. It does mean that, under current conditions, we don't know how to live individual lives of moral integrity and we don't know how to form proper

communities, including political communities.

What can we say about the political community which runs Social Security and Medicare, a few relatively large and criminal wars, a greater number of small criminal actions in any given year, a dysfunctional space-exploration program, a number of troubled transportation systems, vast networks of schools which aren't, and assorted other disasters? It isn't a community. It's an incoherent gathering of disparate regions seeking to gain advantage at the others' expense and of unassimilable groups seeking to gain still more advantage at the expense of other groups, many of them sharing a number of individual members. Such a political disaster can't run any complex system in a manner hinting of either moral integrity or practical efficiency and effectiveness.

As I've said before, it's time to let the United States break up into smaller countries which may or may not become republics and may or may not come together to form a more rational and more sustainable confederation. Some of those countries might well have the desire and the capabilities to organize various sorts of welfare systems for its citizens. Let God's story work the way it will and we must learn how to move with the story rather than trying to impose our dreams upon reality.

In the meantime, any human crooks stealing from the public till should be prosecuted and jailed as individuals, any crooked corporations should be broken up, but that won't fix much and won't fix it for long. In a land of moral disorder and political incoherence, the crooks will find their way into that public till again. We could empty the till or leave only a few pennies in it, that is, go to an anarcho-capitalist system or something of the sort. I've vote to devolve into the sorts of communities which can meet human needs rather than to stop trying to meet those needs.



## 452 How Much Health-care Do We Need?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1163>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/01/12.]

I haven't had any health-care for ten years or more. Haven't seen a doctor. Have only had special blood-tests when donating blood a few times. I've been lucky for sure but it's also likely that I've gotten good advice from non-interventionist doctors who told me to avoid the medical system as much as possible. To be sure, they did tell me to find another non-interventionist doctor wherever I happen to live and to go for a check-up every couple years, but I made a decision to do the work I felt God called me to do and I've made not a penny from my writing. Trying to be consistent with my beliefs, I've accepted help from relatives and friends but haven't applied for any sort of government aid.

Why haven't I made any money? I can only repeat what I was told by independent literary agents as well as ex-employees of the mainstream publishers: the American mind has deteriorated so badly that even the employees of the publishing industry can't handle demanding books. There is no market for what I'd call real books—not that I deny the goodness of a certain amount of mind-candy in the intellectual diet.

In any case, there is apparently no need or at least no felt need in the United States for books or other products which might develop the mind. This would imply that Americans, probably most in the modern West, feel no need for a well-developed mind just because they have fulfilled Adam Smith's fear that the citizens of the prosperous West he foresaw would feel no need for moral integrity. Yes, in general though not in all cases, I do tie together moral integrity with a proper cultural level for your historical

circumstances.

Let me move back to the question in the title by considering a quote from Kenneth Minogue's *The Liberal Mind* [95]:

[W]hile the welfarist is concerned with vague general ends, it is in fact the means which are crucial in society—for the simple reason that the ends are never reached. [page 106]

This implies our true 'needs' are for means to reach ends rather than being 'needs' for the ends themselves. As they say, "Teach a man how to fish rather than giving him fish." As our means expand, so will the ends we might personally define as 'needs' and so will our luxurious desires. All of this should be, must be, defined within an understanding of a good human life and that will involve means more than ends.

There's an interesting and more specific line of thought I'd like to quickly explore. If we were to develop greater means, I think it's likely we find ourselves in a different place than we would have planned. Going forward from that place, we would start desiring still different ends, perhaps ends we couldn't even imagine. In the meantime, we, or our descendants, would have started developing means we certainly couldn't imagine.

To make "vague general ends" our focus is also wrong because such mis-thought and misbehavior will lock us and perhaps our descendants into pursuing, with ever greater desperation, goals which have revealed themselves as strange.

Let me now switch to a practical issue of great immediate importance.

We are at a transition point. The Modern West is decaying a bit prematurely but it would have happened at some point. This decay into decrepitude and senility is happening early because of our lack of courageous and creative response to the very successes of the Industrial Revolution and various sorts of reformations including those in religious and political communities.

We are looking at the need for very basic changes which are likely to lead to a variety of changes in our political communities. There are likely to be many hurt as we respond to this decay of the West and its various communities, but far more would be hurt and hurt for generations to come if we don't respond in some plausible and proper manner. One of the most dangerous of temptations in the early phases of our responses is that of reforming various parts or aspects of communities which are fundamentally

flawed and need to be dissolved or radically restructured. Only time will tell us exactly where to head as God's story moves on, but we shouldn't be looking backward and using too many resources to solve ongoing or new problems by way of defective institutions.

So far as Social Security and Medicare are concerned—they appear almost as if they were designed to maximize conflicts between generations and between various ethnic and religious groups which have very different ways of approaching financial matters, caring for the elderly and those who fell through various safety nets, and so forth. The Euro-zone is currently being destroyed by conflicts between the Northern and Southern Europeans. The American population almost certainly has similar conflicts because of different ethnic traits – on top of the generational conflicts already showing. For example, members of some ethnic groups tend to seek high cash income while the members of other groups will seek business ownership with lower cash income in the short-term along with the build-up of business assets. All else being equal, the first will be better off with retirement annuities, cash benefits, whether purchased from a private institution or supplied by a government program funded by some sort of taxes. They might even be better off with a sub-optimal government program with a bad tax strategy. The second might be best off if they can leave their business assets to the next generation under favorable circumstances in return for being supported in their retirement years. Meanwhile, tax and regulatory policies in the United States have destroyed the viability or at least attractiveness of traditional family businesses.

In other words, despite what big-mouth and invincibly ignorant politicians and 'expert analysts' say, there is no one solution which is perfect for all of us. At least, we haven't discovered it and we aren't likely to do so or even to find a variety of better solutions for the different groups in our larger communities so long as we remain committed to our current ways of doing things, spending time and energy and other resources to reform institutions we should allow to die.

We've trapped a lot of human beings into dependence upon these government programs which worked well at least for some but only so long as we met the solvency requirements of these not-quite but sort-of Ponzi schemes. It's probably a bit more complex for Medicare but Social Security was in good shape so long as we had annual net (after inflation) growth of 3% in the national economy and a ratio of about 3 active workers for each retired worker. We passed to the bad side of any such point of solvency by

the early 1990s or so.

I suspect our good-looking, pre-2000 economic statistics were fraudulent since at least the 1970s, but a little thought would indicate that even a well-designed pay-as-you-go system can have serious problems with even a relatively short stretch of economic problems and the consequent inadequate premiums/taxes. So far as the workers go: I believe we currently have 1.8-1.9 active workers for each retired worker on Social Security. It's likely that we would have run into the demographic problems even if our economy had grown non-stop and were projected to continue to grow. At the very least we would have had to up the 3% net growth as the birth-rate fell. I'll leave it to the reader to contemplate my claim in light of history or to explore the issue in an historical context—not the hot-house context of current politics and growing generational conflicts.

So how much health-care do we need?

I'll claim that we have no right to demand of this world any level of health-care or retirement benefits or the like. What we have is a duty to build the sorts of communities which have the means to care for their members according to the traditions and overall purposes of those communities. If we succeed in building the means, including the music and other arts which bind communities, we'll be able to help care for ourselves and others in the appropriate ways, which may or may not involve high levels of the sort of industrialized health-care which is the standard in the decaying West.

## 453 Can the State be Limited?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1171>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/01/24.]

The state as we think of it in this year of 2011 can't be limited without destroying that state. This is because—in Jeffersonian terms—the state as it currently exists in most countries is an instrument of a vague group of human beings which we could call the exploitive class; these morally disordered creatures have taken control of the governments of these modern states. This current generation of predators are certainly good at destroying, even at the level of entire countries, but not so good at even profiting from that destruction, let alone being good at building something worthwhile.

How did this happen?

C.S. Lewis once claimed that Hitler and Stalin had not lost. In the way the West chose to fight them, the peoples of the West became the disciples of those brutal men who were much better at destroying than at building much that was useful let alone good or beautiful. The leaders of the modern West are very much in this mold. However much they like to soak in their own morally-advanced juices, they know only destruction, the reduction of enemies to submissive, quivering creatures and the reduction of sewage systems and hospitals to piles of rubble.

To save these states, the United States and Germany and so forth, legitimate governments would have to be formed by some morally well-ordered human beings from the producer class, preferably having formed smaller-scale groups with interests and legal rights tied to the future. Then they would have to take over and powerful, greedy men are rarely thrown out of power without the type of violence which simply places a different group of powerful, greedy men into power, but that's not a set of issues that I can

discuss in this short essay.

More importantly and relevant to the themes of this essay: I see no signs that the ordinary citizens or even the most capable of producers have learned much. If the United States is rescued as a prosperous republic by some miracle, the American citizenry would allow another predatory takeover of the United States so long as the new predators were careful to appeal to the fears and desires dominant in the public marketplaces of our sad, sad days. I imagine the situation is little different in other parts of the West.

I'll sidetrack a small bit to give a warning to the wary: membership in the class of expoliter/predator or that of producer isn't pre-determined but is, at least partly, taken on. Nor are most of us pure producer or pure predator. To use some oversimplified historical examples from a crucial period of American history: Henry Ford – despite some rough characteristics—was almost a pure producer of wealth, Andrew Carnegie probably had a bit more predator in him, John D. Rockefeller proved he could be a producer but opted to become largely pure predator, and J.P. Morgan was a predatory financier from the start to end.

The modern movement towards democracies and republics which has led to the state as we know was largely enabled by the freeing of community members to be individuals under kings and some early advocates of democratic or republican forms of governments. This process was partly driven by offers on the part of power-seekers to relieve the troubled of some of their suffering. It was also partly driven by the mobility of opportunity and the overlapping mobility caused by the chance to escape various forms of persecution. The first cause is more important to my current thought and I'll ignore the ways in which communities dissolved or weakened simply because their members left for better opportunities or at least the dream of such.

The modern state has continued to secure its power by offering help to those suffering from abuses of power in smaller-scale communities. How many fathers are abusive? It doesn't matter to the leaders of modern states and their employed do-gooders any more than it mattered to King Louis XIV and his do-gooders in the 17th century or to any other would-be tyrants in history who have sought power by shattering natural human communities. So long as the modern state can elicit complaints from some allegedly abused children, you can interfere in all families. This is a game American politicians are good at, so good they've taken their show on the road man-

aging, for example, to show the world some of the bad and some imaginary bad done by Saddam Hussein before moving in to wipe out all the good he'd done without more than a show of healing the damage he'd done to his country. (Iraq had good infrastructure before the American military destroyed it, that is, destroyed sewage systems and fresh-water systems and schools and hospitals.)

In all likelihood, as I said above, the American citizenry and the citizenry of other countries of the West would fall for this sort of a routine once again and the related routine offering of government jobs to more than can be supported by the rest of the population. I'm not saying that all government jobs are useless or dangerous. In fact, in alliance with politicians, such non-governmental workers as doctors and ditch-diggers have grabbed a large enough share of the economy to cause damage. And then there are bankers. . . Nuff said

In any case, politicians have the power and ambitious, stupid politicians have the motive, to make governments excessively large. Nathaniel Hawthorne pointed out in the 1850s, in the introduction to *The Scarlett Letter* that Americans will seek promises of financial security of this sort and are quite willing to sell their liberty in return for government jobs or other government income or government-enforced monopolies. Our moral characters haven't gotten any tougher since then.

This would indicate that a general regime of individual freedom isn't going to work the next time either, though I think other possibilities exist which don't lie on that simplistic spectrum of possibilities from individual freedom of the modern libertarian (or 19th century liberal) variety over to modern style tyrannies, but let me zag a bit now that I've zigged—as is my custom.

I've been very critical in the past toward my fellow Americans—that is, ordinary citizens and not power-seekers—and toward others in the West and I probably shouldn't have been. The Bible tells me, the Catholic Church and nearly all Christian churches tell me, that most of the brethren of Jesus Christ are sheep, not shepherds and not even brave by the limited standards of sheep. This helps us to understand what's at stake with some of the important questions I've tried to raise when I address political and moral issues.

Why do we let legitimate governments mutate into cancerous masses? Are we so taken in by the big show of federal money to put fancy swimming pools into schools not able to teach basic skills of reading and writing? Sure

it is that the pools were intended to improve the physical fitness or make up for past prejudices against some racial or ethnic or religious groups. Or at least the politicians lead us to believe they are truly compassionate and devoted to the public good. At the same time those state-centered leaders do what they can to destroy the authority of those communities which have retained enough coherence to remain true communities in the face of the state and its allies in Hollywood and on Wall St.

As I've been doing for several months, I'll turn to *The Liberal Mind* [95] by Kenneth Minogue, seeking to cast some light upon our modern mess:

[I]t is characteristic of liberalism to make politicians of us all; and in this case we find liberalism promoting alertness to trends among the population at large. Indeed, to be liberal *is* to accept an obligation to be concerned with matters beyond our direct responsibilities. [page 109]

In these words, I find a strong pointer to another reason for seeking to be a member of a concrete, local community which is represented in centralized governments rather than being an individual member of an abstract, fluid herd voting for a morally compromised product of political machining. Those whose primary energies are devoted to family and local communities, those who devote more of their remaining energies to following professional football than to the most casual readings about the countries recently invaded by the armies of the West, troop off to elect the scoundrels who will decide which countries we'll invade over the next few years. By making government the work of all, at least for one day every year or two, our political masters have made sure government isn't the special work of those who know enough and have the qualities to protect those who belong to their communities. We have also, borrowing from Thomas Jefferson, developed a "perverse literacy" in ourselves and this has led to an "invincible ignorance" which leads most to pay no attention to the thoughts of those few who've bothered to learn something about the modern world. The invincibly ignorant feel it good enough to learn a few convenient talking points and to maybe learn something about the issues as defined by policy wonks who live in a world where the nomads of Afghanistan are no more than pawns in political games played in Washington and London and Rome.

There are a lot of things going on in the modern world. There are a number of long-ignored problems which are developing into festering sores

the size of Mt. Etna. Meanwhile, we allow ourselves to be taught that any Vietnamese or Iraqi peasant who shoots a heavily armed American in his backyard is an evil creature and we concern ourselves with so-called issues which have little to do with reality and a lot to do with the egos and squabbles of those who thrive in political snake-pits.

So: What is going on in our day and age? What should we be doing, for example, to return the West to some path of moral and intellectual sanity?

I don't think we can understand our world by laying matters out in a schematic form. There's a story going on, a story being told by God, and it's not a matter of intuiting *a priori* or any other metaphysical truths, but rather a matter of paying attention to the actual past, on evolutionary and historical and annual scales, and trying to figure out the nature of the physical surroundings and the nature of the characters and the types of events which move the story along smoothly and the types which disrupt the story in various ways. Let me zig again to quote Professor Minogue on his use of 'state' to refer to a legitimate form of society and associated government:

The State is not an aspect of society; it is the only unity that society can lay claim to. [page 131]

This is as good an excuse I can find for a somewhat delayed retreat from my recent tendency to take the libertarian understanding of 'state' as something always bad, always imposed upon a population who should be free of central authority. Let me take a definition of state, from an older and more solid dictionary (Webster's 1913 dictionary [140]):

**state** A political body, or body politic; the whole body of people who are united under one government, whatever may be the form of the government; a nation.

The definition says nothing about where power originates and that would seem to be the entire problem; certainly, the origin and nature of power, as well as the need to protect it from the inordinately greedy and ambitious, was the major political problem of their day for some prominent Founding Fathers of the United States and most especially John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, in their work as Founders and also in their correspondence during their years of retirement. It is also clearly a major problem

in to some highly-regarded advocates of liberty such as William Lecky and John Dahlberg (Lord Acton), and others who occupied islands of sanity and intelligence in this modern desert. For an intimidating list of books by serious students of these issues—including Lecky and Dahlberg, see *The Online Library of Liberty* at <http://oll.libertyfund.org/index.php>. Many of these books are out of copyright and available for free download as pdf files.

I admit to still having some reluctance to use ‘state’ in that sort of good sense, however tentative and qualified that goodness, perhaps because I started coming to some dim awareness of my political environment during the years of the American war against the Vietnamese people was followed by Watergate and then by the disasters we know as the Ford and Carter administrations—Monday morning quarterbacks can see these disasters were largely, though not entirely, caused by Johnson and the criminal way he financed a criminal war. Then, things seemed to get much better and, like many of my generation, I was lulled to sleep by the future-eating prosperity of the mid-1980s through 2000 or so. (Actually, I was a little ahead of the game, waking up to our dangerous situation around 1990 but that was forced by some crises in my personal life.)

As a young and very confused advocate of conservative thought and behavior, I had hopes that Reagan would re-establish something like the decent and fairly well-ordered small-town world I’d known as I grew up in the 1960s and early 1970s. I was under the illusion for a few years that this had truly happened and then, for another ten years, under the illusion the Reagan Revolution had been for real and betrayed after the fact by Bush and other Republicans. Oddly enough – in retrospect—I can see the world I longed for was a somewhat mindless world which wasn’t so good for me but that’s another story I’ve at least hinted at in other writings. There’s now historical evidence, including testimony from Paul Craig Roberts and Angelo Codevilla, that Reagan had honestly planned to do what he promised in his first election and his administration had been somehow bullied (don’t know what the threat was) into accepting George H.W. Bush and other pro-statist insiders who proved to be saboteurs of the most treacherous sort. I knew there were traitors to Reagan and to the American nation as a whole but didn’t know how early they’d done their work. Murray Rothbard has also written of Reagan’s campaign promises to cut back on the power of the bankers and their creatures in the Council for Foreign Relations, Trilateral Council, etc. David Rockefeller obtained a one-on-one meeting with Reagan after he’d won the election and Reagan appointed a cabinet dominated by

charter members of the Trilateral Council, such as Schultz and Weinberger.

In retrospect, things look very bad for any who would speak of the American state as being a morally ordered community, one caring for all its members and—at the very least—maintaining a level playing field. But we should remember that failures in a dynamic world of evolution and development don't mean that the effort was wrongly directed. It might be that multiple tries are needed for one reason or another. In other words, our failures are likely the failures of creatures living in the early stages of an evolutionary process, a process in which a variety of social relationships are forming and a variety of ways of stabilizing those relationships are coming and going. The American State as we know it is falling apart, probably pretty fast. Such is true of most of the states in the West as well as those around the world, even in the Orient, which have modeled themselves upon some orthodox or heretical view of political systems advocated in the academic and journalistic communities in New York City or Paris and sometimes actually tried in the American State or the Soviet State or the Italian Fascist State.

If the nets of salvation are to gather in many, communities of various sorts are needed to care for the many who don't have the initiative or the talents to explore Creation and to think through what they discover. Communities of various sorts are needed for the blind and the timid—if they are to be saved. That is to say—human communities must care for the weak and cowardly in the flock. After all, God could have created a world which would have terrified and broken the strongest and most hardheaded of men. By God's highest standards, all human beings are lacking in intelligence and initiative and courage and faith, but, in His mercy, He has set lower standards for us.

I'm now ready to claim that we need some form of the state to compensate for weaknesses and to satisfy positive desires of the members of the Body of Christ. I'm also claiming that God will give us what is needed for that Body.

What then has gone wrong with the state in recent centuries? Let me just hint at an answer by addressing one specific problem I see in our efforts to form communities and to govern those communities.

The problem with the United States is not that we're currently paying no respect to the Constitution written in 1789 but rather that we think it possible to so structure a growing and developing community, political or otherwise. The Catholic Church has a similar problem as do many other

communities of Christian or other nature. The Pope is less the father of a growing and developing community—as most recent Popes would prefer to be—and more the king of a community assumed to be frozen into a structure that it will take on in heaven. We maximize the dangers and damages of rapid change, and lose all control over our most immediate future, when we treat the United States and the Catholic Church and so many other human communities as frozen structures. It would be dangerous, and an intellectual error, to assume a community is the same as an individual organism but it's a simple observational truth that they are similar in many ways, including the fact that they are developing entities rather than entities which can be designed at one time for all time. No wise parent determines details of their child's life when that child is but an infant. Even in the most traditional of societies, the farmer's son might become an apprentice to a blacksmith, the farmer's daughter might have to learn how to arrange the more complicated, if more luxurious, life of the household of a major merchant. We don't know what God's world will offer us or throw at us, as individuals and as communities. To predetermine our responses is to live yesterday's life in tomorrow's world, it is to be planning to drive a horse-and-buggy in a world which suddenly is building interstate highways. In the realm of politics, it also to put your children's life under the control of men who have learned the tricks of gaining and using, or abusing, power in such a mindless society.

Political structures—indeed, all communities—evolve in the way of stories rather than being entities from a short list given to us, once and for all time, by Aristotle. To a Christian, the proper form of a state is that which serves the Body of Christ, as a whole and as a collection of individuals. The proper form of a state isn't that which enables efficient economic development, though competent and wise statesmen wouldn't interfere in matters not directly the business of the state. The proper form of a state isn't one which allows ambitious men to stride as glorious conquerors across the stages of history, though such men play a role in that history perhaps similar to the role of various brutal predators in the story of biological evolution. The proper form of a state isn't one which either interferes with religious matters nor one which serves human religious institutions. I have even come to believe the Christian Church herself is but one organ in the Body of Christ though a particularly important organ. In this mortal realm, it may well be proper that the Church and state are wary of each other as their overlapping roles develop.

In any case, we need some sort of centralized political authority, something which corresponds vaguely to our current idea of a state, but we don't really know what form that state should take on and we certainly don't know how to build one. But that's part of our problem. We think to build such a complex entity when it needs to evolve and develop. We need to learn how to be energetic and intelligent characters in a story rather than strange engineers designing the future of our communities as if designing a road-system.



# 454 Why Do We So Readily Accept or Even Welcome War?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1174>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/01/30.]

In *The Liberal Mind* [95], Kenneth Minogue tells us:

War is habit-forming, and peace is confusing to many people who cannot deal with conflicting standards and feelings of guilt.  
[page 111]

I'm aware of others who made comments about the eerie and morally disedifying attractiveness of war to many men who are seeking to avoid not just moral confusion but also seeking to escape what seem to be boring lives. And I myself still sometimes dream of waging violence against some Other threatening those and that which I value. Sinners we are and the major danger to those who would wish to do better is our tendency to justify our favorite sins and, being habituated to war, we modern human beings of the West, especially Americans, have tended since 1914 or so to invent justifications for any and all military actions against those who are different from us.

Perhaps the basic problem is what I've noted recently—most human beings are sheep and not well-formed for independent and self-directed lives. We don't know how to amuse ourselves and this makes us victims of exploiters who provide despicable and mind-numbing entertainment. More than was ever true of the Soviet Union of Stalin's days or China of Mao's days, in the modern West, minds and moral characters are shaped by scoundrels of various sorts, politicians and political commentators who get our juices flowing and help to further shut down our brains, educationists

who prefer teachers and students who shut up and get on with the mindless routine. We are primed to jump at opportunities—such as wars against enemies well-defined at least in the propaganda—to prove to ourselves we are energetic and morally-directed creatures who can accomplish something more than applying bureaucratic rules to the applications passing over our desks, something more than drinking some good wine or a fine micro-brewed beer as we catch a few hours of television.

Maybe Thomas Jefferson was right when he wondered if Americans would have been better off illiterate rather than having what he called a ‘perverse literacy’. Illiterate human beings have a hardheaded common sense, of a parochial and otherwise limited variety to be sure, which allows them to deal with reality without the aid of television or rap music. Like those with a higher literacy and access to books or music or other substantial stuff, preliterate people don’t get bored. The first group are more likely to complain there are too many (serious and good) books and not enough time. The second will loosen up as some tune up fiddles and pipes. The first will go looking for a library or will sit quietly with “Volume Mi-No” of the encyclopedia which seems so archaic and so comforting. The second will sit without feeling boredom or may go looking for some woodwork or painting to do. Those who are semi-literate will read Stephan King or Thomas Harris novels or will surf the Web or the cable television looking for something to satisfy a stimulated but poorly focused brain.

As Jefferson realized, our illiterate ancestors were more properly skeptical about any government officials or big-city merchants who made promises of a better life. A knowledgeable historian may well say that Jefferson was wrong in some ways, but the point remains that there is such a state as ‘perverse literacy’ where the human being has traded in a fully concrete view of the world for one where concrete reality is partially and—usually—incompetently organized to one or another abstract scheme. And I will add, perhaps redundantly, that those whose skills of literacy lead them to writings by or about Jefferson, or the writings of Lord Acton or Forrest McDonald, Charles Beard or Hannah Arendt, will be capable of amusing themselves and of engaging in intelligent conversations about our current mess. They will also be capable of evaluating the mindlessness of our politicians and political commentators for what it is and also capable of evaluating the claims of historians and philosophers and moral theologians.

The semi-literate or ‘perversely literate’ human being, smart or not so smart, college-educated or 8th-grade dropout, doesn’t know how to evaluate

the world in that way. They absorb one or another schemes advertised to represent reality, having little talent for or developed skills for evaluating those evaluation schemes, so to speak. And few there are who can build new understandings of reality, whether that understanding is in the wrongful form of a scheme or in the form of a narrative which uses specific schemes in limited and well-defined ways.

Modern men have absorbed morally disordered schemes which give false descriptions of reality and provide horribly misleading guidance for action in the world we inhabit.

We're easily bored and our heads have been filled with romantic images of that most horrible of human activities—war. We think glory when the reality is scared men peeing or shitting in their pants as soon as the guy next to them is beheaded by a piece of sheet-metal shrapnel. We think of armies advancing when the reality is that tanks are rolling over the rubble of schools and hospitals covering the corpses of innocent human beings of all ages. We think of precision bombing when the reality is one alleged enemy in the midst of a village of innocent human beings or even no more than a wedding party celebrating the Afghan way by shooting rifles into the sky. This is a reason our equally confused American leaders start too many wars and probably a reason the United States can't win wars nowadays. It's not that we need to be more realistic in a nasty way or more realistic in a morally compassionate way. We need to be more realistic. Period. We need to pay attention to the stuff and characters in our universe and we need to pay attention to the story in which they play roles in a story which is unrolling. And we, however 'we' is defined, are among those characters.

This is an added complication, a richer additional meaning, to the words of the historian Carroll Quigley which I quote so often:

The truth unfolds in time through a communal process.

It's not just that the truth already manifested in Creation has to be understood by a timefull process. The fullness of truth can only be known at the completion of the story we call the 'world', our universe seen as morally ordered to the purposes of God. The story goes on and the truth—from our creaturely viewpoint—is still evolving and developing.

To me, this stuff is more exciting than war could ever be if only because human wars, just or unjust, are only a part of this story itself unfolding as part of Creation in its entirety. Others clearly feel different, most especially

all those adolescent leaders in Washington and their supporting casts in uniform and in the do-gooder organizations who just love war at a time when we can help those we miss to get back on their feet and become better human beings, that is – more like Americans or Englishmen, and we can also help to rebuild some fraction of the schools and hospitals and roads and agricultural infrastructure we've destroyed. And make a profit at that. What a world!

And all the guys at home get to cheer as they watch those precision bombs go down the chimney of a Baghdad building just like Santa Claus. And we Americans can take credit for being almost like St. Francis – the buildings we show blowing up on the television screens are never hospitals. Maybe it's an Iraqi military office being hit at a time when the only occupants are janitors and cleaning-ladies. But it's not a hospital like that pile of rubble down the street which the Pentagon PR guys didn't mention in their briefing, providing a potent signal of sorts to let the television news-shapers know what be their duty.

What a way to escape boredom and satisfy our patriotic longings. What a noble way to satisfy our desires to sacrifice for our country. "Hey, Joe, grab me a beer while you're in there. They just machine-gunned some more bums moving around the streets. Probably some America-hating creeps'll claim they were a bunch of children. Wanna order a pizza? This could go on a while."

There are guys who've been there or who served in the military in supporting roles and could have ended up in combat roles. And there are guys who've suffered a lot in various ways. I knew some who went to Vietnam and they were forced to kill some civilians, even young ones, to stay alive. There were some who figured out that Johnson and the other scoundrels in Washington had betrayed the boys in uniform and they weren't happy about it. There were a lot back home who were suspicious but didn't want to do anything to damage their respectability. Like the nice men in the bureaucracy described by McNamara in his memoir of the Vietnam era, the leaders of our churches and towns and universities mostly went quietly about their duty, acting as if there were no stench of moral decay coming from the White House, the Pentagon, Foggy Bottom, Langley, and so many other places. It was a moral mess. Even legitimate wars of defense can be messes of accidental killings of innocents or even your comrades-in-arm. Even legitimate wars can corrupt the leaders and ordinary folk back home. We should treat war as the very dangerous activity that good historians

describe. And some of those good historians were warriors themselves. You could help your understanding of war as a brutal activity by reading *On Killing* by Lt. Col. Dave Grossman or *War as I Knew It* by Gen. George Patton or *A Rumor of War* by Philip Caputo.

I agree with Professor Minogue's comment: "War is habit-forming, and peace is confusing to many people who cannot deal with conflicting standards and feelings of guilt." I also think it quite strange because the guys who are in the real fighting see lots of conflicting standards. A fire-fight is going on and there's suddenly movement in the high grass off to the side. Fire or not? I talked to a guy who was a U.S. Army Ranger in Vietnam and he said he fired and later found the corpses of an elderly lady and three small children. Did he do wrong? Should he have taken a little bit more risk to his own life and the life of his comrades? I don't know. I wasn't there – basically the title of a too-young-to-go novel about Vietnam I play with in my minuscule time which is spare while I have functional eyes. Oh, for young eyes. There's too much to do while so many who parade as God's chosen ones, called to work as clergymen or Christian intellectuals, seem to find time to watch an American's allotment of television and movies—and what sort of Christian would subject himself to that mind-numbing, soul-destroying experience which is so large a part of the problem I'm writing about here.

We've made ourselves and our children into invincibly ignorant and willfully stupid people, living in a morally perverse dreamworld. I speak not of the worst among us but the mainstream among us and, over time, the alleged elite—teachers and clergymen and political leaders—have refused to do their duty and have instead charged to the head of the herd as it heads toward barbarian and morally disordered regions. We who are now the members of the responsible generation were ourselves once the children under the misguidance of an earlier generation of adolescents masquerading as adults but now the West has been thoroughly looted, in cultural resources still more than in financial resources. The end-time, in a manner of speaking, approaches fast as the likes of Alexis Tocqueville, Hermann Melville, Jose Ortega y Gasset, Garet Garret, Hannah Arendt, Paul Kennedy, and Jacques Barzun have been prophesying. I could even add some of the Founding Fathers who were pessimistic about the moral maturity and moral character of Americans. And, no, I'm not saying the world is ending, only that an age of prosperity and promise is ending in a horrifying and destructive manner.

This may seem a funny way to summarize a large-scale cultural and moral critique, but:

We don't know how to entertain ourselves properly.

Incapable of finding enjoyment in the care of animals or woodworking or reading serious history books or reading even serious mind-candy, we sit in front of the television and imagine ourselves to be the sorts of human beings with more initiative and greater moral character. We imagine ourselves as explorers and great warriors or – increasingly—as celebrities to be admired because of our fame. Masses of defenseless human beings and the infrastructure of a major city are but props for our imaginations shaped by *Rambo* and *Star Wars*. An adolescent mind struggling through regions of violence toward some sort of good moral order would be better served by dreams of a good number of American politicians and a few generals standing on the scaffold, about to pay the price for what they did to young American men and to the Vietnamese, to more American men and the Iraqis.

I've found myself that dreams of vengeance against our own treacherous leaders can help move me along the path toward a better Christian moral order, however strange to the likes of St. Francis it would be to reach moral order by way of dreams of vengeance of the sort God has denied to us.

Vengeance? No, that is forbidden us. Calling to account? Yes, if we Americans were capable of being a moral self-governing citizenry.

It's easier to seek entertainment in dreams of fighting the Other, the Other which is evil and which is devoted to destroying us. It's hard to work with a pile of planks to turn them into a table-top and just as hard to read serious science and serious theology to establish a meaningful opinion about any possible conflicts.

Let me repeat a quote from *Time and Free Will* [11] by Henri Bergson:

[W]e are free when our acts spring from our whole personality, when they express it, when they have that indefinable resemblance to it which one sometimes finds between the artist and his work. [page 172]

Before going on, I'll remind the reader that Farmer Wendell Berry is as much an artist as is Poet Wendell Berry.

We are potentially free and also potentially morally well-ordered because we're born as social creatures and a human sort of freedom and also good moral order are to be found in our social relationships, some of which we can 'sublimate' even to love of God. When we are truly free, we aren't Hannibal the Cannibal satisfying despicable desires. We aren't flaccid and passive creatures enjoying stupid and evil movies about Hannibal the Cannibal or Rambo. But that is what too many of us are—flaccid and passive creatures who enjoy not only evil movies but also news of evil and unjustified violence inflicted on many innocent human beings and perhaps a few who are alleged to be evil in the way of American political leaders—that is, they kill or order others to kill innocent human beings.

To the extent that these Americans, political leaders or applauding followers, are free, then we can say: "[Their] acts spring from [their] whole personality." This is not a good thing—to have a personality which is devoted to moral disorder.

On the other hand, anyone who reads *On Killing* by Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, an airborne Ranger and then a psychologist, will learn that ordinary Americans of previous generations, moral and decent men, who killed face-to-face in battle because they thought it morally justified were still suffering occasional nightmares decades later. I think those men discovered that war isn't much in the way of pleasurable entertainment, at least not for men of moral character. Lt. Colonel Grossman even tells us those men refused to put on their uniforms to march in such events as Memorial Day parades. They were willing to put on their uniforms to fight again if their country needed them, but thought parades and the like were too much like celebrations of killing others—some more of that entertainment of a morally despicable sort.

A morally well-ordered warrior has to be a little detached from the destruction and death he inflicts on enemies and on some innocents who might be in the wrong place at the wrong time. A morally well-ordered citizen-soldier struggles unsuccessfully for that detachment, aware if only after the fact, that he has inflicted horror and brought it into his own self. I would hope that we will someday reach the point where citizen-soldiers who don't have to kill or even see in person as others suffer as a result of armed force won't try to derive vicarious pleasure because of the heroics of those who did have to fight and kill and maybe wade through muck containing human remains. I would certainly hope those at home will gain a true respect for what some endure not because they suffered but because of the

suffering they inflicted or helped to inflict on others.

Read Lt. Col. Grossman's book if you have any doubts: except for a small percentage, some—and perhaps most—good men will pass through their own suffering and move on but will carry the suffering they inflict on others for the rest of their lives, though there is some merciful attenuation over time. This is a good thing. Painful but good.

## 455 Let's Hear It for Amateurs, That Is, for Lovers

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1180>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/02/09.]

Not one to accept the mishmash of ideas which is the modern worldview, Professor Minogue reminds us in *The Liberal Mind* [95]:

A free State is one in which there is a strong resistance to professionalization; it is marked by that “versatility” which Pericles claimed for Athens. [page 150]

This is not to argue that professionalization is bad. Minogue was himself a quite highly-regarded professional in the field of political history and theory. This is to argue that we should resist professionalization as we should resist any good thing that might outgrow its own domain, in a sense—might outgrow its own good.

The modern age is one of monstrous growths of that sort and we are learning, some probably already knew of this from studies of history, that one problem with excessive professionalization is that it quickly decays into an amateurism of the bad sort, a rigorism tied to yesterday's thoughts and embedded in a general sloppiness of thought. This is a still greater danger in this excessive professionalization which I'll be emphasizing.

One obvious example of professionalization gone bad, in this year 2012 of an ongoing worldwide crisis, is banking and finance in general. The professionals, in the commercial banks and the central banks and the government bureaucracies, carry about heavy degrees from prestigious universities as well as a long list of attendances at equally prestigious conferences which were gatherings of Nobel laureates, government ministers, and other highly

professional experts who all belong to the right societies and the right country clubs. Unfortunately, it seems they mostly know how to enlarge the financial sectors of economies to a bloated and unsustainable size, largely by encouraging the solution of problems and non-problems as well by way of products and services which provide large flows of fees and other incomes to financial professionals. Which creates a new round of problems to be solved by financial professionals.

Of all modern professionals, scientists and engineers have maintained the highest levels of what could truly be labeled professionalism, the attainment and disciplined deployment of high levels of knowledge and skills in a field. They have done so precisely because they're forced to respond to reality rather than being fully free to build their own little ghettos in which they can serve their own interests and the interests of some of the human institutions to which they belong. Having said that, there are those even from the scientific community who have worried about the effects of the corporatization of science – some articles summarizing the results of complex experiments in fields such as particle physics might have lists of dozens or even hundreds of 'authors'. This large-scale corporatism will probably drive out the sorts of true individuals who can take on the role of prophets to their fellow-scientists and will also make it difficult for any remaining members of the herd to feel even the need to exercise personal moral responsibility. Anyone who has read a history of the Manhattan Project or a biography of a major participant will know these moral problems were already showing up in that project, relatively small by current standards, and showing up despite and because of the fact that those scientists of an earlier time tended to be more individualistic and had been raised in societies which didn't pay undue respect to political or military or professional authority.

There are others who have given personal testimony about the decay of fundamental honesty in the practice of science. Back in the 1960s, Michael Polanyi, chemist and surgeon and philosopher, was so testifying. More recently, David Ruelle, a French physicist who was one of the rediscoverers of what's misleadingly called 'chaos theory', testified that copies of his articles had actually been cut out of journal copies in the libraries at universities where his academic rivals were resident—see *Chance and Chaos* [125]. Put this together with the ease of assembling scientific research teams to build weapons which could be fairly labeled as evil and the ease by which scientists carry out research which their parents and grandparents would have con-

sidered the stuff of science fiction nightmares not so long ago, and we have warnings that the professionalism of even scientists might well be decaying into what might be called amoral service of one's self and one's institutions. After all, there's nothing morally special about those who have minds capable of fluently working in the formal systems of quantum mechanics. The moral goodness often found in scientific research is arguably a carryover from the early modern traditions of the amateurs who founded these fields of research and often remained amateurs, that is—lovers, even when invited into universities or given grants to set up laboratories. See Chapter 236, *Are All Scientists Evil?* for a slightly more extensive discussion of this issue.

The point is that we're all human beings and the focusing of the mind and spirit which can occur with any intense professionalization, including that of clergymen and moral philosophers, can lead us to enter a ghetto with walls which are no more than a self-serving blindness. When this happens, professionalization turns from a training/education and practice which serves higher ends, including especially the needs of human communities, and becomes a source of fragmentation and conflict of the sort which can quickly break down moral order. True human communities, including those of political natures, are formed and held together by bonds of dependencies which are of a moral nature, that is, both the shepherds and the sheep are dependent upon each other and both willingly take on the task of forming the appropriate bonds of moral order. And—again – professionalism can develop into a form which dissolves these bonds of moral order rather than building new bonds or supporting old bonds.



## 456 We Should Be Willing to Pass Moral Judgment On Professionals

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1185>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/02/18.]

In Chapter 455, *Let's Hear It for Amateurs, That Is, for Lovers*, I used a quote from *The Liberal Mind* [95] by Kenneth Minogue, to argue along a slightly different line than Professor Minogue had intended:

A free State is one in which there is a strong resistance to professionalization; it is marked by that “versatility” which Pericles claimed for Athens. [page 150]

Rather than follow the thrust of Professor Minogue’s statement, I argued that excessive professionalism was likely to lead to amoral self-service by professionals, even those in science and engineers who are held in line somewhat by their need to stick closely to reality. In speaking this way, I was dealing mostly with the tendency of human instruments to decay into institutions. This terminology is due to the American historian, Carroll Quigley—a short introduction to this controversial and—in my opinion—important thinker can be found at [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Carroll\\_Quigley](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Carroll_Quigley).

As Quigley used these terms, and I follow him, an instrument is set up to serve a greater community such as the Christian Church or an entire civilization or the vaguely defined community of those who wish to understand our universe or world, said instrument almost certainly decaying eventually into a stagnant and self-serving institution.

Here, I'm going to deal with the dangers to free men of trusting entirely in professionals, even those who maintain their moral integrity and maintain the instruments they founded as such rather than letting them decay into self-serving institutions.

In addition to the institutional corruption I discussed in that previous chapter, Chapter 455—*Let's Hear It for Amateurs, That Is, for Lovers*, there are also the more vulgar forms of corruption—self-serving acts by those who don't even believe in their cause and also simple padding of the pockets by believers and non-believers alike. These vulgar forms of corruption, however dangerous in the short-term—and the biggest danger is perhaps their effect on those still in early stages of shaping their moral characters, are of little interest in the long-term. Let us go then, you and I, and enter realms where generations are spread out against the sky.

As St. Paul told us: we each have our role to play in the Body of Christ, in the various human communities of this mortal realm and some will be given the opportunity to play roles in the various human communities of the world of the resurrected. Yet, I'll conjecture we'll not be and not expected to ever be extreme specialists who leave the other job to the other fellow. In fact, in line with the analogy I've drawn between the Body of Christ and the Holy Trinity, our individual thoughts and skills and behaviors will be those of all other members of the Body of Christ.

This puts me at odds with many of the streams of political and social thought in this dusky period of the modern age. There have been some powerful and influential thinkers who thought of one or more communities of men in such a way as to at least imply the individual human being is little more than a passing inconvenience. There have been more, perhaps the best of modern thinkers in these fields, who have turned the individual human being into a strange creature whose social relationships are voluntary and, if volunteered for, accidental.

Ultimately, my beliefs about even pragmatic politics are founded upon my understanding of the human being and his potential relationship to the Body of Christ and to other human beings in that Body as well as to God. This doesn't imply a pietistic attitude. In fact, I'm increasingly inclined to the view that there is some validity to the concept of 'scourge of God', a term once applied to the likes of Attila and Genghis Khan but equally applicable to modern leaders including some of the most prominent of American presidents. This isn't to say that we should be fatalistic or submissive to men who might serve God in the long-run, quite unconsciously, but most

certainly do serve their own ambitious and greedy desires and those of their associates.

Put these long-range views aside for a moment and think in terms of the middle-range, the range of our lifetimes and those of a few generations before and after our own generation. At this range, a polity with well-informed and clearheaded decision-makers can aim to act in a morally well-ordered manner. The shorter end of the long-range is the domain perhaps of the Pope, according to historical rules of thumb, but mostly the long-range belongs directly to God: the Almighty gives us hints of the life we might one day share with Him but most of the long-range is incomprehensible if we think in terms of suffering or prosperity, both of which are showered upon the good and the bad alike. In addition, as I noted above, God's ways of working will occasionally unleash scourges even upon peaceful and well-ordered societies. Sometimes we can come to realize, along with Isaiah and Jeremiah that this is the price we pay for living our own lives without considering the greater part of God's story, of this world. The ancient Israelites didn't respond properly to a new age in which barbarian conquerors had gained control of the wealth and technology of advanced pagan societies. We modern men of the West haven't responded properly to a new age in which great prosperity is punctuated by horrible wars. This historical mess has allowed the great growth of population and the spread of advanced technology even in the third-world at the same time that we see large-scale piles of human bodies as well as the brutal destruction of the infrastructure of entire countries which stand in the way, intentionally or not, of power-elites in one or more powerful countries.

We have failed to study reality and to think hard about proper ways of responding, of reshaping ourselves and our various communities. We have failed to create a proper moral order even in our families because we have—at best—tried to hold on to a way of ordering our thoughts and behaviors which is no longer coherent in this new world of immensely complex and complicated human communities, communities which we've failed to even try to understand. We have an understanding of the Bible and of human history in general which leads us to a state of psychosis, a separation from reality.

We need to respond in more appropriate ways to our opportunities and problems and this isn't a task for specialists but rather for those who have a wide-ranging understanding of at least one major human tradition as well as a similar understanding of modern empirical knowledge. From such a

foundation of knowledge, we can begin to understand our individual selves, our communities, our universe. We can respond to God's Creation so that we can see a world: the universe in light of the moral purposes of God in His freely-chosen and freely-constrained role as Creator. A world is unified, coherent, and complete, though only in the very long-range since this universe is boiling over with the products of evolutionary and developmental processes. But, if we do our best in the middle-range, we can see – however tentatively—how we particular individuals and our specific communities should be ordered to fulfill our roles in this world, this true narrative—that is, morally purposeful tale.

This isn't a job for a specialist. Nor should it be considered a job for some recognizable elite, though it's clear that serious writers and thinkers from various fields will play important roles if they have the courage and faith to respond. But creative writers and thinkers are rarely specialists. Nor are those increasingly rare leaders we could label as 'statesmen', political leaders seeking peace and order and prosperity. Nor are most prominent specialists to be labeled as 'only', not if they are truly educated and truly alive in their mental and spiritual lives, not spiritual leaders seeking new ways to order the developing relationships between men and God, not entrepreneurial businessmen seeking to realize prosperity for their own selves and others, not lawyers and judges seeking new legal forms to consider rapidly developing and evolving individual and communal relationships, not architects and builders responding to new technology and new ways of living, not craftsmen seeking to give us the appliances and furnishings and decorations for our changing lives, and so forth.

We need some generalists to give us some overviews of the process of understanding this world, this story of which we are part. These generalists will work as poets and novelists, musicians and visual artists, architects and engineers, politicians and economists, house-builders and road-builders, etc. We need some generalists, some dreamers and visionaries, from the entire range of human efforts, but these generalists will be only a small percentage of all the workers in these fields. They must be communicators of not only their own efforts to respond to this dynamic world of evolutionary and developmental responses but also communicators of their professional communities. Generalists, whether specialists themselves or not, are dependent upon the efforts of specialists but they must go beyond and outside specialist efforts.

Moral order is sustained, enriched, even changed in fundamental ways

when appropriate, by generalists and not by specialists nor even by some consensus of groups of specialists. Those groups of specialists can contribute to the overall understanding which will be manifested in some attempt at establishing moral order. Some members of those groups might even move into the more open regions of generalists, as some physicists did in advocating for controls on the nuclear weapons they had helped to design, but they do so as generalists who have a particularly good understanding of the underlying technical issues. Their moral judgments as such are no better because they might be brilliant scientists.

And what has this to do with the ‘freedom’ of which Professor Minogue speaks?

Our ultimate freedom is a sharing of the life—and freedom—of God by way of entry into the Body of Christ, the most inclusive human community in the world of the resurrected. In the meantime, we can realize some reasonable approximation to freedom, in our political and economic and cultural and familial aspects of our lives by understanding our world and responding to that understanding so that we ourselves can become images of God, encapsulating and understanding – however incompletely and defectively—God’s acts of bringing Creation into existence and shaping it in various ways. This understanding, and the proper ordering of thoughts and behaviors which it enables, gives us only a limited freedom in this mortal realm. We have to limit our actions or those of our communities in response to the acts of worldly powers—as Isaiah and Jeremiah tried to convince their fellow-Israelites. We have to limit our actions to consider our frailties and defects of person and communities. We have to limit our actions to those allowed by a physical universe we only partially and imperfectly understand. We have to limit our actions by a sense of modesty and humility, recognizing in some overall way that we don’t understand well enough to act in ways that put undue burdens upon our descendants or upon those who live in our age.

This is freedom: to realize the moral possibilities of our individual selves and our communities, to so realize by both a deep understanding and a well-ordered behavior. Such a project requires that wide-ranging knowledge and generalist attitude which I have been speaking of.



# 457 Moral Order vs. National Welfare Systems

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1189>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/02/19.]

The bishops of the American Catholic Church are upset with President Obama's mandate that all participants in regulated health-care programs should have coverage for contraceptives, abortions, and perhaps some other services and products considered immoral by Catholics and many others. But this Catholic layman has a question:

What right have the bishops to object in quite this way to a mess they helped to make by strongly supporting national health-care in a country in which there is so much divergence in moral beliefs affecting medical decisions?

In fact, we can generalize as I did in the title. Any national program which affects matters of moral order will eventually create these sorts of conflicts if there is no consensus on important moral issues in the underlying population of individuals and communities. The interested reader can sample letters and reports from the American bishops and their advisors at <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/health-care/> to see how enthusiastically the American bishops and their staffs helped to create this mess which bothers them now. It's quite appropriate they should be bothered but, over the past six years, I've posted several essays about the difficulties of acting as if we're a morally coherent nation when we're not. Others have been arguing about the dangers of national social welfare programs from various standpoints,

including the highly regarded Catholic historian Thomas Woods who argues from a libertarian standpoint. Did any of the bishops or their advisers pay attention to any sounds outside of their echo-chamber?

Take this as a general rule:

Social systems which have a major moral component should be designed for and implemented within morally coherent communities.

This doesn't exclude charitable give-and-take between communities not in full moral agreement, but it does exclude dependency relationships between such communities except in the most dire of circumstances – such as the large-scale destruction of a region's infrastructure by a natural disaster.

In other words, the American Catholic Church and its leaders, Christian leaders in general, had no business in recent decades pushing for any sort of national health-care in a country where there is no consensus on moral issues affecting medical care, such as abortion, contraception, hospice care, or the care for children lacking some of the capabilities of most children. If anything, they should have been questioning many existing programs such as Social Security and Medicare. After all, the opponents of Social Security beginning in the 1930s have criticized more than the financial dangers of Social Security. Some have also claimed that such a program would weaken the bonds of families and would even cause an inter-generational war. And, as it turns out, weak families and inter-generational war over Social Security and Medicare are among our greatest existing or impending problems.

As we become more dependent upon medical systems which are certainly not under the control of individuals nor local communities nor even the larger religious communities, we'll be offered such poisonous fruits as drugs and techniques developed by experimentation on lab-grown embryos 'engineered' to have specific medical problems, growth of embryos who will never be born but will provide transplantable tissue or organs, engineering of babies to be brought to birth to provide transplantable organs—some of this is already happening quietly in major research centers. For example, this relatively old article from 2006, *Harvard to Create Human Embryonic Stem Cell Lines* at [http://www.rxpgnews.com/stem-cell-research/Harvard\\_to\\_Create\\_Human\\_Embryonic\\_Stem\\_Cell\\_Lines\\_4400\\_4400.shtml](http://www.rxpgnews.com/stem-cell-research/Harvard_to_Create_Human_Embryonic_Stem_Cell_Lines_4400_4400.shtml), tells us:

After more than two years of intensive ethical and scientific review, Harvard Stem Cell Institute (HSCI) researchers at Harvard and Children's Hospital Boston have been cleared to begin experiments using Somatic Cell Nuclear Transfer (SCNT) to create disease-specific stem cell lines in an effort to develop treatments for a wide range of now-incurable conditions afflicting tens of millions of people.

In an article from the *Harvard Gazette*, we read about a meeting of some theologians who discuss some varying views on the allowability of using these embryos for research—the Catholic Church and more conservative Protestant churches seem not to have been represented: *Stem cells, through a religious lens* at <http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2007/03/stem-cells-through-a-religious-lens/>. Read the article and note the difference in moral teachings regarding the use of embryos grown from stem-cells even amongst theologians of monotheistic religions. How can Catholics participate fully in a health-care system with Muslims who allow the therapeutic use of stem-cells derived from 'surplus embryos' produced in fertility treatments? I don't feel the right or the urge to go on a nationwide crusade to stop all acts I consider immoral but I also can't benefit from such acts without endangering my relationship to God, not even surreptitiously by way of medicines or techniques derived from research on those embryos. Nor do I even wish to be in a hospital which carries out what I consider to be immoral research or treatment. If we can't be sure the service or product isn't free of the taint of moral disorder, then we'll have to refuse it. The bishops have helped to create a situation where any morally well-ordered Catholic Christians might soon have to refuse all services and products of the American medical industry. The entire industry is on its way to being morally contaminated in a very deep way.

We should learn to think in terms of the general rule suggested above:

Social systems which have a major moral component should be designed for and implemented within morally coherent communities.

Human beings with diverse moral beliefs aren't going to be able to agree on a wide variety of health-care issues or social welfare issues in general. A morally diverse group of human beings or a morally diverse gathering of

human communities aren't going to be able to form a coherent community at a small or large scale. A falsely-justified attempt at implementing social programs with those who don't agree with your moral positions will result first in the moral corruption or confusion of human beings in the various communities, not just the community with the toughest moral standards. In addition, such confused efforts will produce serious disagreements threatening any existing social coherence, however slight, and will endanger any chances of meaningful dialog on matters of fundamental moral importance. And they might even endanger the very existence of some of these communities reduced to dependence upon a government which pursues its own interests, probably more free to do so because of the lack of moral coherence along with the pretense that we are a morally coherent nation.

Anyone who wishes to read a well-documented scholarly analysis of this lack of moral consensus in the modern West can check into the writings of Alasdair MacIntyre, such as *After Virtue* [88]; *Whose Justice, Which Rationality* [89]; *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry* [90]; and *Dependent Rational Animals* [91]. For a good historical work narrating the past five centuries as a period of decay in the West, see *From Dawn to Decadence* [9] by Jacques Barzun.

## 458 Freedom as an Interest in How Things Are

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1192>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/02/23.]

I'm coming to the end of this scattered series of essays inspired by Kenneth Minogue's profound book on modern politics, *The Liberal Mind* [95]. My thoughts have developed so that my understanding of liberalism has taken on a surprising form, but no form of liberalism seems to me plausible or rational.

I've taken a position that relationships are primary rather than concrete stuff. Even the flesh-and-blood of our bodies are secondary, or greater, forms of created being. God created this concrete world, this world of thing-like being, from some sort of abstract stuff hinted at in the work of physicists and then He shaped this concrete stuff into what He needed to tell His story, the story centered around the Son of God.

When God brought Creation into existence, He was acting with the full power of God.

When He began to shape the primary stuff, the Primordial Universe – which I claim to be manifested truths, He was working within the constraints of His own decision to create a specific Creation. We could say, analogically, that the Almighty was acting as a metaphysician in knowing the primary truths He'd manifested and a mathematician and physicist when He began to shape those truths in levels of increasingly particular being.

When He began to tell a story using this particular universe, the Almighty was acting as an author telling a tale of evolution and development of nonliving and living entities interacting, forming relationships.

Our freedom, and our rights such as they are in reality, are at the level of that story and not at the level of the thing-like stuff, our own bodies, which participate in that story. Our freedom and our rights involve relationships formed by human beings who are the result of a long and complex evolutionary process not yet over and are also the result of the evolution and development of human communities and also—of course—the result of development of that individual which is ideally dominated by complex, morally guided responses to the opportunities and problems of God’s Creation.

Once again, I quote Henri Bergson from *Time and Free Will* [11]:

[W]e are free when our acts spring from our whole personality, when they express it, when they have that indefinable resemblance to it which one sometimes finds between the artist and his work. [page 172]

Here’s an interesting statement made by Kenneth Minogue in *The Liberal Mind* [95]:

[I]n considering the circumstances in which free independence is possible, we must observe that it depends to a very large extent on an intellectual interest in how things are, in contrast to the desire to make things conform to a pre-established plan. [page 151]

In making peace with reality and responding to it in such a way that we develop that artistic personality alluded to by Bergson, we achieve freedom. If we are in a community of like-minded human beings, we might well establish strong relationships of the sort which mandate that we acknowledge strong rights on the part of others and others will acknowledge strong rights on our part.

In an essay on the German school of history, John Emerich Edward Dalberg, Lord Acton referred to liberals as “promoters of secondary liberties” and I think he would have at least accepted for discussion my claim that freedom and an artistic personality are deeply connected, that is, my claim that this deep relationship between true art and a free life tells us where lies the primary liberties, those which conduce to a well-ordered human life, one in which the human being has become a person, forming relationships with

the world which allow him to become a world of sorts, a morally purposeful narrative. Both world and person are unified, coherent, and complete in meaningful senses, being open to that which is still greater, that which encompasses them on a larger scale without compromising their existences as world or person.

Think of this as a fractal, if you wish. Human beings are a smaller version of a human community, similar to that community in a sense much like that used by mathematicians, that is, the smaller entity is ‘shaped’ the same as the larger. And that community is similar to the world, itself similar to the entirety of Creation. For those who’ve never read about fractals, I use it in the sense of having a complex structure where there are some smaller, similar entities within the largest. ‘Within’ is as important as ‘same shape’.

In this way of thinking, a civilization is something like a work of art just as a human person is. A large community, even if prosperous in some ways isn’t a true civilization without having true unity, true coherence, and true completeness. A human being, in the same way, isn’t a human person if he has not those traits.

Having those traits, that human person is free even if he lives a life constricted in many ways by either his fellowmen or by the environmental or economic or political conditions during his lifetime. That human person is aware of his accomplishments, his talents and limitations, knows of the difficulties of his life in a way that affirms his traits of personhood—unity and coherence and completeness. If political or economic or technological conditions are adverse, he might have only a very constrained freedom, maybe hardly any at all outside of his own thoughts, but his freedom is truly that unlike the false freedom of those exploited consumers who think themselves free because they can watch dirty movies.

I’m going to close my latest effort to plumb the depths of Professor Minogue’s book [95] with a couple of quotes and a quick conclusion:

One cannot organize a work of art; nor write poetry to rule. The man who sets out quite deliberately to maximize his own happiness is likely to fail. Whilst one may, perhaps, be able to create vast pools of technicians at will, one cannot create political stability or a nation of mystics. There are many things in the world which we cannot attain simply because we want

them; and some are beyond our grasp precisely because we want them too much. [page 157]

There are no means which serve the precise end of freedom, for freedom, like happiness, is not an end that can be pursued. [page 158]

Happiness of the mundane sort is most certainly not a bad thing in its proper place, nor is freedom of the obvious sort allowing us to move around and do those morally proper acts we should wish to do nor is it a bad thing to live in a human community in which we all behave towards each other in a way that corresponds to what traditional liberals labeled as rights of one sort or another. I can't imagine a human life in this mortal realm where happiness is continuous nor one where we each and all move with morally well-ordered freedom. In fact, it's often the case that one man's happiness might conflict with that of a wife who wants the family to take common vacations but doesn't enjoy fishing or hunting. We certainly haven't worked things out so that there are no conflicts between the rights of a landowner who wants to divert much of the flow of a waterway to irrigate his crops and someone downstream who wants to keep a good flow of clean water moving through his swimming hole. The best we can do is perhaps take up the position I came to after reading some of the works of Frederick Hayek and some of the works of Thomas Sowell a number of years ago (I supplement and reword to my own slightly different overall viewpoint):

Some sort of well-ordered system of property rights might always create conflicts because of real and imagined injustices but that system will allow for a peaceful human community.

We can go beyond that, but the issue of property rights are clearly fundamental since they deal with food and mineral resources and other materials and transportation routes allowing us to feed and clothe ourselves.

I believe it to be a commonplace amongst lawyers and legal commentators that tough cases make for bad precedents and, hence, bad law. It's also true that tough, outlying situations can make for bad understandings of human history or of Creation in general. Our Maker has clearly given us a world and a nature which lead to conflicts which must be worked out in non-optimal ways. The story which is our world, the physical universe seen

in light of God's purposes, goes on but it's sometimes rough on the good and bad alike, sometimes especially rough on those who are trying to be friends of God, sometimes just as rough on those who are trying to lead virtuous lives for other reasons. Yet, it is possible to live our lives in a way that brings out "that indefinable resemblance [between our personality and our free acts] which one sometimes finds between the artist and his work." By doing so, we have attained some measure of freedom, perhaps hard-earned freedom, in the strong sense that we have chosen our own moral path, one which embeds us in our own lives. For that is perhaps the real issue underlying this sort of discussion: there are far too many human beings who give little sign of being truly alive, of being active and free participants in their own travels through this mortal realm. This was pretty much the reason for Albert Jay Nock losing his faith in the doctrine of the immortal soul and then his Christian faith—since he falsely considered that doctrine a necessary belief for the Christian view of the resurrection.

While I don't imagine I can dictate or even predict God's acts, I speculate that those who will be saved will be those who have enough life, who can live with the dangers and blessings of freedom, so that they can share God's own life. Those who can't live freely in this true sense and those who've not developed their lives in this way, have remained human animals and may enter the eternal grave along with non-human animals, but the next paragraph raises a different possibility.

As I've speculated before: true freedom is beyond the capacities of created natures and can be obtained only if God blesses us with the gift of sharing in His own life. I've also speculated that we are saved as members of the Body of Christ and that raises more complicated possibilities of the freedom-lovers, or at least freedom-toleraters, amongst us being capable of providing to their more timid or more closed-minded fellowmen what is needed for being part of that Body. This would mean that something of the sort could occur in this world but only by way of strong communities containing some significant percentage of freedom-lovers.

The liberal arguments for some sort of rights, both those of 18th century lovers of freedom and those of 20th century lovers of centralized and intrusive governments, break down for those arguments assume some sort of uniform human nature which has a desire for freedom and for human rights which demand much of all. The percentage of those who love freedom so they won't compromise even to save their own lives might be far too small to directly support any stable free society and might make for a relatively

small Body of Christ, but maybe that small number can provide something needed by others and can, in turn, accept from others what they lack.

## 459 Progressives Kill Progress in Future Generations

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1198>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/03/03.]

One of the worst things one generation can do is trap future generations in one specific way of life or one way of solving problems. There is perhaps more than some think to the witticism by someone whose name I can't recall: "I refused to be a radical when I was young because I didn't wish to be a reactionary when I grew old." There is perhaps more, though perhaps not much more, to the simple observation that modern rock-and-roll music is little more than a set of ruts worn-down by one generation drawing upon deeper traditions such as African-American blues and Celtic music. That is, rock-and-roll was a genre with limited artistic possibilities and most of those seem to have been explored by men born in the period 1930-1950 or so. In a strange but interesting way, rock-and-roll music can be used as an analogical case to the problems I'll be discussing in this essay.

This is a strong version of my claim: Progressives, with their tightly organized programs embodying strong views on how to solve certain problems lock future generations into specific ways of organizing their political and social and economic activities.

Whatever you might think about the solutions of the New Deal, whatever true urgency you might attribute to the construction of the national security complex after World War II, we're stuck with the particular programs and institutions, we're stuck with the costs and the large number of federal bureaucrats and even engineers and scientists who are making good livings doing what might not need to be done any longer. If those things ever needed to be done.

I have to admit that I sometimes think of progressive-talk as being no more than self-interested rhetoric by which one group of intellectuals and businessmen and educators and others justify programs which suit their fancy or provide them or their students or followers with good livings. This is unfair because there is a fairly high percentage of consistent progressives, that is—not ‘progressive’ on a selective basis—who seem truly motivated to make a better society, to care for the poor and elderly who’ve fallen through all available safety nets, and so forth. While the motivations are noble, progressives should think a bit more in terms of long-lasting programs which can solve one problem today and trap the next generation. They should realize that they are tying individual human beings and human communities together with artificial bonds of dependencies which might create serious conflicts in the long-run. Progressives, and anyone solving problems including businessmen, should realize that we human beings have a tendency not only to fight the previous war but also to burden future generations with the weaponry and strategies we’re developing for our current wars.

We should try to leave behind weaponry as light as possible and strategies as flexible as possible. It would be nice if we could even leave easily disposable weaponry and strategies.

Leaving behind the metaphors of warfare, I’ll also suggest we should be more humble and also more respectful toward our ancestors, troglodytes that they might have been by the standards of our enlightened age. We should consider that maybe even the feudal systems of Medieval and early Modern Europe were developed as serious solutions to problems when the solutions advertised by the moral giants of the Modern Age weren’t yet available. The feudal system might well have been an imperfect solution to the problems of a world with low levels of literacy, little non-animal power generation – though far more than many realize, few roads, regular invasions by Vikings in Western Europe, by horsemen from the central steppes of Asia in Eastern Europe, by other Europeans including your angry brother with his band of knights and knaves. The feudal system became bad at least by staying around too long but that’s the way of all human institutions and will be true of the welfare systems, the educational systems, the legal systems being set up by the modern progressives over the past few generations.

I happen to believe these modern progressivist programs were poorly conceived to start with, that they create dependencies upon centralized powers in order to help those who fell through safety nets and those who have had bad experiences, even severe abuse, in communities which develop

as part of natural human relationships, such as the family, or those which develop by bottom-up processes which we can handle pretty well, such as local political communities and ethnic clubs. In effect, if reform were needed, it was at the level of naturally developed human institutions, but it doesn't matter to the point I'm making—modern progressives are no different from those in the past who solved the problems of their age and left the solutions to burden succeeding generations.

As I've said recently in various ways—we try too hard to build what must develop over time, bottom-up by way of a communal process in line with the unfolding of truth through a closely related communal process. We modern folk don't seem to be all that good at either sort of communal process, that of nurturing communal life or that of seeking truth. Human beings will need to become good at those sorts of processes if our race is to ever to mature into a peaceful and well-ordered community on that largest of scales, the scale of the Body of Christ. (No, I'm not arguing for or against universal salvation, only that the Body of Christ will contain all those who will share God's life for time without end and the pilgrim Body of Christ should be seen as including all living human beings as well as a good number of deceased human beings.)

I'm not claiming we should stop trying to help the poor and the down-trodden, I'm not claiming we should stop trying to solve all sorts of problems. I'm only claiming we should be humble enough and prudent enough to be modest in our efforts to develop programs which might – in principle—solve serious problems but prove to be burdens for future generations, burdens of the sort which make it difficult for our descendants to solve their problems or even to fine-tune any successful programs we leave behind us.



# 460 Paying for Perverts at the Airport but Drawing the Line at Birth-control

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1218>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/03/23.]

I want to ask a simple question of the bishops of the American Catholic Church:

Why is it acceptable for Federal agents to fondle the breasts of American women, probe the genital regions of American children, and publicly remove the diapers of incontinent elderly Americans but beyond the moral pale to force those violated Americans to pay for birth-control and sterilizations? (At least, it's beyond the moral pale if those violated Americans happen to be Catholics.)

I don't ask this with a bias toward one or the other abuses of government power since I consider both to be just that—abuses of government power. I do think it particularly despicable to be violating the bodily privacy of human beings, especially women and children, but I seem to be somewhat alone on that issue amongst American Catholics. And I do suspect the agents of a growing police-state are a greater threat to this country and its religious freedoms than an additional tax, however disguised, imposed by a bloated government which already collects lots of money to pay for activities which are criminal or simply dumb.

Maybe religious freedom remains standing when a little boy's penis is manipulated by a federal agent or a little girl's rectum is penetrated by a

gloved finger, but—if so—what would it matter? At best, that would be a religious freedom compromised by a tight connection to evil. In fact, while this airport security regime would be bad if imposed upon us, it's a true moral horror, a shame to us in the deepest sense, just because we've so readily accepted it.

Bluntly speaking, the bishops, and their Protestant and Jewish colleagues, long ago showed they were willing to give up a large measure of freedom in return for Federal money or the satisfaction of endorsing programs which will surely end all those problems which the Bible tells us will always be with us. We have a bloated and non-workable welfare-warfare state partly because the leaders of the American Catholic Church, not just bishops, thought they'd found an easy way to feel good about themselves and to pretend to bring Heaven on Earth. Thus, there was no time and energy to spare to figure out if these feel-good programs were good for the American people, as individuals or as members of communities. Time was a 'wastin'. A New Deal was needed so that everyone could have 2 Potted Chickens in the Nude World Order. Or something equally as intelligent as that.

American politicians have already measured the level of moral integrity and moral courage of the American Christian leaders and now they're just negotiating the price of their cooperation and a few contractual details before inflicting the next humiliation upon the citizens of the United States, or inflicting far bloodier humiliations on the inhabitants of Southwestern Asia. Or maybe it'll be Mexico or India or Angola next—there are growing rumors of the evil resident in those countries and our leaders are devoted to rooting out evil throughout the world. And the bishops will interrupt their battle for religious freedom long enough to pray for the success of another invasion or two. Your Excellencies, as an American Catholic, I plead with you to learn the meaning of the term 'just-cause' and to learn how to evaluate the flimsy excuses offered by warmongering and war-profiteering politicians. Those excuses have proven to be lies in all the recent wars and police actions of the American government.

While we're at it, I might ask the Catholic bishops if they'd noticed that American invasions have recently been very effective at destroying ancient Christian communities? Is the strangely constrained religious freedom beloved by the American Catholic bishops of infinite value and the very existence of ancient Christian communities in Asia of no value at all? I fear that Americans, including Obama and the Catholic bishops, are the re-

sult of a people having more money than brains, more power than moral character.

We Americans wish to spread our freedoms and our goodness around the world and there's nothing like a demolished fresh-water system or a city reduced to rubble and collateral corpses to teach the world how to live like us good Americans. Just so long as the American government doesn't impose a health insurance plan on the Iranians that forces Iranian Catholics, if any survive, to pay for birth-control. Just promise us you won't do that, President Obama, and we American Catholics are ready to go to Tehran with you. Or at least to sit in our living-rooms and watch young American soldiers kill and be killed for our viewing pleasure.

American politicians will tolerate an ill-tempered spasm on the part of American bishops because the politicians hold all the cards those bishops and their predecessors passed to them during the decades when works of charity and of social care, including the care of retired workers, came to be considered the responsibility of central governments primarily and the responsibility of subservient contracting agencies only secondarily. The American Catholic bishops, helped train the members of their flocks to become dependent upon the Federal government and to assume the leaders of that government are speaking truly when they say we need to invade another country that allegedly threatens us or to expand the not-yet implemented health-care plan to include needs or rights claimed by some substantial minority. Of course, the wrong sort of expansion leads to screams of moral outrage on the part of our Pandoras. "I didn't mean to release that particular critter."

I'm not claiming the American Catholic bishops are more cowardly or more hypocritical than the rest of us. Along with the other American Christian leaders, these bishops are little different from other American men. In general, we fail to protect our women and children and elderly against our governments, though we'll support the murder of hundreds of thousands in other countries because of some ghostly criminals in the mountains of Afghanistan. Manly, aren't we? We remind ourselves of John Wayne playing Davey Crockett. I'll bet we're impressing the other peoples of this small planet with our sheer, bare-chested manliness. I'll bet we're really impressing the God of Jesus Christ who told us to kill ragheads and gooks by the thousands, let government perverts violate women and children and elderly, and – above all—refuse to pay for birth-control and sterilizations.



# 461 Through the Looking-glass: Religious Liberty and Religious Toleration

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1227>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/04/06.]

I'm trying to tighten the focus of some of my own ideas in the area of religion and society, religion and government, religion and any other form of human community. There are probably many things to be said about the conflict between religion and various sorts of religious societies, and some also cover conflicts involving some who hold no firm religious beliefs but do have strong moral beliefs about human life. I'll not make most of those statements, at least not here.

I will speak generally about the various conflicts associated with so-called Obamacare, including the religious freedom problems. They seem to be partly, maybe largely, caused by confused actions and lack of actions on the part of Catholic bishops and other Christian leaders over the past century or so as the American state has drawn its citizens into a variety of dependency-relationships. We shouldn't become dependent upon power-centers which might one day call upon us to act against our principles. In fact, I'll claim that religious neutrality on the part of governments is possible only if religious conflicts deal with issues not really important, at least not in our public life. In that case, religious freedom has no particular value and religion itself becomes the purely private affair advocated by extreme liberals of the modern era.

If religious beliefs have any substance, if religious beliefs have any bearing on the behaviors and the other aspects of concrete lives of human beings,

if they are—in the strongest example—sacramental or even Sacramental as some Christians believe, then any behaviors affected by those beliefs couldn't be subject to compromise in the interests of 'religious neutrality' and then the public square becomes at best a gathering of mobs representing different beliefs as they shout at each other—or worse.

In fact, we think of public squares in terms not compatible with true religious faith, but I'll put off a discussion of that issue to a future essay. I'll give only hints about the possibilities of sharing some substantial amount of a public square with those who advocate beliefs which Catholics and some other Christians think to be morally disordered.

Let me propose a rule:

If a program involves substantial issues over which there is much principled disagreement on the part of significant groups, then we should be very modest indeed in the implementation of that program or competing programs.

This doesn't exclude the possibility of relatively small 'safety-net' programs for something like medical care but even there we should realize there is a chasm between 'us' and 'them', however those are defined. For example, important research hospitals in the United States are trying to find cures for horrible medical conditions by experimenting upon embryos who have those conditions, at least in potential, and who are grown in the laboratory. I'm not interested here in arguing this topic, only interested in noting that many Christians, some Jews, some skeptics and atheists, believe that any being which is at least arguably human should be treated as human. How can we—I'm one of them—share a medical system with those who are developing medical technology by experimenting upon lab-grown embryos and will maybe be harvesting tissue or specific biochemicals from lab-grown human beings? How can those who think abortion is a right share a medical system with those who think it murder?

Maybe we should be so tolerant as to act as if we had no moral principles?

Our leaders would have us move forward assuming that those with greatly divergent moral beliefs can cooperate on medical systems and we can create a crazy-quilt pattern of exceptions on the basis of conscience. We negotiate treaties with men who have gone over to behavior we consider evil and then somehow that protects our noble and pure selves. And,

of course, we can trust men who do what we consider evil to honor their agreements. Our Christian leaders don't seem to have any clear ideas how this can happen, probably because it's a psychotic view in a strong sense, a view at odds with reality as understood through honest human perceptions and reason. Our leaders have merely asserted, without explanation, that we can have one uniform, nationwide healthcare system though it can't be quite uniform when our beliefs are threatened. Don't worry, as problems arise in this morally incoherent plan of action, we'll jury-rig solutions. They even tell us that we can share everything so long as we have gimmicky accounting to make it seem we Christians don't pay for anything God would not allow.

Again, I think we Christians can cooperate on basic safety-net services with those who would allow abortion services and even experimentation on human embryos. Somehow. If we had leaders, if they had advisers, who were morally responsible enough to learn about these issues and think about them rather than just reacting in ways that make certain sorts of shallow Christians feel good about themselves. We should worry that we've become a people better at organizing feel-good rallies in Washington and state capitals than at thinking hard about the world and anticipating problems.

And, if our objections to the economics and politics and morals of our neighbors involve truly fundamental principles, we should be thinking seriously about forming communities of those who share our principles. Done properly, this sort of separation would bring some peace and order to a world growing increasingly chaotic as we pass through another period in which established ways of thought and behavior are breaking down and there are mass movements of individuals and groups into regions inhabited by those with greatly differing cultures and religious beliefs and so forth.

Let me put this in terms of God's purposes for us.

We are in a narrative which is the formation of the Body of Christ in its mortal form. We have not the knowledge, not the power, not the legitimate authority, to force this Body into some sort of preconceived shape or to have some sort of preconceived functions. We are intending—in the Thomistic sense of growth—properly as individual human beings when we respond as best we can to our opportunities and problems, including discretionary opportunities for pure pleasure. We grow into the future. We develop toward a goal we can only dimly perceive—if we can see it at all. We have a duty to cooperate with God, to remain firm in our intentions, so long as we intend to obey our Maker. We explore possible paths of development.

We don't create the territory in front of us, the abstract spaces of possible developmental paths.

When we act as if we were aiming at some knowable point down the path of development, when we think there is some sort of larger entity already formed and under our control, we become rebels against the Creator who is telling this story. We try to take over the role of our Maker.

As one who has accepted the questionable task of trying to see a little further than is usually wise into the future, that is—into the unfolding narrative which is our world, I can assure those who think it easy to see some allegedly desirable goal, “universal healthcare” or “democracy in every nation”, that it is a task that will give the morally responsible thinker more than a few eerie dreams and even the occasional nightmare. To the extent that prophecy allows even the slightest bit of foresight, it can frighten those with stronger hearts than mine. The future, the world as it will be in a few generations, is no longer ours. It's not a matter of just fun gadgets and all sorts of high-tech conveniences as if it were an episode of the cartoon show *The Jetsons*. Only those insensitive to the conventions and customs in our behaviors and thoughts, our very ways of seeing and hearing the world, will think they could go back to, say, the Philadelphia of Ben Franklin's days and feel as comfortable as if they'd gone to a nearby city for a day of shopping and entertainment. It's a indication of the reasons the United States is the most bumbling and incompetent empire in history: we are so insensitive to cultural issues, to moral and other habits, so inclined to bend the world to our will, that we feel comfortable in any and all cities of the world—so long as we can find our favorite American restaurants. We ignore all the surrounding mobs of smelly human animals speaking some sort of gibberish. We've even made ourselves insensitive to our own cultures, to our own moral habits and customs. We can't smell and see the differences between the streets of Boston and those of New York City.

Let me wrap around to draw some sort of a conclusion about the topic in the title. Religious toleration in some sort of large-scale public square would be possible only if all the human beings of the surrounding communities were in agreement about the nature of their world, the moral purpose—if any—of the events of their individual and communal lives. As I've noted before—perhaps in weaker language, only a deluded fool could believe that communities differing on such important issues as abortion and experimentation upon lab-grown embryos can possibly share—fully—either a medical insurance system or the medical system itself.

I fear the worst is yet to come and it might involve a quiet and cowardly surrender by Christian leaders.



## 462 We Americans Love to Stay in Our Comfort Zones

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1249>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/04/27.]

Math is hard, Barbie, and that goes for you too, Ken. It's hard like tennis or basketball or baseball, requiring hours of hard work on basic skills when you really have little clue how those skills will really be used. When you have the basic skills of arithmetic or of fielding and throwing the ball, then you learn how to handle symbols in a manner analogous to numbers or you learn how to turn the corner at second-base or how to position yourself for the rebound.

There are many in these United States of American who put in many an hour of practice duffing away before approaching a round of golf at par. There are many who teach their children of the need to work at those skills of skating and slapping away at pucks. There are even some, slightly old-fashioned, who see that Junior practices his latest chord before heading to his next guitar lesson and see that Missie hammers away at the animal-friendly plastic keys on her electronic musical device each every day.

We leave mathematics to the professionals and the best of parents will rarely do more than make sure Junior is getting good grades on his exams and Missie is doing her homework. We leave it to those professionals to set the standards, to decide what Junior should be learning as a freshman and Missie as a junior. My own experience, even during a slightly better period in American education, taught me – eventually—that we're leaving some important issues to the care of some who themselves never aspired beyond the duffer stage, beyond the stage of banging out *Chopsticks*. This article tells us my experience might be typical

for American students. There are countries which do better. For some specifics, see the article, *Countries That Best Prepare Math Teachers Share Similarities: Several Key Conditions Generally Lacking in US* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2012/04/120416101026.htm>.

The article tells us:

Countries that best prepare math teachers meet several key conditions generally lacking in the United States, according to the first international study of what teacher preparation programs are able to accomplish.

The IEA study, led by Michigan State University, suggests that in countries such as Taiwan and Singapore, future math teachers are better prepared because the students get rigorous math instruction in high school; university teacher-preparation programs are highly selective and demanding; and the teaching profession is attractive, with excellent pay, benefits and job security.

The key word is ‘rigorous’. Math is hard, but—as I’ve noted before—so are any subjects when approached properly. Rigorous is painful for a people trained to be the passive victims of canned entertainment or to consider work to be something which can be done according to a short checklist developed by some bureaucracy.

Our English departments in the American school systems aren’t in much better shape than our mathematics departments, perhaps a little better just because we’re generally born with more language skills than mathematics skills and a highly motivated man or woman will find it easier to acquire higher level skills in the nature of composition and textual analysis just by frequenting their local library or the college library even if their formal education was weak. However, just as a talented teenaged furniture maker needs to learn higher levels of skills and discipline from a master, a lover of language also needs to learn from a master to be a truly skilled and self-aware practitioner, at least at a level adequate to serious teaching—we will, of course, always need a lot of teachers who concentrate on rudimentary skills but that sort of teaching can work only if teachers of all levels of skill have a good respect for rigor and are in a system and a culture which also has that good respect.

It's easier to motivate ourselves in fields where we generally start out with some decent level of talent. We can almost all throw a rock at a target or a ball in the direction of our father as he teaches us some athletic skills. Some of us, certainly not me, have enough coordination of limbs and of eye-hand movements to be able to advance so quickly that learning to play ball can be fun for years of development rather than a chore. Any serious athlete will tell you that even the great ones reach the point where they have to participate in special strength and skill exercises to continue to advance or to maintain very high levels of skill.

In a similar vein, many of us can more or less naturally acquire enough visual skills and enough oral language skills to become at least somewhat literate. Some have great facility with various aspects of language so that learning to recite poetry or write simple poetry or learning how to read serious narrative works is fun for many years of development. Then comes the day when you have to struggle to wrap your mind around the book of Genesis or a poem by Shakespeare or the writings of Thomas Jefferson. Back to the practice field.

One of the problems with mathematics is that there aren't that many who naturally develop any serious skills and I learned, by experience and years of contemplation upon experience, that most educational systems—certainly the one in my hometown—have not the slightest clue how to nurture even a raw talent such as I had, high-level but not at the level of a truly creative research mathematician. I would have probably become a physicist or engineer but for learning how to hate college after going there poorly prepared in habits and attitude – I'd been able to stay even more securely in my comfort zone than most and went to college as a couch potato of sorts. When I, as a boy, had needed to learn how to work, how to learn and think rigorously, I had been encouraged by the educational system, as well as American culture in general, to stay within my comfort zone, to sit and get good grades by sleeping through class and then browsing the material in study-hall.



# 463 Prosperity that Never Ends. . . Oops

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1283>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/05/29.]

Historians have noted that approaching crises typically take longer to arrive than the more prescient of the victims-to-be would expect. And then they are typically far worse than the more pessimistic of the victims-to-be would expect.

I fear the truth that might lie in the above claims because we of the West, and many in other parts of the earth, live with governments and allied business communities which have gone to the limits to push back what might have been a manageable crisis in order to save as much as they could of the system. As it became obvious that salvage job was Mission Impossible, they continued their ineffective programs which – whether they had anticipated this or not—had the side-effect of turning honest people’s money into politician’s money and crooked banker’s money. That certainly provided a motive to continue with actions which did so much damage to the United States and most of its citizens. I oversimplify a bit but not so much as I would have thought even ten years ago.

Why did our masters-of-reality decide to move in for the kill? Had matters reached the point where the parasites were better off feasting off the flesh of the suffering beast rather than returning to the long-term strategy of taking a few quarts blood on a regular basis? We can assume something of this sort, but the question then becomes: Why? What had changed? The United States, as a particular and interesting example of Western countries, was and arguably is an immensely wealthy and powerful country. Many are now inclined to speak of the inevitable decline of a great power, though

it would have done a bit more good to have spoken that way and acted to deal with the problem 20 years ago when Paul Kennedy enraged many by suggesting the United States was showing signs of premature decline. Premature? I'll get to that after noting that Hannah Arendt had forecast 20 years before that the United States would face a decision in the early years of the 21st century: accept a collapse back into poverty or become a more forthright empire and steal what Americans were no longer able to produce on their own. Why can't we produce now what we seemed to be producing well in those early years of the 1970s? I'll also get to that after noting that one prominent American commentator and man of the Old Right, Garet Garret, had noted around 1950 that the United States was the strangest empire in history. To put his insight into my somewhat more expansionist claim: we paid the price, morally and financially and in blood of Americans and foreigners, to conquer other countries and didn't manage to profit, at least not at the level of our country as a whole, though clearly those heavily invested in the national security complex, in terms of careers or finances, have done well though not good.

All the while, right up to the seemingly minor recession of 2001, the American piles of wealth seemed to be increasing. Junior insurance company executives were building houses in my hometown at least double the size of the houses the doctors and lawyers and prominent business-owners had lived in when I was a boy in the 1960s. BMWs and Accuras and Lexus's were suddenly common, along with such exotica as Cadillac SUVs and pickup trucks. Simple, Mom-and-Pop restaurants were struggling unless they specialized in breakfast, though the fast-food restaurants were doing fine. At the same time, the larger surface streets and even the blue-collar shopping centers in the general area were sporting a host of what might be called mid-scale chain restaurants allegedly bringing us some part of culture from Texas cow-country or from Australia or from some part of Florida, that peat-desert hell in the making. The upscale restaurants were also doing fine though some were so crowded as to weaken the pleasures of a revamped dining experience.

I've written of distorting an economy by confusing the transactions related to unhealthy living and the resulting ill-health: see Chapter 389, *A Fraudulent Economy: Mixing Wealth and Illth and Mismeasuring the Mess*. The problem is still larger and more general than that.

As we've grown richer, we've sought more services, especially luxury services as well as the illth services which keep our overfed, sedentary selves

alive. We're eating out more and convinced that each of us deserves the medical care and other benefits of the richest in society. While it's certainly true that we have developed some technology beyond the dreams of our grandparents by enlarging the markets, that can only go so far. Rich people can afford rich people's medical care, and that care might become middle-class medical care in another ten or twenty years. It's the same with houses. Rich people can afford rich people's houses and some of the enhancements to those houses might show up in the houses built for the middle-class and worker-class in another generation or so. As it was, over the previous 20 years, middle-class people allowed themselves to be suckered into buying these 5,000 square foot energy hogs and are now in trouble, as is the banking industry which made sheer silliness possible.

The moneys controlled by politicians and also the moneys paid as insurance premiums (how many pay cash for medical services nowadays?) are still flowing though I'd guess the accountants at the average over-mortgaged, over-built, over-equipped medical center are worried. The next crisis will be manageable from the viewpoint of those seeking to keep the system alive only if the Federal Reserve Bank and Treasury Department can keep alive banks which are still gambling—in a casino dominated by bad bets. Private and public pension funds are in deep deficits. Medicare and Medicaid are in deficit by about the value of everything on the face of the earth. An increasingly shaky insurance industry is making generous payouts for natural disasters and self-inflicted medical problems and dents to ridiculously expensive cars and so on. There there is the medical industry which is spending like that drunken sailor though there are clearly disruptions to cash-flows coming at them soon, bigger problems behind those.

In general, you could probably find more problems by looking at any industry linked too closely to the Federal government or regulated by any level of government. Even well-run private companies are buying from and selling to these critters which are frozen and staring into the approaching headlights. It's time to go into the road-kill meat business.

The Apocalypse isn't coming but it's time for those who would help their fellow-citizens to at least get some perspective by looking at other periods of economic and political collapse. Some of those periods are only a little tough and some are downright nasty and are linked with major drops in population and decades of hardship. Think wars, famine, disease. Think barbarian hordes on the move. Think slavery.

Let's pray we don't reach that point and the United States might suffer

least of all even if we deserve worse—we're behind the deepest and widest moats on the planet and we have a lot of resources which can keep us fed, clothed, and sheltered. But, at the least, we'll be losing our nice cars and our summer visits to the Caribbean. And our diets will be simpler, perhaps a good thing since Americans don't seem to be able to eat healthily so long as that ice cream is in the freezer and the steak restaurant is offering a special on a huge slab of beef with a two-pound baked potato topped with a quarter-pound of butter and a crumbled pound of bacon.

We thought we could afford to live above our means, and outside the constraints of wisdom, by pretending to increase our means and by pretending the doctors and drug-companies could cleanse our bodies as fast as we poisoned ourselves. We've committed ourselves to paying ever higher salaries and benefits for various workers, bankers and musicians and nurses and teachers and so forth, whose productivity has been—at best—stagnant in recent decades. We've done this at a time when it seems likely that some of those workers, bankers and teachers for sure, aren't performing so well as similar workers in prior generations. Perhaps, they were forced to work against the grain by the changes I'm talking about, which have led to not only unrealistic expectations on the part of nearly all of us but also to severe damage to our moral character. Bankers, even from the most solid of local institutions, have to satisfy the needs and desires of those who want it all and want it now. The children of such human creatures have internalized this sort of moral disorder and have not the habits and attitudes to allow much in the way of real learning. This puts a burden on the best of teachers, to be sure, but the proper – if seemingly nasty way—to handle the problems is to send the children ill-prepared or ill-equipped to learn standard material to classes teaching more appropriate material or operating under more restrictive discipline. Maybe some should simply be sent back home. A more flexible system might accomplish this without unduly prejudiced bureaucrats making judgments on particular students. Perhaps the local communities could supply basic infrastructure and the teachers and classes for basic courses in reading, writing, and arithmetic. Then parents could contract with private classroom teachers or even tutors for individual instruction with perhaps some public subsidy to ensure talented youth with important talents don't miss out.

I don't really feel the need or the right to propose an entire system of reform because—and this links back to much of my recent work – we've messed up badly in many of these areas and we need to retreat and to start

fresh development and experimentation. We needn't and shouldn't begin any reformation with strong expectations of what we should do. Once we've reached better ground, we can begin to respond to God's Creation, cooperating with the processes of evolution and development which the Good Lord ordained for this world.

So, why do I say that the decline of the United States is premature? Is it something which could have been delayed, even for an indefinitely long time? There's a graph found often on the Internet in recent months. This graph shows the length of time for which one country or another has had the reserve currency for the past six centuries or so. Nearly all those periods have been 75-100 years before the reserve-currency country began an economic and political and military decline. The graph itself is very simple and shows the U.S. dollar has been the reserve currency for about the same amount of time as the currency of Portugal in the 15th century. Portugal had great leadership but it was a very small country with little in the way of natural resources and her time of glory came before there was much capability to buy or steal needed resources from third-world countries.

Speaking very generally, the United States, which is remaining the dominant military power for now even as our economic might dwindles, surely should have lasted longer than Portugal as the reserve-currency country, which is essentially possible only for the dominant world-power. We were even reasonably well-liked before we made it clear we'd kill innocents all over the world to make ourselves feel good about ourselves. We had no real competition until we simultaneously outsourced our production and some of our skilled technical services to Japan, Taiwan, China, and other countries while also wasting our energies, morale, and money on wars that didn't seem to have a real point other than convincing American leadership they were some sort of second-coming of the political and military geniuses of the Macedonians, Romans, and Mongols. We gave away the sources of our wealth and then spent it anyway. The evidence indicates our recent leaders in the U.S. learned strategy by watching Three Stooges movies, except our stooges had all those planes and bombs and tanks and high-tech guns. Moe and Larry and Curly poked eyes. They didn't bomb the hell out of cities filled with civilians and the infrastructure they needed to live decent lives.

In any case, it's likely that Nixon prevented the loss of reserve currency status, which loss would have been a good thing if we wanted to be a modest and peaceful people rather than the enslaved residents of a global power, by taking the U.S. dollar off the gold standard. He sold the American people

down the river but protected the power of the American government and military-industrial complex. Nixon, acting not as an individual but as a cog in a machine which he had entered by his own choice, doomed us and put up government barriers to any efforts to revive American industry, which was a bit tired—as a real estate agent might say—in the early 1970s. We needed innovation and the nurturing of endangered skills, not luxury goods and exotic vacations along with Vietnam and then Grenada and Panama and Iraq-Kuwait and... The United States has become a obese predatory beast with poor muscle tone but still driven to invade and occupy and fight until it weakens of exhaustion and meets some sort of end.

Over the next week or so, I'll be writing about some specific aspects of the ongoing decline in American prosperity and the inevitable decline in military and political power which will follow. I may or may not write about the related problem of the sheer lack of interest Americans have had, and still have, in taking on the role of leading a revival of Western Civilization.

## 464 Why Are the Parasites Killing the Host?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1286>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/05/30.]

This is a short follow-up to the previous Chapter 463, *Prosperity that Never Ends... Oops*. Besides a few unexplored aspects of this situation, I also left hanging the question which is the title of this post: Why Are the Parasites Killing the Host?

Indeed, why? Wouldn't they be better in the long run to keep the source of blood and flesh alive while feeding off of it? I really can't say for sure and I don't believe it worth spending too much time thinking about the matter. It's a bit like trying to figure out what went wrong in the political system of Germany while planning for your battalion to meet its goals, including survival, on the beaches of Normandy. There will be time for such historical analyses, by professional historians, when we move past the oncoming disasters. For now, I just wish to make a few suggestions to make it possible to have a more or less complete narrative understanding of the situation of the human race in 2012.

1. The thrill of the hunt has gotten hold of some of the bankers and politicians and a feeding frenzy has begun.
2. The population of the exploitive or predatory class has grown so large as to unleash, again, shark-like feeding behaviors in the face of a limited food supply.
3. The beast is dying anyway, so why not rip out a big hunk of as-yet healthy flesh.

4. The looting has been set in motion and no one can or will stop it.

In my next essay, I'll move on to a more useful attempt to understand: why have so many of us been oblivious to the increasing signs that something had gone wrong in our age? In fact, some seem to still be oblivious. In my hometown, everyone is excited about the possibility of redeveloping the mills which once were so productive of jute-stuff and then a variety of metal and paper products. What sorts of companies are going to go in there? The major occupant will be a large health-care facility at a time when Medicare is approaching a cliff, Medicaid is probably dead on the scene but not certified, all sorts of insurance companies are likely to tank because they're one of the industries being stripped to the bone by the low interest rate strategies of the central banks (and they have other problems), and everyone has noticed the U.S. pays twice as much as Germany, as a percent of GDP, for our relatively crappy health-care.

Let me add an item to my list: The parasites are killing the host at this time because the host is loving it as its flesh is ripped away from its bones; it cries for more of the same stuff.

# 465 Dumber Every Day, With Beer in Hand and War on TV

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1289>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/06/02.]

In Chapter 127, *Intelligence vs. Intellect*, I quoted Jacques Barzun from *The House of Intellect* [7]:

We [in the United States] have in fact intelligence in plenty and we use it perhaps more widely than other nations, for we apply it with praiseworthy innocence to parts of life elsewhere ruled by custom or routine.

...

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

The dumbing down of Western man isn't a dumbing down of the individual's intelligence but rather a loss of willingness and ability to draw upon deeper and wider sources of thought, mostly thought of great worth since it has survived some sort of selection process, similar to the selection processes of biological evolution. This is to say it has survived in such a way as to reproduce itself in various related bodies of thought, as Greek thought

proved its 'evolutionary worth' by contributing in various ways to the substance and form of other civilizations, Roman and Arabic and Persian and eventually Christian thought of East and West, and so on to our day and beyond. We modern men of the West have adopted some strange understanding of ourselves as individual creatures somehow freestanding and able to benefit from our cultural heritage on a purely voluntary basis, choosing to take our political beliefs from, say, the Roman Republic and our metaphysical beliefs from the Aristotelians of Athens and our cultural beliefs from Lutheran Germany of the Renaissance and so forth. Mostly, though we worry about pleasing ourselves by selecting from a menu of surrogate experiences in front of the television, shopping and dining experiences at the local not-yet-dead mall, vacation experiences in artificial Edens—some of which were legitimate centers of human cultures before being discovered and exploited by Americans and Europeans, experiences, experiences, experiences. If you have to purchase experiences, plan the details from menus provided by corporations, live them for a while as if they were the real thing and not as meaningless as your lives back home, treasure them until you can repeat the next year. . . They ain't for real and you're being trained to give up what's real for some imaginary circle of Hell which is quite profitable for someone.

Whew. . . A mouthful and no more than an expansion of what Professor Barzun claimed and what has been claimed by a variety of insightful thinkers. Let's move on and see what can be made of this mess.

In recent decades, the measured IQs of modern human beings have risen. The trends of various public test scores even for the United States as a whole have been surprisingly good if adjusted for the different populations taking these tests. When I go out and have casual conversations with my fellow Americans, or occasionally try to have a more serious conversation, I'm struck by the apparent liveliness of their thinking processes and also struck by the way that that liveliness is directed down a small number of well-worn paths which have proven themselves to be fruitless and dangerous. Though we might think that a loss of awareness of tradition might free us for creative movements, the opposite seems to happen to most human beings. Freed of some sort of structure, and maybe some tools, from one tradition or another, human beings take to a cattle-like movement, paying attention mostly to the cow in front of them and the bull to the right and the calf to the left.

Without attachment to some rich tradition, without that intellect which

is “the capitalized and communal form of live intelligence,” we lose our awareness of the greater world rather than becoming free to move away from the herd. We are those herd-beasts and few are those who can so much as look wistfully away from the direction in which moves their herd. We can be members of herds moving through good pastures, moving in a morally well-ordered manner, and moving towards appropriate goals. Or. . . We can be members of disordered herds moving in ways and directions to no good purposes or to the purposes of exploitive men. Any disordered herd will likely come to be exploited in large or small ways.

We Americans were always vulnerable to exploitation because we are relatively bereft of intellect, but there was a day when we, including the politicians and businessmen and generals, had some serious respect for the likes of George Kennan, Arthur Schlesinger, Adlai Stevenson, Robert Taft, Garet Garrett, Jacques Barzun, and Lionel Trilling. That age of respect for men worthy of respect for their connection to intellect was just dying in my youth though it was years later before I knew about it or about any of those men. Notice the variety of men on my list. I deliberately chose a smattering of left and old-right (true conservative and not much like modern Republicans), politicians and diplomats and academics and more-or-less independent men of letters. There’s even some overlap for those with more complex vocations. Even someone so erudite, so sophisticated in her expressed thoughts, as Hannah Arendt, the Austrian-American philosopher and historian, could publish in magazines of wide circulation and get some serious distribution for serious works of history or philosophy.

What’s going on that we Americans, and apparently Europeans as well, seem to be barbarian children trying to run a complex civilization? I use the language of Jose Ortega Y Gasset in *The Revolt of the Masses* [60]?

I think in slightly different terms than Ortega Y Gasset and nearly all modern thinkers because I’m willing to be consistent to my Christian beliefs in all my thinking, even in realms of politics and economics and—even, even—physics and other sciences.

This world, the universe ordered to God’s purposes, is a story in which the Body of Christ is forming. This Body will not fully form in this mortal realm, but rather in the world of the resurrected. Yet, we are called and driven to intend to move into our proper roles in this Body, where I use ‘intend’ in the Thomistic or biological sense of being a movement in a growth or development process.

The Body of Christ itself will be the ultimate human community, like

unto the Holy Trinity in that the members will retain their individuality while becoming fully members of that community which will be one. All will be shared and yet each thought and each action will come from a member or at least an organ of that Body, yet, it will be the thought or the action of all. Each of us has to play our own assigned role. Each of us has to contribute from our own talents. Yet, what we give will come from all and will be received by all in the Body of Christ, even as we are giving it and also receiving it.

Intelligence is an attribute of individual members of the Body of Christ and intellect belongs to the Body as a whole or at least to organs of that Body. Some members have intelligence directed towards matters which are properly concerns of individuals first and others have intelligences which can operate in that individual way but they are particularly sensitive to the intellect, the communal form of live intelligence. Likely it is that there are also some with limited intelligence but a talent for taking up matters settled by the intellect.

We human beings of the 21st century are still early in the process of the development of those organs of the Body of Christ which have strong relationships to the intellectual organ, but we can see some remarkable developments if we pay attention to where we are, what we have in communal relationships, relative to the human race in earlier periods. A creature who seemingly evolved to live in kinship groups of maybe 50 at most is now living in cities with tens of millions of human beings organized into a bewildering network of smaller, but still often large, communities. We can organize the building and operation of continent-wide power grids and communication networks. We have built civilizations—early forms of the Body of Christ itself as primitive fish were early forms of more sophisticated animals including social mammals, as apish creatures five million years ago were early forms of human beings. These cities have grown increasingly large over time. The Rome of Pompey is nothing compared to the city which now sits on that site. Nineveh is a village compared to Beijing. What is to come? Will we be seeing a global civilization arise over the next few centuries or will we see a group of large and small civilizations interlinked in various ways and to various degrees of tightness? Of course, given how terrible all men are at predicting the future, especially those who try, something completely different is likely to develop.

Yet, as certain sorts of participants in a very complex story, we need to have possible futures in mind that we might be better and faster able to

react when opportunities and problems arise. And there are certain members of the Body of Christ who have the goal of understanding longer-range, larger-scale, more abstract matters that we might understand ourselves and our world and also anticipate those possible futures. This is the role of those who have the sorts of wider knowledge in science and history and technology and literature and the other arts and at least some knowledge of the work of the various workers which feed a large and complex human community and put up its buildings and collect trash and so forth. (To be sure, some men of high intellect and high culture are often limited in their ability to deal with some fields of human knowledge or human activity. For example, literary men often, though not always, find simple algebra to be difficult. Many well-educated men have great difficulty understanding simple laborers or even skilled craftsmen.)

Intellect, “the capitalized and communal form of live intelligence,” is the knowledge and the allied thinking processes I refer to in the above paragraph. Development of a dynamic form of intellect, the process of taking in tradition and trying to adjust it to new circumstances, is not to the liking, perhaps not within the capabilities, of even most of those with some serious connection to intellect. Professor Barzun discusses in *The House of Intellect* [7] the odd fact that the 20th century up to that point, 1959, and since then in my opinion, has been a period of exploiting the creativity of scientists and visual artists and creative writers and philosophers whose prime working years had mostly ended by 1900 or so. Much good has come from the hard work of expanding and developing in detail the work of Einstein and Planck, Riemann and Gauss, Tolstoy and Melville, Picasso and van Gogh, Mahler and Mendelssohn, Ford and Carnegie, and so forth. But there is a certain flatness in the creative efforts of succeeding generations, with the possible exception of the quantum physicists such as Bohr and Heisenberg and Schrodinger and especially Dirac.

Why did this explosive activity come to an end?

There are a number of histories of human thought not yet written which will deal with this question. I don't pretend to have the skills or the access to materials which would allow me to participate in the writing of such histories. Nor, to be honest, do I have enough interest in the question to make such an effort and turn away from other work. I can only claim that this loss of creative intellect, and the lost of awareness of the need of such, is the problem we face, it is the way in which men of the modern West have dumbed themselves down even as they've retained high levels of individual

intelligence. Individual men have retained their intelligences but devoted them to analyses of upcoming drafts in the sports leagues and to politicking rather than to knowledge of human history and to efforts to understand how to move forward into new moral and social and political relationships better suited to our situation, our problems and opportunities, than are the relationships we inherited. Even the cultured men of non-creative but high levels of intellect such as Trilling and Nock are not to be often found and are not influential in forming even the higher culture for there is no such state of mind.

We lost our intellects while retaining our individual intelligences but it would have been hard for any but dedicated students of the past to have retained their intellects since the world has shown us new forms and we can keep our intellects, communal forms of living intelligence, only by moving into the future and developing new forms of intellect to correspond to the new forms of our world.

# 466 Misallocating the Gains of a Productive Economy

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1295>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/06/04.]

The economist William Baumol, see [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/William\\_Baumol](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/William_Baumol) warned us about one of the problems which human beings create under conditions of prosperity, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baumol's\\_cost\\_disease](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baumol's_cost_disease):

Baumol's cost disease (also known as the Baumol Effect) is a phenomenon described by William J. Baumol and William G. Bowen in the 1960s. It involves a rise of salaries in jobs that have experienced no increase of labor productivity in response to rising salaries in other jobs which did experience such labor productivity growth. This goes against the theory in classical economics that wages are always closely tied to labor productivity changes.

The rise of wages in jobs without productivity gains is caused by the requirement to compete for employees with jobs that did experience gains and hence can naturally pay higher salaries, just as classical economics predicts. For instance, if the banking industry pays its bankers 19th century style salaries, the bankers may decide to quit and get a job at an automobile factory where salaries are commensurate to high labor productivity. Hence, bankers' salaries are increased not due to labor productivity increases in the banking industry, but rather due to productivity and wage increases in other industries.

The original study was conducted for the performing arts sector. Baumol and Bowen pointed out that the same number of musicians are needed to play a Beethoven string quartet today as were needed in the 19th century; that is, the productivity of classical music performance has not increased. On the other hand, real wages of musicians (as well as in all other professions) have increased greatly since the 19th century.

In a range of businesses, such as the car manufacturing sector and the retail sector, workers are continually getting more productive due to technological innovations to their tools and equipment. In contrast, in some labor-intensive sectors that rely heavily on human interaction or activities, such as nursing, education, or the performing arts there is little or no growth in productivity over time. As with the string quartet example, it takes nurses the same amount of time to change a bandage, or college professors the same amount of time to mark an essay, in 2006 as it did in 1966.

Baumol's cost disease is often used to describe the lack of growth in productivity in public services such as public hospitals and state colleges. Since many public administration activities are heavily labor-intensive there is little growth in productivity over time because productivity gains come essentially from a better capital technology. As a result growth in the GDP will generate little more resources to be spent in the public sector. Thus public sector production is more dependent on taxation level than growth in the GDP.

As it turns out, many of those jobs without productivity gains occur in government activities and in industries, such as medical-care, which are particularly susceptible to an excessive degree of government meddling, though it might start out as low-level regulation. As a consequence, such jobs have increased in number as well as in salary and benefit levels. The industries so friendly to government meddling, especially health-care and weapons manufacturing and military services, have grown so huge as to distort the very political process, black holes distorting political and economic spacetime so that more stuff is sucked inside.

We've allowed ourselves, and our more local and more natural communities, to become passive in our economic roles, workers and consumers,

and many of those centralized institutions upon which we are dependent are generators of the unproductive jobs I wrote about above. Politicians and allied businessmen have poured borrowed money into the medical-care or military industries. We've created an economy in which our health-care industry, as a percentage of GDP, is twice the size of the same industry in Germany. Our military-industry complex is about as large as the military industries of all other countries combined. How much do we have to spend to think our precious American selves are properly cared for by our hospitals and properly protected by our armies?

The economic costs of our self-indulgence and the indulgent behavior we've allowed in our politicians are starting to hit when so many Americans, especially those no longer young, have a belief they have a right to new joints, new veins, expensive drugs at low-cost, long stays in hospitals and rehab centers. We accept it as natural that we will invade or at least surround any country which behaves badly, for real or as presented by our scheming politicians and think-tank sharks. I knew some young drivers when I was young who bragged of their fathers' power to protect them from the police but some of those daredevils learned the laws of physics hold even in a politically corrupt town. We will also learn that some basic rules of economic and political relationships will hold despite our perceptions of unlimited American power and wealth. We the citizens of the United States are trapped like rats conditioned not to escape. We'll be squashed or driven out of the cages we've constructed for ourselves.



# 467 Hints of Unity, Coherence, and Completeness

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1298>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/06/08.]

Since 2006, I've been writing books and essays, nearly all of which are available for free downloading on the Internet. My main theme is simply the need to see our world as being the universe in light of God's purposes for this concrete realm of Creation, which includes the need to see the entirety of Creation by properly disciplined speculation. The world in itself is unified and coherent and complete. Creation can be described in similar terms and so can any entity properly labeled a human person. I'll also claim that a civilization can be described in similar terms and will deal with that a little more later in this essay.

We can think of these three defining characteristic, unity and coherence and completeness, as signs of a moral narrative and we then see hints of ways to produce a Christian understanding of being in light of both revelation and also modern empirical knowledge. As part of that, we see hints of new Christian forms of politics and economics, new Christian ways to achieve moral order and to tell the stories of these morally ordered communities. We can see hints of new ways to integrate our individual selves into new forms of communities and new ways of forming relationships to other communities. We can see new ways of forming communities in which Christians and non-Christians can fully participate.

The point I wish to drive home is the need to re-establish the foundations of our civilization or to build new foundations for a new civilization. A civilization is essentially the human minds of its members and its entirety, the minds of the individuals and also the communal mind which Jacques

Barzun calls the 'intellect'. (Here and for the rest of this essay, I'll ignore the physical infrastructure such as precision manufacturing machinery which, if lost, would take several stages of engineering and manufacturing to recover.) A well-developed human mind is essentially the civilization in which it is found. The decay of our civilization, our moral disorder and other forms of disorder, are the same as our minds, our individuals minds and our communal mind. Our inability to engage in proper politics, our inability to control our habits, our inability to hold together our families and church communities and social clubs, are the external signs of the chaos which is us and our ways of understanding reality and of forming relationships.

A civilization is like unto a world or a moral person: unified and coherent and complete in itself. Can we simply will to instill a better order in our governments and our businesses, in our houses of worship and our family homes? No, we have no viable order to shape ourselves and our communities. The world accessible to man's exploration and exploitation has expanded greatly. It grew far larger than the prior understandings of that world. Satan hasn't invaded. We've simply failed to recognize the evidence of how large and complex the world is. We try to deal with this world now known to be immensely large and extraordinarily complex in terms of intellectual systems better suited to a world of villages, low levels of technology and scientific knowledge, slow transportation, and slow, low-capacity communication.

We can't move forward before we develop a new view of our empirical world and all that we might speculate or believe to lie beyond that world. The stuff of stars and of human bodies and of spacetime is what God uses to tell the story which is the world. The relationships involving all that stuff and the entities made from it are the relationships of that story and tell us much about our relationships to God. We need to have a greater understanding to guide us as we develop more focused understandings, as we try to work out the problems of our political and religious communities, as we try to figure out how to safely feed and entertain ourselves and our children. But it's necessarily an iterative process in which we, some of us in any case, concentrate on those more specialized viewpoints. What the specialists learn feeds into the greater understanding of human history, of the world, of all Creation.

We should take 'understand' in the widest sense, the sense which takes in all of human knowledge and plausible speculation. We need to have a narrative that includes a very fundamental understanding of this universe's

explosive expansion 15 billion years ago. That narrative should also consider dinosaurs and mastodons and apish men. It should consider abstract algebra and biochemistry and bridge design. It should consider the various ways of making music in Vienna and Bogota and the jungles of Brazil and Nigeria as well as the hills of Arkansas and the steppes of Mongolia. It should be willing and able to make judgments about the relative worth of those various ways of making music. It should make some sense of the human liking for symmetry and for certain color combinations. It should make sense of nuclear families and extended families and tribes and New England towns and Asian cities and Nigerian medical societies. Again, it's an iterative process because the greater understanding has to develop from more specific understandings of concrete being and particular entities and specific stories. That greater narrative will be the shape of our minds and much of the contents of those minds as well as our communal minds.

The poet and farmer Wendell Berry has told us that if we find a moral way to make our livings, we'd know how to solve our ecological problems. I'm expanding this idea greatly to claim that if we find a way to make sense of all that we know or believe to exist, we'll also know how to restore moral order to our various communities and how to make our livings and how to set priorities on technological and scientific research as well as better defining what serves human needs in the development of mines and the construction of factories and transportation systems. We'll know how to feed ourselves and our children, how to entertain ourselves, and how to properly care for our property. We'll know how to re-form our civilization or how to develop a new one and we'd know in the process of doing so.

Arguably, our largest political communities, nation-states, are currently the most morally chaotic of our institutions and are causing a variety of other forms of decay and chaos. I'd claim, and have claimed, that we Americans desired, in a unformed and childish way, to become the citizens of a large nation-state with high moral standards and have failed to follow the proper path of growth and development. We certainly learned the art of nurturing self-esteem, a trait we elders criticize so freely in the youth. Rather than being a virtuous people capable of examining our actions and evaluating their practical and moral effects, we patted ourselves on the back whether we were sending money to tsunami victims or devastating Baghdad—such an attack on a city is fully and undeniably a war-crime in terms of Christian just-war teachings. We let our politicians and bankers and industrialists get out of control, after all we got a share of the borrowed

money, and then accepted what they did as part of our efforts to, above all, feel good about ourselves.

We never matured, not as individual citizens and not as a country. We have formed ourselves into a mob marching to the primitive beat of modern pop music. Our American mob is collectively at the moral level of a self-righteous 13 year-old. Such a mob can produce some ugly and bloody scenes when it controls, or its leaders control, as much fire-power as the U.S. armed forces can deliver. A different set of ugly scenes of poverty can be produced when those leaders control the world's reserve currency. Those leaders are more ruthless than the rest of us, less inhibited in criminal behavior, but they too are part of the herd. They too are us.

Clearly we don't yet know how to develop into a community on the scale of the United States and seem to have forgotten how to develop into smaller scale communities. We will eventually develop into a community far larger than even the U.S. or China—the Body of Christ. If we don't yet know how to develop a coherent political entity on a scale seemingly indicated in the modern world, we have to realize that we'll have to pay the price of retreating and letting ourselves be guided by our developing minds and especially that communal mind which doesn't yet exist. The processes of such developments will not be, could not be, centrally planned and controlled but they need to be conscious unlike the workings of a pure Darwinian process, more conscious than the workings of Adam Smith's Invisible Hand. What does that mean? First of all, we need to intend what is most important, where I use 'intend' in the Thomistic and biological sense of being a step forward in a growth process. More than that? I don't know but I'll learn by participating in the development of a new civilization or the re-formation of Western Civilization, a development which includes the development of our individual and communal minds.

Having said all that, I'm going to point to an interesting discussion which doesn't go far enough, though that's a weak criticism when we're exploring a world which seems different than we and our ancestors assumed in recent centuries. Ralph Hancock has posted the essay *Prospects for the Democratic Nation-State: What State Are We In?* at <http://libertylawsite.org/liberty-forum/prospects-for-the-democratic-nation-state-what-state-are-we-in/>. There are also two responses. Aurelian Craiutu has posted the essay: *Loving the Democratic State Moderately* at <http://libertylawsite.org/liberty-forum/loving-the-democratic-state-moderately/>.

Daniel McCarthy has posted the essay: *From the Nation State to the New Church* at <http://libertylawsite.org/liberty-forum/from-the-nation-state-to-the-new-church/>.

I have one major criticism of Mr. Hancock's essay and this is what my essay has led up to. He is concerned with the fundamental problems in the political institutions of a civilization melting down (to re-form or to be replaced?) in terms of that civilization's own understanding of its mind: something that is labeled 'reason' has to struggle to gain control over something that is labeled 'passion'. Modern neuroscientists have shot down such a model of human nature. In any case, Mr. Hancock suggests—quite properly—that we need a more humane, less technocratic or rationalistic, understanding of 'reason', but such a suggestion is reasonable as stated only if we stay within the general limits of the Western tradition—a behavior not found in the founders or re-founders of civilizations. Instead, and at the very least, we need to develop a radical re-understanding of the human mind as I've suggested starting with an early weblog entry which can be found in this book as Chapter 69, *Hellenistic Metaphysics is Too Small*.

Another way of stating my criticism of nearly all current efforts to understand our problems and move forward: they assume a way of thinking and try to impose it upon a recalcitrant reality when they should be learning how to think from that reality which, after all, was created by God. At least we Christians believe so and I would move on to explicitly claim that all of Creation is the manifestation of thoughts of God, thoughts He wished us to share with Him, thoughts which we should use to shape our minds and become better images of the Almighty. God's mind and imagination are beyond human understanding, but He gave us a world where we can share His thoughts and also His creative freedom, learning how to be like God, how to share His life one day. But we learn no such thing if we continue to bring our human systems of thought to our exploration of reality. Gauss and Riemann and Einstein found that the greatest of thinkers hadn't provided what they needed to understand space and time and they responded properly to a world a bit more complex than could be assembled from Euclidean instructions. We are learning, very reluctantly, a similar lesson about human nature and human history, about the nature and history of human communities.

Maybe I've done a good job. Maybe I've made a good first effort in a major move forward into a new understanding of Creation and the Creator. Maybe not. At the very least, I've shown the large scale of any plausible

effort to make that move towards an understanding of a well-ordered human race in a Creation which is well-ordered. It's not nearly enough to criticize our failed and failing institutions in terms of the ways of thought of a civilization which has itself failed to produce an adequate understanding of Creation in light of vast piles of undigested and partially digested empirical knowledge and in light of all the possibilities and dangers which have risen with modern technology and the sheer size of human communities. Framing the criticism in slightly modified terms maybe helps a little to understand what's going on as the building falls down upon you but it doesn't help you to rebuild before it falls or to move elsewhere and build anew.

# 468 Christian Traditionalism: Moving With God's Story

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1304>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/06/14.]

Call it traditionalism or conservatism if you wish—though I refer to an attitude and a body of thought far from the comic-book views of the mass-media commentators and the ideologues they serve. What is it?

One of my favorite, perhaps overused, quotations is from the historian Carroll Quigley (see [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Carroll\\_Quigley](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Carroll_Quigley) for a short article and pointer to his major works):

The truth unfolds in time through a communal process.

In this idea, we have a better definition of a true Christian traditionalism or conservatism. Does it serve to define other forms of traditionalism and conservatism? Put that question aside for a short while. I'll provide my own understanding of what it is that we Christians are to learn from tradition and from the current state of the world, my own understanding of what it is that we are to conserve.

A Christian conservative, unlike perhaps most others, isn't interested – at least, shouldn't be interested—in preserving a particular social or economic or political structure in this passing and mortal world. In general, the Bible itself presents no such structures, nor even an ecclesiastical structure, which we modern Christians would think to be worth reviving or conserving. Jesus Himself denied the absolute value of the family and of the Sabbath.

If the Christian Bible is unsettling in denying the primacy of much that conservatives would declare among the Permanent Things, what does it give us? It gives us a variety of books of prophecy, wisdom writings, histories

of ancient Semites, four strangely limited biographies of Jesus of Nazareth, and various sorts of writings of followers of that same Jesus. Overall, the Christian Bible gives us a story, a narrative directed to the moral purposes of the Creator. And it gives us stories of attempts to respond to God's world, some attempts being successes and others being failures and others having ambiguous results. It doesn't tell us where the story is heading nor does it tell us exactly how to play our parts in that story, but it does give us much in the way of advice on how to find our way in that story.

A Christian traditionalist or conservative, as paradoxical as this might first seem, is concerned with the forward movement of God's story and only concerned about the things of tradition to the extent they are playing a valid part of this ongoing story or are helping us to understand this story in which they no longer play a part. We aren't called to preserve the structures or ways of David's kingdom nor the ways of simple Hebrews at the time of Jesus nor those of on-the-move evangelists over the next century or so. Why would we think our calling is to preserve the ways, political or social or economic or cultural, of Italy during the Middle Ages or England during the Age of Reason or Germany during the glory years of the ruthlessly rational and remarkably competent Bismarck or Europe during the exciting decades before the guns let loose in August of 1914 or even working-class Waukegan during the boyhood of the recently deceased Ray Bradbury? We certainly aren't called upon to conserve the American way of life in its current morally disordered state.

In this world, we are characters in God's story, participants in the Body of Christ as that Body develops in its mortal form as a community of mortal creatures. It's the story, the Body in its entirety, not the organs of that Body which are important; those organs might come and go during mortal development. It's the story, not the structures in which those organs are set, structures not necessarily less mortal than many of the organs. As the kingdoms of Israel and Judah came and went, so will the United States. As the Aristotelian summation of all that was worth knowing came and went, so will modern forms of knowledge, including the forms I'm developing. Certainly the Christian Church will persevere for She is the organ of worship and of moral and spiritual order, but She will change. She has to change for She is currently so ineffective at even properly shaping Her priests and bishops and other ministers, so cowardly in the face of criminal wars and abuses by the powerful, so falsely charitable when accepting checks to do works from centralized welfare-warfare powers, so falsely courageous when

the battle is lost or when those powers threaten something of direct interest to the bishops.

The story continues. To uphold tradition properly, we must study and explore in God's Creation. We must learn to see even slight hints of His acts of creation, His acts of shaping what He has created, and to see the slighter hints of His purposes which might tell us where the story is headed. What is the Good Lord up to? We now know the Creator's story is set in a spacetime which seems strange to us. We know also that matter and movement and relationships between entities aren't what we would think from our ordinary lives. We have learned, by shedding of much blood and destruction of much important infrastructure and art, that human nature—especially when united in certain types of political movements—is capable of great evil: masses of nice men can reluctantly but faithfully serve a Hitler or Stalin rather than join the persecuted.

The good we have learned to do in living our parts in this story can have a dark side—the technology which has raised living standards and increased expected life-spans can destroy human relationships and can also destroy or badly damage some parts of our physical environments and can also stimulate selection processes on infectious organisms which might produce truly horrible epidemics.

The bad we have learned to do can at least hint at the side of light and goodness—some sadistic barbarians, such as the Assyrian emperors or William the Conqueror, have formed political entities which proved to be good settings for the development of better forms of organization such as countries republican in government and capitalist in economy. Should we celebrate that some of the good in our modern world came from the sufferings of those raped and murdered, enslaved or left with no way of making a living, by one conqueror or sometimes a parade of such brutes? No, but, as I implied in the paragraph above, we should be careful in celebrating even the good we do—it might not be so fully good as we think. We should be joyful for the gifts of God and should ponder how to properly use those gifts and should wonder at the complex nature of those gifts which so often bite us and bite hard.

Even when those inclined to morally well-ordered motivations fall into evil, the ensuing repentance can lead to deeper understandings of moral and spiritual order and to a proper sort of liberalism, generosity of spirit and openness of mind. Such periods can also lead to that old problem of tossing the baby out with the bathwater, beliefs are shed along with the

desire to torture or kill those who disagree with us. During the 1950s and 1960s, Europe showed some promise of having truly renounced her efforts to commit continental suicide. Then, prosperity brought back the hubristic traditions and Europeans have seemingly discovered a way both old and new to destroy their continent and their cultures.

I don't pretend to produce a full catalog of the possibilities we have of learning from the past in God's story, of learning and of changing our very selves in proper response. Call me Janus as I look to what has happened and what is now happening and only partially perceived and likely not at all understood. The past and transitions are what we can know and even the past is not well-known in a true sense until understood in light of a worldview, an understanding of God's story in light of His purposes. In such a light, the story which is our world can be seen as unified and coherent and complete within itself. That is, it has those qualities until we learn by exploration or the world teaches us by perhaps cruel suffering something important and not yet part of the story as we understand it based upon the memories and customs found in our traditions. We explore, in some ages with faith and courage, yet even in such ages we don't much understand those ongoing transitions which are so disruptive and more so promising. Columbus didn't just sail the ocean blue, he blasted apart a logjam in the minds and spirits of the Europeans. The ensuing onrush of water did a lot of harm as well as still more good.

As we sail into our own oceans blue, lacking the faith and courage of Columbus, we leave the deck and settle into our cabins stocked with all the man-made items which make us feel comfortable and safe even as the boat rocks and rolls and even as we, if we are honest, admit we fear success in our journey as much as we fear failure. Perhaps more. And so those who think to be conservatives, pull out the books on the shelves of those cabins, dusting and fanning the pages to check for worms and other vermin. They gain much true wisdom and some distorted wisdom by pondering the criticisms Tacitus made of the corruptions of the Roman Empire and the highly intelligent debates between the Founders of a once promising American Republic. They stare with admiration at the paintings and statues of past centuries. Too many of them remain in those cabins, thinking them to be preserving something they label the Permanent Things.

It's the world outside that cabin which provides the stuff and the experiences which can generate new ideas to fill new books as wonderful as those of Sophocles and Virgil and Shakespeare. But we can rise to those heights

because we've moved on to hitherto unknown regions of God's world. We don't stand on their shoulders. We move some miles ahead of their graves.

We should conserve what is worth saving in light of our understanding of our past and what is happening now. We should honor, if possible, that which is no longer worth saving if it had helped to advance God's story. We should even ponder respectfully such horrors as the French Revolution, so bloody and also so destructive of decrepit political and economic and social structures being preserved by those who were profiting from the wrong sort of conservation. Perhaps a defective moral order, one which was moreover structured to meet the needs of a prior age, could be a barrier to the development of a better order, perhaps it could be an obstruction to the forward movement of God's story.

The story, when seen as such, is dynamic. It's not simply some sort of game in which the pieces move themselves, sometimes with the assistance or even the insistence of God. The pieces change, even change themselves by how they move. The board changes and also shows itself to have always been different as it is explored. Many of the rules change or at least show themselves to be different as the pieces interact with each other and with the board and with the Creator. We need to move up to a higher level of abstraction so we can see what is truly permanent, invariant in terms of modern mathematics and physics. I don't claim to have any such vision and might not reach that vision in my allotted time on Earth.

In ancient times, it was plausible to see a proper order in a crystalline form. More recently, men began to think in terms of a society which moved in a way corresponding to Newtonian dynamics. Smaller communities of men might be bound to a larger center of power and culture and that entity which was seen to reside at the center of power was unaffected by the movements of those smaller and more distant entities. Then, as was the case in Newtonian dynamics, thinkers began to adjust for the effects of smaller communities on the greater center, coming to realize 'binding forces' worked on the entire system and all the entities in that system—even the greatest and most central of entities. Over time, various thinkers have done much to account for such complications and nonlinearities. These analogies from earlier understandings of physics to moral systems or political systems didn't live only in the human mind. They were part of the nature of created being.

And, now, we need to move on to understand a world which seems to sometimes move well outside the boundaries of any system of reason we

have yet developed. As one example, I think we need some abstraction of the geometric concept of geodesic (see <http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Geodesic>) which has certainly proven its worth in physics and other sciences including the engineering sciences. In that article, we read a limited definition, but one that covers our needs and more:

[A] geodesic is a generalization of the notion of a “straight line” to “curved spaces”. In the presence of a Riemannian metric, geodesics are defined to be (locally) the shortest path between points in the space. In the presence of an affine connection, geodesics are defined to be curves whose tangent vectors remain parallel if they are transported along it.

The concept of geodesic practically invited itself into theories of gravity, which—roughly speaking—have become theories of spacetime since Einstein gave us his theories of relativity. I think some corresponding concept, abstracted properly, can play a role in restoring some serious understanding of this world and of God’s way of moving it towards His purposes. How do we get to a proper abstraction and a better understanding of our world? Let me retreat a little to talk in very general terms about the ways in which our understanding of the nature of being, including the being of moral creatures, are truly meta-physics, dependent upon ideas drawn from physics.

Plato and others did much good in the early years of philosophical and scientific thought by working with models which saw some sort of ideal forms which were static. A man, a tree, certainly a triangle, are imperfect images of some perfect entity, some Real entity. Paths, including paths of a moral creature through its life, were seen in Euclidean terms. Moral paths were usually seen as the geodesic of a Euclidean plane: a straight line. To be sure, some such as Dante intuited a more complex reality—in the opening lines of the *Inferno*, the path curves away from the non-observant pilgrim.

Static understandings of the world as a whole, of God’s story which is a morally purposeful narrative, are no longer possible though such understandings of classes of entities and of individual entities which are static for substantial periods of time will continue to carry much truth. We can consider first-order changes to static entities and – even more importantly— to their relationships. That brings us to an idea of an orderly but steady movement through time, corresponding to the concept of velocity in physics

but leaving us in a pre-Newtonian state. Even Galileo didn't fully appreciate the importance of second-order changes, acceleration, but that was expected since the calculus was needed for a true appreciation.

Second-order changes correspond to acceleration or to a geodesic through a curved spacetime—the curvature of spacetime might be flat and the geodesic is then a straight line. I imagine that any realistic understanding of the more general structure of our world, the structure in which we moral creatures live and move and form our relationships, will be very complex. That structure will be a manifestation of an high-level abstraction which will perhaps be a straightforward generalization of the spacetime of General Relativity and other theories of gravity. Perhaps.

I'll refer to the following graph I've used before:

We can start at *Node y2*, which represents our current understanding of *The Spacetime of Our Universe*. This node is found on the bottom row. From that node, we work our way up through higher levels of abstraction until we reach a level which shows some promise for helping to understand, for example, human nature. So, by abstracting somewhat, we can reach *Node x* which is *Abstractions Leading to Complex Paths* and then travel down to *Node z2* which is *Human Nature* including our understanding of our moral pathways through this world. This understanding is also supplemented by other abstractions as shown by the arrow from the unlabeled node titled *Various Concrete Abstractions*. By *concrete abstractions*, I intend to convey the idea of a level of abstract being which is close to that of our concrete world.

Whew!

I'll pull things together by generalizing the old rule: just stay out of God's way and He'll do what needs doing. No one who's ever said that to me has been passive. They had something in mind which kept them actively doing their duty but in a way that kept them from obstructing God's story. So, the rule is wrong if we try to take it literally. It becomes more plausible if we try to state it in terms of a geodesic: We should become sensitive to the movements of God's story so that we move along the main plot-line with minimum effort. We wouldn't have to try at all to journey towards the Sun if we were in space and were captured by its gravitational field. We certainly aren't making any effort to move along with our galaxy towards a faraway gravitation center called the Great Attractor. We also wouldn't have to try at all to move along with God's story if we let ourselves be captured by that story and let ourselves be pulled along toward His goals

for this world.

And, yet, there are all sorts of things going on locally as we all stream, willingly or not, towards God's purposed end for this world. As we can properly cooperate with physical forces or can defy gravity, perhaps for the thrill of some so-called extreme sport or perhaps because we like to drink and then drive recklessly along a cliff, so we can also cooperate with the forces of God's story or can try to defy them. By responding to the more local matters in a morally responsible way, we can still find ourselves struggling against the divine narrative forces which draw us on. Sometimes, taking some sort of risk that defies the forces of God's world, as did the early aviators, is the morally responsible thing to do. God didn't give us a simple path to navigate and the nature of the Body of Christ as it develops is quite complex, complicated, self-conflicting in the Body's mortal form, vulnerable to invasion and to parasitic infestations, etc.

I'll be trying to deal with some of those complications and complexities in writings to come soon, God willing, but I'll quickly deal with the question I raised at the beginning of this digressive essay that was, to be quite honest, hard to bring to a coherent end: Does my understanding and expansion of Quigley's claim serve to define other forms of traditionalism and conservatism? I don't think so, though Jews and Muslims might be able to produce a somewhat similar claim which allows for their different views on the relationship of God to His Creation. Those who don't see this world as a Creation, or a part of a greater Creation, won't be able to think along these lines. At least I don't think so.

And even Jews and Muslims see God as a King who rules over a world separate from Him. We Christians see God, at least I do, as a Creator who brings moral order to the concrete realms of His Creation by the way He shapes rawer or more abstract stuff. By His very acts of manifesting truths as the raw stuff of created being and then shaping that raw stuff by various stages from the human viewpoint, and then telling a story at an appropriately concrete level, God brings about moral order. He brings it about because He is in those acts of creation and shaping since all created things are thoughts God chose to manifest in Creation. He is a Creator and a King only by analogy.

There is much to be done in understanding a world unfolding itself in human perception and—more reluctantly—in human thoughts. All of Creation, including the concrete realm which is this world, is proving to be richer and more complex than can be understood in terms of Hellenistic

thought or early Christian thought or Medieval Jewish thought or any other thought which has yet taken firm shape.

My effort to understand the world in the best available terms isn't an academic exercise. It's part of an effort to bring a new phase of Christian civilization into being. Understanding, truly knowing, is also doing. To truly understand is be part of God's story, moving with the Almighty and doing your own work in your little piece of the world. And in this way, I propose, a Christian truly conserves, truly saves what should be saved in tradition. He conserves by helping God to change this world and all the entities which are part of it to the goal of bringing the Body of Christ to unity and coherence and completeness.

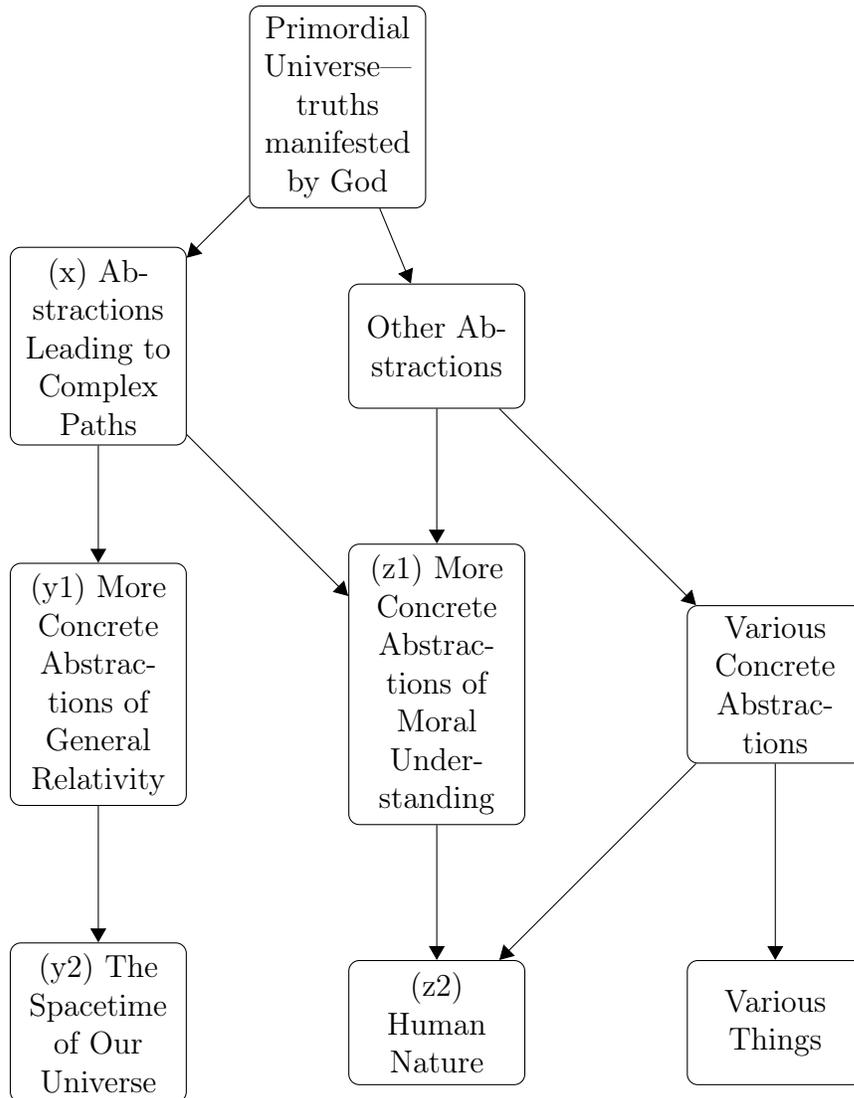


Figure 468.1: Simple Relationships of Abstract and Concrete Levels of Being

# 469 Can We Retain or Restore American Prosperity?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1311>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/06/20.]

A few weeks back, Michael S. Greve published a discussion of one of our fundamental problems in these troubled times, as opposed to the secondary problems discussed by the better technical experts in financing, investment, etc. Greve's essay, in three parts, can be found at:

1. *The Constitution of Affluence, Part I* at <http://libertylawsite.org/2012/05/17/the-constitution-of-affluence-part-i/>,
2. *The Constitution of Affluence, Part II* at <http://libertylawsite.org/2012/05/21/the-constitution-of-affluence-part-ii/>,
3. *The Constitution of Affluence, Part III* at <http://libertylawsite.org/2012/05/23/the-constitution-of-affluence-part-iii/>,

The first essay begins with Greve's statement of the problem he is addressing:

We live under a Constitution of Affluence. Obviously, I don't mean a constitution that produces affluence. (Prosperity may be right around the corner, but it's the corner behind us.) I mean a Constitution whose basic institutions presuppose and depend on high levels of affluence and, equally important, public expectations that life will get better and richer.

The United States Constitution—the formal Constitution and its nineteenth-century arrangements—is (or was) not a Constitution of Affluence in the sense just explained. It sought to create conditions that would be conducive to rising prosperity—principally, by way of ensuring political stability, meaning institutional arrangements that would let citizens go about their business without constant fear that somebody, someplace might confiscate the proceeds. But it was supposed to work, and it did work, even in times of prolonged economic stress—in one of those “varying crises of human affairs,” as John Marshall might have said and in fact did say.

We don’t want the conditions of prosperity. We don’t want to work to understand and to do. We just want prosperity and now we assume prosperity is ever coming our way. Americans remain an assembly of mostly hardworking peoples but we think prosperity, a recent-model car and an annual vacation to some tropical paradise, are our right and not the result of luck in ancestors and in date of birth as much as a result of our hard work as individuals. In many ages, men and women have worked still harder than we just to avoid too many weeks of empty stomachs and too many children buried at a young age. We learned what the world is really like during our years of prosperity and so did our leaders who seem to be dull of wit and empty of knowledge as much as they are overly ambitious and excessively respectful of their own less than modest talents. We willingly hand over power to those leaders who make promises corresponding to our false beliefs about the nature of reality—which are theirs as well. We turn away from any politician or other leaders or thinkers who might remind us, as did Rudyard Kipling in his poem, *Gods of the Copybook Headings* – see [http://www.kipling.org.uk/poems\\_copybook.htm](http://www.kipling.org.uk/poems_copybook.htm), that payment will be made when those gods, the moral rules which govern human life, catch up to us. Peter cannot ever be robbed to pay Paul. I would add that Peter shouldn’t even assume he’ll ever be able to make enough to support just himself and his family. He should take steps to ensure his prosperity rather than just knowing he can always count on his corporate employer and his insurance company and his mutual fund and the Social Security system.

We can address a multitude of secondary problems in the American citizenry but the primary problems remain as Greve states above. The primary problem, that is, if we assume we inhabit yet a Western Civilization

which is intact, that is, if we assume we're standing upon some foundation which supports us as we go about living and making our livings, raising our children and worshipping as we see fit. Under this assumption, the primary problem might not be solvable until some disaster brings down the rickety superstructures built upon the foundation, but the foundation remains as do the building materials.

If we stay with that assumption, that there is a good slab of concrete beneath our feet, we could deal with a variety of serious and true problems which are secondary. Many intelligent and insightful analysts, including a number of amateurs blogging on the Internet, are addressing such problems as inadequate or wrongly-targeted regulation, malfunctioning educational systems, and so on. Greve says there are no solutions because we've built a political system that operates as if the money will continue to flow even if the politicians and general citizenry begin to realize the flow is diminishing in real terms. That is, we are strongly encouraged by the system we've built and by our own inclinations to continue acting as if the fiscal problems are a mere aberration that will disappear at any second. Moreover, we'll soon be at each other's throats.

As general prosperity dwindles for at least a while, those who know school budgets can't be cut will be at war with those who know police department and fire department budgets can't be cut. There are pensions and health benefits for the elderly and the disabled and the impoverished. There are wars which some think need fighting and, in any case, expensive but often ineffective military systems to buy. There is a huge and growing national security bureaucracy and industry. There are roads to be maintained. We know, in our heart of hearts, that there is money to do all of this for all of this is necessary to help us maintain the living standard which is our right. Mostly, we just know the world is truly what it seemed to be for the sixty years or so of never-ending American prosperity and power. Surely, such an important aspect of reality can't change.

I wrote about this human weakness a few years back in an essay responding to an article which "is about an effort to find, in archaeological and evolutionary biological terms, a way of speaking of the odd fact that the residents of a once successful but collapsing civilization will go on acting the same way they, or their ancestors, did when that civilization was prosperous and growing." Chapter 409, *Individuals and Herds*, provides more discussion as well as a link to that article which started from the discovery that the leaders and citizenry of a phase or local manifestation of Mayan

civilization destroyed by ecological problems were aware of those problems as they developed and did nothing in response.

We may be in worse shape than those Mayans and others studied by anthropologists and historians trying to deal with this lack of response by peoples aware their civilization was being destroyed. If there was a loss of faith in the Mayan understanding of reality because of their problems, that understanding would have, in some strong sense, remained intact if a bit battered. We don't have an corresponding understanding of reality. We've lost it as modern empirical evidence has piled up telling us the specific understandings of Western civilization, understandings of space and time and matter and human nature, are wrong. I would say those understandings aren't rich enough or complex enough to cover reality as we now know it, but nearly all modern human beings, including most scholars and rabbis and learned poets, won't be able to dig in and see the situation for what it is. They will see strong hints of utter wrongness. As Walker Percy told us: we're lost in the cosmos. But we're lost just because we developed the knowledge and skills to launch ourselves out into that cosmos, leaving behind a world falsely understood. And we haven't developed a proper understanding of that cosmos even though we're penetrating it in a high-speed rocket. We no longer see a true world, the universe seen in light of God's moral purposes. But we see the universe with greater clarity and in greater detail than even Einstein could have thought possible a century ago. We simply need to develop a moral understanding, that is, we need to find a moral narrative that provides an understanding of human individual and communal lives, of stars and rattlesnakes, of modern theories of gravity and quantum mechanics, of a man who was the incarnate Son of God—true creature and true Creator.

I deal with our problems at that bedrock level in Chapter 467, *Hints of Unity, Coherence, and Completeness*. In that chapter, I somewhat developed the idea that we need to rebuild our civilization, and—equivalently, our minds—at a fundamental level. Efforts to fix our banking or political or industrial systems, efforts to set priorities in a world of large but finite resources, will fail if we don't first develop an understanding of our world, if we don't find a meaning for our individual and communal lives.

So: Can We Retain or Restore American Prosperity? My answer is: Only if we first understand the world in which we would be prosperous, which means we'd have to also come to understand what sort of prosperity we wish to have.

# 470 The Greatest Achievement of Medieval Civilization

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1318>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/06/25.]

In June of 2012, I read *Western Europe in the Middle Ages, 300-1475, Third Edition* [131] by Brian Tierney and Sidney Painter. The book ended with these wise words:

In the last century of the medieval era, the peoples of Europe had to cope with an unprecedented combination of plague, war, schism, and economic decline, all occurring simultaneously and all interacting with one another. In the face of these disasters, medieval men did not lose their nerve. They did not succumb to a “death wish.” Instead, they kept working at their problems, solved them as best they could, and in doing so, brought into existence the institutions of the early modern world. Thus the “time of troubles” of the late Middle Ages did not lead to a disintegration of Western civilization but to a new era of expansion and achievement. Unlike the population of ancient Rome, the peoples of medieval Europe conducted themselves with enough sense and courage to avert the threat of a new Dark Age. That was the greatest achievement of medieval civilization. [page 575]

It’s clear we’re going through troubled times so far as our political and economic systems go. Our financial systems have become bloated looting operations, in league with the politicians and bureaucrats of the powerful nation-states. The dominant power in the world, the U.S., was never so pure as naive Americans believe and has now lost all sense of moral decency in

its behavior overseas. As bad as it is to conduct criminal wars as a national policy and to use taxpayer money to rescue financial crooks when they lose their custom-tailored shirts, I think we have still deeper problems. See Chapter 467, *Hints of Unity, Coherence, and Completeness* for a recent overview of my claims about our fundamental problems and what we can do to move forward.

The obvious question is: will we conduct ourselves “with enough sense and courage to avert the threat of a new Dark Age”? There are good signs, some of which can be seen just by Googling for phrases such as “sustainable communities” or “resilient communities”. ‘Communities’ is the key word. We don’t need to populate the hills and deserts with heavily-armed sociopaths preaching an incoherent and immoral sort of radical individualism. We need local communities to start restoring some balance to our dependency relationships. We also need larger-scale communities, religious and political, because we’re finding ourselves in a complex world with a huge human population. We face problems which need to be dealt with inside of very large communities, though those giant communities themselves will provide only a setting and not any viable solutions.

We need to work hard to develop our “sense and courage.” And we should also approach our tasks of building with humility and with a respect for the real world. We should allow new communities to develop as they will though we should direct them to moral and humane purposes. As individuals and as communities, we will do our duties by responding to opportunities and problems courageously and with good sense, not by seeking to impose our will upon the recalcitrant stuff and the powerful forces of this world, this story being told by God.

# 471 As Bodies are Frozen Soul, Politics and Economics are Frozen Morality

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1330>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/07/02.]

I've written in the past that we can think, with proper qualifications and definitions, of physical matter including our bodies as being frozen soul: see Chapter 172, *Frozen Soul and Other Delicacies* for a recent essay discussing that claim. This language of "frozen soul" is another way of thinking about the spectrum of created being:

1. God manifested the truths He chose as the raw stuff of Creation.
2. The Almighty shaped more particular forms of abstract being from those pure truths.
3. After some unknown number of steps of increasing particularity (maybe just one but I suspect more), God shaped the concrete stuff of this universe and began to use it to tell a story which I call our world.

I was motivated to change the rules of the metaphysical game a little bit by changes inside of me which came as I recovered a strong form of Christian faith and then began to read substantial books, including books and other works in the fields of mathematics, physics, and brain-sciences. Those led to other fields such as evolutionary biology but, at least at first, I was quite affected by some accessible but serious works in cosmology and relativity

and quantum physics. Specifically, I learned of the discovery of modern physicists that some of the concrete forces and particles of our universe are particular entities which come from the breaking of more elegant or more symmetric entities. See the article at <http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Electroweak> for a brief description of the electroweak force which breaks down or freezes into, in relatively low-energy environments, to the electromagnetic force and the weak nuclear force. The electroweak force, so far as I understand matters, couldn't be observed, it couldn't exist as such, under the conditions we would consider normal, including even such extreme environments as the plasma atmosphere of the sun—millions of degrees hot.

As go forces, so go the associated particles, leptons (such as electrons and neutrinos) with W-bosons and photons as particles which exchange the forces. As the best current theories have it, the particles of our universe are the results of more symmetric entities breaking. The current celebrity particle, the Higgs boson is also incorporated into the Glashow-Weinberg-Salam model. For short articles on the three theorists awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1979 for developing this model, see [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Steven\\_Weinberg](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Steven_Weinberg) (Steven Weinberg), [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Sheldon\\_Glashow](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Sheldon_Glashow) (Sheldon Glashow), and [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Abdus\\_Salam](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Abdus_Salam) (Abdus Salam).

In other terms, the electroweak force doesn't exist as such in this concrete realm of Creation, but I could say it does exist in those pieces from its shattered self. It's pretty general knowledge what electromagnetic force does. The weak nuclear force brings about the transitions between a neutron and two particles—a proton and an electron. The electromagnetic force and the electroweak force are, in a manner of thinking, shards of the same force and yet they operate in completely different ways. Forces, interactions, relationships are part of created being and also lie on a spectrum from the more abstract to the more concrete.

Moral relationships are the ties between social beings and also the ties between individuals or communities and lesser or greater realms of Creation. They are also the relationships between creatures, including communities of creatures, and their Creator.

Particular sorts of relationships correspond to particular sorts of entities or to particular aspects of complex entities. They are particularized forms of more symmetric and more elegant relationships. Moral relationships, speaking in general terms, are those which connect us to other complex en-

tities, most especially to other morally aware entities. In this case, I include such totalities as the Universe or all of Creation and such communities as the body of physicists or the body of Orthodox Jews and also complex environments such as the local watershed including its plants and animals and fungi.

The political communities exist to establish and maintain public order, internally in the case of all levels of politics and externally in the case of national governments—in terms of human political organizations in 2012. The economic communities exist to produce the goods we need to survive or to enjoy life beyond simple survival. Political communities seek a certain sort of public order in which citizens feel safe from street-criminals and fraudulent businessmen at the same time that economic communities seek a sort of order which involves such local turbulence as the destruction of entire industries when no longer needed or the downgrading of the reward to certain lines of work. The morality appropriate to economic activities would include such matters, some coming under the Ten Commandments, as honesty to customers and to employees and to employers and to governments. It includes a desire to obey the legitimate criminal statues and, at times, a pragmatic willingness to obey the abusive or over-expanded criminal statues as well. It doesn't include a desire for justice nor even a pragmatic willingness to see justice done as part of the economic system. The better man, the man of high virtue, might have the lesser skills as an entrepreneur or salesman or machinist. Obeying the basic rules of economic behavior should, with very few exceptions, allow that virtuous man to make an honest and decent living as defined by his place and times, but the scoundrel might every well be the one living in the mansion on the hill. Moreover, his ruthlessness might have played a role in his successful rescue of a struggling company, perhaps cutting the employment in half but keeping at least those jobs and that wealth-producing capacity. Living in a city of crumbling factories shouldn't deny a man a fair day in court but they might deny him a good living without the businessmen and business communities being at all guilty of immoral behavior. Harm can come as a result of morally condemnable criminal acts or as a result of bad luck in the economy. A man can lose all he has but such losses occur in the economic realm with no moral guilt involved.

None of this is new, only put in terms of a new metaphysics, a new view of Creation and the entities it contains. This is to say I've tried to view the issues and to write about them in a way consistent with my proposed ways

of viewing all of Creation in its different realms. As the title of this essay goes: As bodies are frozen soul, politics and economics are frozen morality. As electromagnetic force and weak nuclear force are results of a shattering of electroweak force as this universe began to expand to a cooler and more particular form, a more concrete form, so political morality and economic morality are the results of a similar shattering of more abstract forms of relationship as particular entities came into existence. They involve overlapping communities and mostly the same individuals but largely separate relationships.

I'm gaining confidence that my way of viewing Creation is quite plausible given what my Christian faith teaches me and given modern empirical knowledge. So it is that I'm pretty confident in the plausibility of what I'm proposing as a general framework for reworking our moral systems into related entities/communities and relationships which are entities in a world of particularity which is the result of the shattering of higher-level symmetries.

I think there has been a modern recognition that something like this is the proper way to view moral systems but there is mostly an inherited tendency to think that there is one sort of moral man formed according to one moral system. So it is that we have politicians, even the honest ones, who tend to believe that the economic system should obey some rule of uniform justice—the good man who has committed no crime shouldn't be prosecuted or persecuted because he lives in a disordered region and he should also not suffer hardship because he is a skilled machinist in a region where such work is disappearing. In a similar way, those who believe in a specific form of justice of the sort administered by political systems think to impose, for example, a sex-equal form of justice inside the family and inside religious organizations. The political ideologues of this modern sort are not willing to accept that women might be willing to give up such a form of equality because they think and feel the way which is plausible for a sex specialized to bear and raise children. Nor do those ideologues, with their sense of justice appropriate for criminal court systems, accept some might believe God ordained or commanded sex-specific roles inside families and at the altar. To criticize in the other direction, we see those who believe in a specific form of charity wishing to impose the moral beliefs and behaviors of charitable activities upon the political and economic realms—perhaps most especially because the zealots in the political and economic realms have already invaded the realm of charity and set up a free-for-all. (This isn't to say that a businessman can't be active in Christian or Jewish or secular

charitable organizations or in political movements, only that he shouldn't be supporting particular charities or particular political causes through his businesses.)

The unity of moral relationships can come into synchronization—in theory—but only in the individual who honors the different sorts of moral relationships proper to the various realms of human activity. The businessman can obey the limited moral rules of the economic realm, oblivious to justice and charity, but he can go home and give proper support to his favorite political organizations and can write checks to send to the synagogue or a struggling monastery or the local animal shelter.



## 472 Why Does Time Move Only Forward?: Some Preliminaries

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1352>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/07/21.]

I've just started to read Hans Reichenbach's *The Direction of Time* [122] and lines of thought came to life before I'd even finished Hilary Putnam's foreword for the 1991 reprinting of an English translation by the University of California Press.

I'll probably write multiple essays on this subject of the direction of time, though it doesn't seem to be a major problem in my worldview. But it does provide some interesting openings for various explorations of that worldview. I'll start off by explaining in this essay why the direction of time isn't a major problem in my worldview, though I've noted in past essays that there is no inherent reason known to mathematicians or physicists why time in a universe like ours moves in any one particular direction. See Chapter 198, *As the Universe Ages, It Forgets What It Once Was* for a recent discussion of some general issues regarding time and the universe.

We live in a concrete, highly particularized, universe in which a variety of decisions have, in a manner of speaking, been made—I qualify matters only to leave room for the truth that God is a Creator whose ways of deciding and implementing His decisions in Creation aren't fully describable in terms of creaturely deciding or creaturely acting. There are a number of physical constants which appear in equations of gravitational force or electromagnetic force, classical or quantum, or nuclear physics or... Though we know not what the exact shape of spacetime is, it seems clear that it has a set of highly particular properties though there are vast numbers of possibilities just in the geometries, topologies, and differential structures currently

being considered as the most plausible, or even the barely plausible, for our universe as we currently know it.

From a practical standpoint, the answer to the question, “Why does time move only in the direction we label as ‘forward’?” is simply: That’s the way the world is. We are creatures of such a world and our minds work as the world works.

Let me unbundle that a little.

In my worldview, as I’ve often explained, I’ve restated the symmetry speculations of physicists and mathematicians in a somewhat sharpened but more meta-physical way:

1. Created being lies on a spectrum from the more abstract to the more concrete, where the more concrete is shaped from the more abstract.
2. Abstract forms of created being remain in the concrete forms which are shaped from them—this can be considered the soul-like aspects of things, especially living things.
3. The directly perceivable aspects of our universe are the aspects of very particular, concrete, thing-like, being.
4. We see the universe as a story being told by the Creator when we come to some understanding, however incomplete and imperfect, of the specific moral purposes of the Almighty.

Let me move a bit beyond my first answer: Time moves as it does because of the need for moral intention in the Thomistic sense, that is, moral growth and development processes. As individuals and as communities and as the Body of Christ as a whole, we intend toward a certain state which has proven to be quite a moving target, which is hardly unexpected since we can’t see even possibilities too far into the future and rarely can be sure about what will happen an hour from now. The basic idea remains the same: We are to first of all accept reality as it is and not just to accept the behavior of atoms before denying the equal but more perceptible reality of moral behavior, in men and wolves, and the immaterial aspects of relations in general.

The universe isn’t forced into the mold of a world, a morally well-ordered story. The universe naturally moves in such a way that certain types of evolution and development occur. Lines of creatures arise which evolve into

lines of social creatures. Stable societies, at least at the level of mammals and birds, involve behaviors which can be properly labeled as ‘moral’, however defective or incomplete the behavior of social birds or rodents. Moral natures and minds and other immaterial entities arise naturally in this world and those immaterial entities are ‘made up’ of relations as the heart is made of flesh and blood. The language is clumsy for now, though I can hope we’ll learn to speak more clearly as we recognize more explicitly that the immaterial aspects of physical creatures are fully as real as the mathematically describable abstract entities which freeze into the stuff of this world. See Chapter 172, *Frozen Soul and Other Delicacies* for a discussion of the symmetry-breaking process by which a force unobservable—as yet—in this universe, the electroweak force, breaks down into the electromagnetic force and the weak nuclear force. For that matter, a little knowledge of the problems that Faraday and others had in establishing the existence of magnetic fields should hint strongly at the truth that we really can’t observe electromagnetism in the same way we can observe a tomato plant or a hunk of asphalt. Fields of all sorts can be directly explored by physical means but they have much of the nature of entities more abstract than the more concrete forms of thing-like being.

Even from a physical standpoint, we’re seeing a universe which makes no sense unless we see it as somehow moving toward certain local goals of order. The universe as a whole has to be seen as at least providing the large-scale setting for the regions of order, even if that order often has immaterial aspects of the sort not to be explored in the way of an experimental physicist—economics and other social sciences remain historical arts more than sciences as we understand the term nowadays. In terms of an anthropomorphic argument, you could move on to draw various sorts of weak or strong conclusions about us not existing to observe the universe unless it were a certain sort of entity or even that the universe in some sense is made for us. This smells too much of subjectivism though the arguments aren’t entirely wrong. If we are to find objective truth of a grander sort, we have to retain an objective attitude when we study the universe—most specifically in terms of its current phase of expansion. We must assume the universe is an entity which exists and see what that means before we start discussing a creature which came to exist 13 billion years or so after the start of that expansion.

The very violent beginning to the current expansion of the universe, the so-called Big Bang, was from a state so highly specific as to dictate

the direction of entropy—that initial state of this expansionary phase was so particular that it had very little entropy. Entropy tends strongly to increase because that state of the universe was so particular, that is, so low in probability. The universe is moving over a path which is taking it toward a state higher in probability. The story God is telling is that path. And far more. But at least that path.

The universe follows that path as it—so to speak—seeks a more probable and more stable state and that path is headed toward that state, headed in a direction we label ‘into the future’. It would seem the universe is yet at a state of relatively low entropy, but we don’t know what the comparison is. We know only the facts—the universe moves in one direction in time as-if consciously seeking some different state. That movement has allowed the development of complex structures which develop by decreasing their own entropy and, as a consequence, increasing the rate of the overall increase of entropy of their environments. It isn’t possible to use energy with perfect efficiency, hence there are no perpetual motion machines, and, hence, any local movements toward lower entropy, such as the development of a living organism or the growth of a civilization, will cost some entropy overall.

The story moves on. How do we come to learn this?

The human brain can be seen as evolving at the species level and developing at the individual level. When we expand our perspective to the mind, the immaterial aspects of human intelligence, then we have to make more complex statements involving human communities. I think much confusion about human thought-systems, with their insights and defects, comes from some sort of tendency to think of the human mind as being something independent from the evolving human brain. Let me suggest, quite speculatively, that a child learns about the direction of time by being constrained to see certain streams of events as the development of an entity with constant existence. The constraints come from the strong built-in belief that things have continuous and permanent existence.

The child sees a kitten and then sees it grow and develop into a somewhat different animal but, the instinct remains to think it’s the same it was when it was a tiny helpless kitten. The child sees seeds placed in the ground or perhaps a piece of potato suspended in a clear drinking-glass. Where the seed was buried, a plant rises. The piece of potato begins to grow stalks and then leaves. That child is shaping his mind as he actively responds, including those responses which are tied to seemingly passive but attentional perception. He sees things which continue to exist but they change. At

some point, not too many months after gaining some toddling fluency in language, he's ready to be integrated into the surrounding stories. At first, he listens as an adult reads to him of, perhaps, an Easter bunny which grows and prospers under the care of a child and his mother. He hears stories of exotic animals and perhaps of children going on simple adventures at a farm or even in a jungle across the ocean.

I don't know what sorts of socializing stories a child might hear in our brave, new world, but we once heard stories about the farmer and the milkman and the policemen. We heard, however implicitly, of the formation of communities and the formation of human bonds, concrete and even those somewhat abstract bonds to those who worked in far distant lands to provide us with bananas. Looking back, I still have good memories from my pre-teen years of reading a series of properly whitewashed biographies of great men and women. I think I learned a lot about moral order and even a bit of history from those books however distorted those books were in some ways, but properly distorted in ways better clarified in later years.

Children generally acquire a naive but plausible and basic understanding of the nature of long-lasting entities, and learn of the error of some of their assumptions when Grandpa disappears one day. The little boys and girls, siblings and cousins, might hear of a place called Heaven or they might hear some vaguer words meant to comfort by obscurity. Often, I fear, they hear a form of obscurity which is a verbalization of their parents' confusion and lack of well-defined faith.

This is where two of my concerns meet. There is substantial evidence gathered by brain-scientists that human beings are born with certain important instincts about their environments of things and living things and relationships. Those instincts are part of the foundation of sophisticated views of moral causation—found in more human beings than sophisticated views of physical causation. Given my beliefs in the nature of the human mind, its capability of shaping itself to reality, given the overall shape of pathways through time which are traveled by stars and living creatures alike, those forms of cause-and-effect which relate to the moral order would seem more fundamental than more physical forms of cause-and-effect. We're creatures who strive to see order in our complex perceptions of static environments and in dynamic streams of events and moral causation is generally even more important to us than physical causation. Often enough, we delude ourselves, a well-researched problem since it can even distort the work of trained observers. We tend to see creaturely forms of purpose in our

environments and that is nowadays labeled as ‘anthropomorphic’. In our modern efforts to deal with this error, there are many, including some serious philosophers and theologians and scientists, who throw the baby out with the bathwater, forgetting that it remains at least an open question as to the nature of causation at more abstract levels of being, let alone at the level – however speculative—of the Creator.

## 473 Religious Liberty for Those Who Really Count

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1362>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/08/09.]

Those who have been following the Obamacare mandate mess will know of the prayers of American-Catholics, led by their bishops, for religious liberty. Apparently, the religious liberty, even the very lives, of Syrian Christians is of little interest, nor were the liberties and lives of the Christians living in other ancient communities which have been systematically destroyed in Asia as the Clintons, Bushes, Obama, and other political gangsters have pursued criminal wars **unexamined** by the American-Catholic community or most of the other Christian communities in the United States. See *Christ Almighty! US Foreign Policy vs. Middle Eastern Christianity* at <http://original.antiwar.com/justin/2012/08/07/christ-almighty-us-foreign-policy-vs-middle-eastern-christianity/> for a discussion of a matter of shame for the United States, at least for the citizens who are Christians—and, no, there is no doubt that American intelligence officers and perhaps military personnel are at least in the safe-haven camps of the Syrian rebels (Turkey and maybe Jordan). It might turn out that, as was the case in Lybia, there are Western military and intelligence personnel disguised as native rebels. The American government is quietly supportive, in public, and strongly supportive, behind the scenes, as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, those two American allies which are such wonderful bastions of liberties—religious and political, arm and otherwise support the rebels in some insane effort to reshape southwestern Asia by first reducing entire countries to violent chaos. We have yet to see one of those countries returned to a state of social and

political order, but the centuries stretch ahead of us.

In any case, you shouldn't hold your breath waiting for a Catholic magazine or news-site to talk openly about this issue and the pattern of American invasion of a country followed by destruction of the ancient Christian communities. Nor should you hold your breath waiting for the American-Catholic bishops to bring up the topic in a national conversation. Who gives a damn about those strange Christians who look a lot like the guys in Al-Qaeda?

I've noted before that the only recent book on Catholic just-war theory which I know of, *When War is Unjust: Being Honest in Just-war Thinking* [153], was written, very reluctantly, by a Mennonite scholar, John Howard Yoder, at the request of a ROTC commander at Notre Dame who'd decided that he didn't know any Catholics he could trust to do the job. (Maybe he should have looked outside the American-Catholic hierarchy and intellectual mainstream. . . But, I digress.) In the years since I first read that book, I've found not a shred of evidence that just-war theory is taught, at least for more than a few seconds, in the courses of either priests or deacons. I have no reason to believe it's taught to laity at Catholic schools, or other Christian schools. Or in Protestant seminaries. Catholic students, maybe other Christian students as well, are taught about our obligations to be nice to peasants who work for low-pay on coffee plantations. Apparently, those obligations go away if those peasants happen to live in the path of an invasion by the American military or the DEA. Then, they can be blown to Hell. And deserve it.

Even when the invasion of Iraq turned sour and lots of evidence showed up that the Bush administration had lied us into that war, even when more evidence turned up that the Clinton administration and the Israeli government had been preparing plans for a 're-make' of southeast Asia and north Africa as early as the mid-1990s, Catholic Christians, bishops and priests and laity, haven't stirred to carry out an examination of the justness of these acts which, when examined on the most casual basis, look an awful lot like mass-murder and willful destruction of advanced technological capabilities in these uppity countries.

I admit to feeling more than a little shame when I think about this entire mess. Bishops and other American-Catholics, indeed the vast majority of American Christians, accept the government's word that those million+ deaths in Iraq along with all the damage to social structures and infrastructure was justified. After all, Saddam Hussein was a bad man, as opposed

to the Clintons and Bushes and Mugsy Cheney, who start wars and kill lots of people because... Well, Saddam Hussein was a bad man, as opposed to Barack Obama who claims the right to kill anyone anywhere in the world if he thinks that anyone is a bad man or a bad child. And that American teenager in Yemen was clearly a bad young man—didn't we kill him?, as opposed to Lieberman and Kerry who own lots of stock in companies which make lots of money from all the wars that Lieberman and Kerry, Obama, the Clintons and the Bushes and Mugsy Cheney, start.

I've had conversations with people upset about the horrors of German mass-murder in World War II and told them about the millions of refugees rounded up by the Americans and British after that war who were turned over to the Soviets to be executed or used as slave labor. Typically, those compassionate Christians admit we can be bad also and then return quickly to talking about the evil of the Nazis or Communists or Jihadists. The rule, to a thinking Christian, is: you're damned for your own sins and there's no reason to believe God gives you credit for crying over the horrible crimes of the Nazis and the Soviets and the Maoists and Al-Qaeda. (See the article on *Operation Keelhaul* at [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Operation\\_Keelhaul](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Operation_Keelhaul) for a start on the literature of the U.S. forcing the repatriation of Soviet POWs and also people who'd fled the Stalinists.)

The American citizenry, including many self-righteous Christians, have a share of an awful lot of violations of the Fifth Commandment, mortal sins, and also a share of the sins in destroying the living standards of the Iraqis and others and even in destroying the moral characters of numerous Americans sent over to fight against, let's be honest, civilians who didn't want us there. 'There' includes all the regions where we fought sustained wars from 1945.

The Americans in general and their leaders including the American-Catholic bishops, let's be honest again, didn't think it worth the effort to even try to figure out if these wars were justified, before or after they were fought. I'm beginning to think there aren't any American Christian leaders, Protestant or Catholic or Orthodox, who know how to spell 'just' though they can do well with 'war', especially when they participate in those American national days of mourning which have been turned into joyous celebrations of how we killed all those bad guys in all those good wars. Morally healthy Christians, and most others, don't even celebrate killing guys who clearly and truly were bad. When the death toll includes

so many innocent human beings of all ages, then we should really feel a sense of shame, a need to examine the situation and the state of our own moral characters. Instead, we get another beer from the fridge and change the channel: see Chapter 465, *Dumber Every Day, With Beer in Hand and War on TV* for a related rant.

Americans, including their allegedly Christian leaders, might be raised from the grave and sent to a park where they can celebrate a joyous Memorial Day each and every day without end. A million years or so down the road, they might realize they aren't in Heaven and that big guy leading them in patriotic hymns isn't God.

# 474 Was the United States Ever a Christian Country?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1382>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/08/23.]

I was fascinated by a claim Jacob Neusner quietly made in *Death and Birth of Judaism: The Impact of Christianity, Secularism, and the Holocaust on Jewish Faith* [99]. The assumption is found in this quote:

[M]y view is that when, in the late eighteenth century with the French and American revolutions, Christianity lost its status as self-evident truth to Christians in parts of the West, the Judaism framed centuries before in the encounter with that claim likewise lost its self-evidence to Jew in those same areas, and died. [page xii]

Is Neusner right that by the time the United States was founded “Christianity lost its status as self-evident truth to Christians”? I think he’s right, but it’s been a couple decades since I stopped believing the United States was ever a Christian country. Though the *Declaration of Independence* has never had any status as a true founding document of our government, its words regarding ‘self-evident’ truths should be taken seriously. A different set of truths than those in the Bible or the Creeds of Christianity had become self-evident. Jefferson, and most of the other Founding Fathers, had taken up a set of ‘self-evident’ truths proposed by lines of English thinkers dedicated to the idea that society could be at peace only if Christianity and other religions were stripped of their public status, purged completely from society or at least driven into the private realm. Most specifically, rights were no longer granted by God or even won by human effort in a Creation

which rewarded certain sorts of moral efforts. Rights were metaphysically grounded and truly belonged to human beings, though with a polite nod to a rather domesticated Creator. With rights stripped of giftedness Creation itself was no longer the work of a generous and Almighty Father; what exists had become our possession and God Himself had better not try to take it from us. (It's actually quite natural that we descended from that denial of Christian truths to a situation where we let our political leaders take our rights and property by frightening us with tales of the dangers in this botched Creation, but I'll let the reader imagine that story-line.)

Clearly, the main concern in Neusner's book is with Judaism, but I'm concentrating in this essay upon this denial of the self-evident status of Christian beliefs by the leaders, religious and cultural as well as political, of the emerging United States and revolutionary France. Leaders in greater regions of the West soon enough joined in. The Founding Fathers of the United States acted in a manner much more calm and much more rational than the anti-Christians to follow, to be sure, but the United States was founded as a non-Christian country with an optional Christian vocabulary to be used only to support ideas which had come from those efforts to remove religion from public life.

I repeat: the United States government formed under the Constitution was fundamentally a non-Christian government, not a Christian government tolerant of religious belief of others. A true Christian has no choice but to be such for the entirety of his life, for all hours of the day and for all the different roles he takes on. A Christian can't participate as a citizen in a country when such participation requires he leave his faith at home. The Constitution requires a Christian to shed his beliefs when he takes the oath of office as President or as an officer in the U.S. military.

Because of the non-Christian nature of the American state, Americans eventually—but American communities early on—took a strange form in which there was a radical separation of realms of human life. Some were clear-sighted and saw this process of fragmentation of individual and communal human life, saw the process and some of its horrible results. For example, the Norwegian-American professor and writer *O.E. Rolvaag* (see [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Ole\\_Edvard\\_Rolvaag](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Ole_Edvard_Rolvaag)) wrote a troubling middle book to his trilogy about Norwegian settlers in the Dakotas. In that second book, *Peder Victorious*, we see an honest vagueness, but clear attribution of motives and causes, about the way that the school teachers sent from the Eastern states took away the

Lutheran faith and much of the old-world culture of the children and grandchildren of Norwegian pioneer families. *Little House on the Prairie* with the school teachers singing the *Battle Hymn of the Republic* with all their might as they stared, stars in their eyes, at the statue of Abraham Lincoln in front of the school. I think Rolvaag got it right in that novel and I think what he was describing was a realization of the greater meaning of the Constitution. Any religious beliefs which might make it difficult for the United States to function as a secular nation must be left at home or, still better, purged.

Neusner is clear in his discussions that he believes, as do I, that religion is not only a very strong and basic part of human life but also the foundation of more complex human communal life, certainly the foundation of civilizations. I've met some atheists who, as individuals, would make better neighbors than most devout Christians and faith-filled Jews, but atheists don't found civilizations. Nor can they maintain or nurture them. As I've noted before, a civilization is inseparable from a people's understanding of the world, however broadly or narrowly they define that entity. An atheist who has such an understanding becomes, by definition, at least a pantheist or some other sort of pagan.

In Chapter 282, *Do We Need Heart and Hands as Well as Mind to Understand Reality?*, I'd quoted from *Judaism in the Matrix of Christianity* [97]: "In the Western Protestant tradition of Edwards and Schleiermacher we take it for granted that emotions speak for the private individual, not the nation." I've never read any of Schleiermacher's works or even any books about his thought but I've read an allegedly complete collection of Edwards' writings and was impressed by the power of his mind but not by the lines of thought he chose to pursue. He saw the world as one not to have been made by a God who would have taken on human flesh. We're left alone in our terrible situation and a brutal sort of Calvinism, perhaps stated more honestly and with more insight by Edwards than by Calvin, is the logical result. Or else, perhaps a pagan incoherence is your pleasure. In any case, we aren't part of any Body of Christ, not even in terms of hope and faith and love. How could you have hope in a God who is infinitely distant from you? How could you have faith in a God who seems to have thrown you into a world in which the provision of human welfare comes through secular institutions? Why would you bother with a God who doesn't gift you with anything because it belongs to you in a self-evident way?

It's not just coincidence that Etienne Gilson identifies a general Catholic retreat into an intellectual ghetto as having occurred around 1800, pretty

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much the same time as the American adoption of a non-Christian Constitution which prepared the way for an eventual all-out anti-Christian assault upon the core beliefs, the very foundations, of Western Civilization. A Brave New World had been born. We've seen only some of the horrors which will occur before something new and good can be founded and the United States has been a major protagonist in those horrors of the past two centuries and is currently more active in waging war against God's Creation than is any other nation.

# 475 Physics, Politics, and Metaphysics

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1399>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/09/03.]

In a short essay recently published on the Web, the political thinker Ken Masugi tells us about political scientists needing to recognize the validity of philosophical modes of thought. They've drifted away from reality as a result of their efforts to become quantitative empirical scientists. In that essay, *Political Scientists Bow to the Laws of Nature* at <http://libertylawsite.org/2012/08/30/political-scientists-bow-to-the-laws-of-nature/>, we can read:

After some hesitation, the American Political Science Association (APSA) has cancelled its annual four-day, pre-Labor Day convention, with Hurricane Isaac bearing down on its New Orleans venue. Even proud contemporary political science must eventually submit to “the laws of nature and of nature’s God” in practice, while remaining resistant in theory.

Dr. Masugi gives us a highly summarized tale of American political scientists, through their professional societies, marginalizing and then even eliminating the study of those “laws of nature and of nature’s God”, eliminating philosophy from the study of politics. Perhaps his most interesting claim is that philosophical ways of thought are often closer to ‘nature’, empirical reality, than efforts to quantify, say, voting patterns and to turn elections into exercises in statistical analysis. The concluding paragraph of the essay tells us: “Following the lead of its Progressive founders, the

political science profession has indeed marginalized the study of political philosophy.”

I think that the author, Ken Masugi, is right that we need philosophy, the study of more abstract realms of created being in my telling, as part of our efforts to understand politics. He might even agree with my claim that we need a proper philosophy as part of our efforts to study any and all realms of created being, even the most mundane parts of the physical world. The most abstract realms of created being are present in those most mundane parts of this concrete realm of created being and we won't understand so much as a gnat, even in principle, if we don't have an understanding of the abstract geometry which describes shapes at this concrete level of being and if we don't have an understanding of the abstractions of relationships which allow us to describe complex environments in this same concrete level of being.

Mathematics and theoretical physical sciences (not just physics) are primarily about thinking; number-crunching should only start after some serious thinking is done. Sometimes, number-crunching isn't even possible except on a purely hypothetical basis, such as sometimes happens in the speculative exploration of exotic states of matter not (yet?) reachable in human laboratories or directly observable in nature. As one extreme example, the tensor equation which is the center-piece of general relativity is a qualitative description of possible equations of a more quantitative sort. If you're able to specify a few attributes, you might be able to turn this description into a solvable set of equations and discover, “Aha! I've found an equation for a simplified system with one dominant center of gravity in a perfectly symmetric sphere.” That discovery was the first explicit solution of Einstein's equation and was later seen to be the description of a particular type of black hole.

Tensors and other tools of modern mathematics can be like that, allowing scientists to describe a system even when they can't (yet?) produce equations which can give quantitative results. More generally, modern mathematics allows us to explore underlying concepts in a system, concepts about the very nature of the 'space' of interest and concepts having to do with relationships between entities in that space. By 'space', I mean a general concept which includes physical space but might also include, for example, a space which is a grid of possible states in a network of machines or human beings or both. Tensors, and the overlapping field of differential geometry, aren't used just to analyze and understand black holes or the en-

tire universe or other objects of interest to theoretical physicists; spinning machine parts are often designed with the help of tensor equations which are, often with much effort and ingenuity, particularized down to specific equations. It seems likely to me that there is a corresponding way to think of ‘purely non-quantitative’ problems, such as those of politics or moral relationships, so that we can qualitatively, abstractly, describe the nature of complex human communities or other created entities which are studied in the ‘soft’ sciences.

For example, we could maybe come up with concepts which are abstract descriptions of what can happen when relationships between members inside a community or between communities change. A moral creature embedded in a variety of communal relationships might suddenly find one or more of those communities is changing substantially so as to seem an entirely different sort of community. This might be a result of the community growing and becoming denser in relationships or as a result of a community losing moral structure.

I’m proposing that we use this sort of thinking, moving from the concrete realm of created being to a more abstract realm where we can reach a potentially more powerful conceptual understanding before returning to the more concrete and more particular realm. Physicists and others in the sciences, including engineering, have done this with remarkable success. In a field, such as politics, it would involve mostly conceptual relationships in the concrete realm of being rather than mostly quantitative relationships. I think this sort of thinking is done in the course of conceptual analyses of political systems or moral relationships, but I also think that it’s done on an ad-hoc basis so that it hasn’t had the desired change on metaphysical thinking, causing a lot of individual theorists to repeat the sort of effort which, as one example, Einstein and his friend Marcel Grossman carried out in learning how to use tensors and differential geometry to study gravity. That effort has been systematized and even clarified in a variety of books and articles and other instructional materials, but I know of no book which teaches thinkers in more ‘qualitative’ fields to abstract from a system being studied before trying to figure out how to particularize and analyze that system.

In my critique of our general inability to understand created being, not just human politics, I’ve pointed to one way of expanding those limited understandings and maybe correcting those understandings by borrowing from those fields such as quantum physics and gravitational theory which

have penetrated to some pretty abstract realms of created being from their particular viewpoints. Modern physics has shot past the limits on created being which traditional physics and traditional meta-physics had given us. We can expand our understanding of created being, including the possible sources of moral nature for a creature, and we can do that by trying to stand upon the foundations which physics and mathematics and other sciences have given to us and trying to see what lies beyond. What is the true nature of created being? Am I right when I say there is one spectrum of created being and that concrete being is shaped from relatively more abstract being itself shaped from still more abstract being and so on until we reach the truths God manifested as the raw stuff of Creation? That is, am I right that we can consider matter as being frozen soul, in a semi-traditional way of speaking?

In Chapter 468, *Christian Traditionalism: Moving With God's Story*, I discussed the issue of modernizing and 'upgrading' the ways in which we analyze and understand our own natures in their various aspects, political and moral and so on. I'll quote from that essay:

I'll refer to the following graph I've used before:

We can start at *Node y2*, which represents our current understanding of *The Spacetime of Our Universe*. This node is found on the bottom row. From that node, we work our way up through higher levels of abstraction until we reach a level which shows some promise for helping to understand, for example, human nature. So, by abstracting somewhat, we can reach *Node x* which is *Abstractions Leading to Complex Paths* and then travel down to *Node z2* which is *Human Nature* including our understanding of our moral pathways through this world. This understanding is also supplemented by other abstractions as shown by the arrow from the unlabeled node titled *Various Concrete Abstractions*. By *concrete abstractions*, I intend to convey the idea of a level of abstract being which is close to that of our concrete world.

In other words, I'm recommending that we construct richer and more complex metaphysical systems for Creation by using abstractions from mod-

ern physics and mathematics. We are ourselves part of this Creation, including those aspects of human nature studied by political scientists and political philosophers, by psychologists and moral philosophers. In recent centuries, we seem to have suffered various breakdowns in our human systems along with—not coincidentally—a failure to advance our moral and communal understandings; we can't understand how we can form coherent, morally well-organized communities from so many human beings with so many ways of organizing their moral and social activities. We have outgrown the metaphysics which is adequate to describe Greek city-states or human beings with a small number of communal relationships. Until we have a proper metaphysics, one which provides a proper description and allows for a proper understanding of the richness and complexity of fundamental created being as we now know it, matter and energy and fields and spacetime, we won't be able to properly describe or understand the complex entities of this concrete realm, not human beings nor human communities. After all, a modern country is probably even richer and more complex than a binary star system and lies within the same realm of created being as does that star system. Why are we assuming a simpler set of descriptions for relationships?

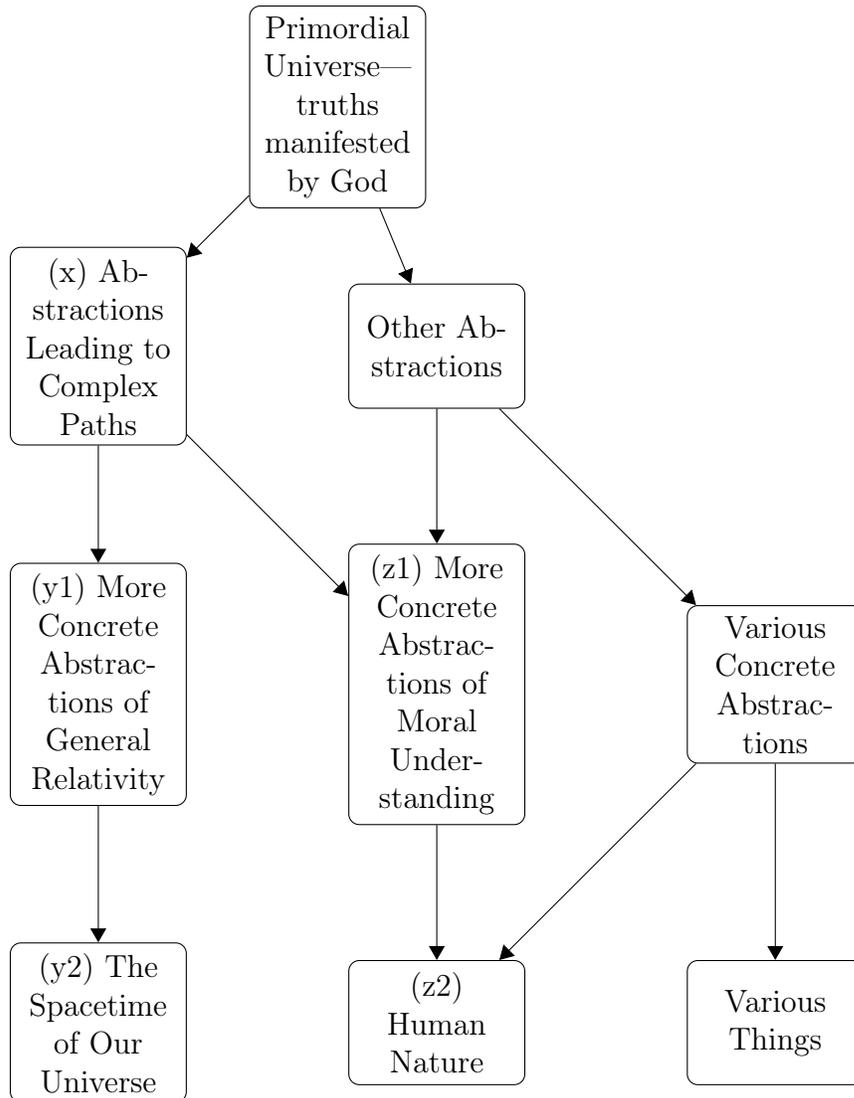


Figure 475.1: Simple Relationships of Abstract and Concrete Levels of Being

## 476 Is Skynet Being Born?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1452>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/11/30.]

Those who have enough sense not to watch modern movies might not realize that:

Skynet is a fictional, self-aware artificial intelligence system which features centrally in the Terminator franchise and serves as the franchise's main antagonist. Scarcely depicted visually in any of the Terminator media, Skynet's operations are almost exclusively performed by war-machines, cyborgs (usually a Terminator), and other computer systems, with its ultimate goal the extinction of the human race.

See the Wikipedia article, *Skynet (Terminator)* at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skynet\\_\(Terminator\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skynet_(Terminator)), or watch the movie *The Terminator* if you care to know more. There is also a Wikipedia article on the movie franchise at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Terminator](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Terminator).

My belief is that something a little like Skynet is possible only because so many people watch this trash and take it seriously just as the criminal activities of gangsters inside the CIA and the Pentagon and the oil-companies and the investment banks and so forth became possible at high levels because people read, watched, and took seriously the James Bond trash as well as the whole genre of stuff out of the fevered imaginations of the likes of Robert Ludlum, Tom Clancey, and E. Howard Hunt—a man and author we should not want to be influencing our views of reality or those of the children of this world.

On to the serious science article to which I'm responding: *Simulated brain scores top test marks* found at <http://www.nature.com/news/>

`simulated-brain-scores-top-test-marks-1.11914`. This article was written by the reliable and often insightful journalist of science, Ed Yong. I always read at least the introductory paragraphs of his weblog, *Not Exactly Rocket Science* found at <http://blogs.discovermagazine.com/notrocketscience/>, but don't usually respond to them in my writings because he deals with general biological subjects of great interest to me but not bearing directly upon my work, though they do affect my general understanding of our world. This time, he did deal with such a subject: are we starting to create technological analogs of human minds?

In his article, Ed Yong tells us:

Spaun—the Semantic Pointer Architecture Unified Network—is the brainchild of Chris Eliasmith, a theoretical neuroscientist at the University of Waterloo in Canada, and his colleagues. It stands apart from other attempts to simulate a brain, such as the ambitious Blue Brain Project [. . .], because it produces complex behaviours with fewer neurons. “Throwing a lot of neurons together and hoping something interesting emerges doesn't seem like a plausible way of understanding something as sophisticated as the brain,” says Eliasmith.

“Until now, the race was who could get a human-sized brain simulation running, regardless of what behaviours and functions such simulation exhibits,” says Eugene Izhikevich, chairman of the Brain Corporation in San Diego, California, who helped to develop some of the first large-scale neuronal models—including one with 100 billion neurons. “From now on, the race is more [about] who can get the most biological functions and animal-like behaviours. So far, Spaun is the winner.”

Mr. Yong also tells us:

Spaun is almost as accurate at such simple tasks as the average human, and reproduces many quirks of human behaviour, such as the tendency to remember items at the start and end of a list better than those in the middle. “We weren't surprised that it could do tasks,” says Eliasmith, “but we were often surprised that subtle features like the time it took or the errors it made were the same as for humans”.

Don't worry that Skynet is literally on its way. This is a very limited model of only a few types of behavior on the part of a few regions of the brain. The underlying computer program which perceives and moves a simple robotic arm isn't capable of learning new tasks; it deals with only a few environmental signals presented in a somewhat artificial way. Yet, it's interesting and also scary because of our moral irresponsibility and our tendency to use, say, drone technology to kill children in Afghanistan and Yemen rather than to monitor forests in danger of fires.

Spaun is the type of limited 'thinking' technology which might work well in a drone with a particular mission, one which is to recognize signs of forest fires or one which will kill human beings wandering hillsides in Asian countries. Let's prepare ourselves for the likelihood that we're still in a decades-long, maybe centuries-long, period when technological advances, such as Spaun, will be used to advance the interests of those who are not only hungry for power and wealth but also ruthless when it comes to the lives and livelihoods of us common folk. Let's also consider the possibility that our technology may become part of us—we can pray only in a more benevolent form than killer drones: see Chapter 613, *Does the Body of Christ have non-human components?*, for a short discussion of the possibility that some technology might become truly part of us and our communities and thus part of the Body of Christ.



# 477 What is the Role of the Christian Church in the Public Square?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1465>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/12/11.]

## 477.1 Man and Community

In recent years, I've been dealing a lot with the issue of man's true nature, as an individual and as a community member. There has been a lot of ground-work to do before I make an effort to provide a more 'scientific' or more 'exact' description of human moral narratives including those which form mere gatherings of human beings into communities; that effort has actually already begun but is so far no more than a first-year graduate student's knowledge of the relevant mathematics—which is probably sufficient—as well as some vague ideas which are starting to take on life in my mind to the extent that they are influencing my dreams. In any case, I'll give only a scattered sampling of this work of the preliminary work I've made public.

What are the parts which best and most completely describe a human being? I've endorsed the traditional Judaic view, not unknown in other traditions, of mind and heart and hands: see Chapter 282, *Do We Need Heart and Hands as Well as Mind to Understand Reality?*. In Chapter 622, *Man, Society, and the Body of Christ*, I discussed how such a creature could become part of a community such as the Body of Christ. I also provide a way of talking intelligently and morally about that Body.

There are a number of other essays in my writings on this topic of human nature in its individual and communal aspects. My goal in this essay is limited to the presentation of preliminary, indeed—sketchy, ideas on the ways in which the Christian churches will have to change. When it's necessary to be more specific, I'll speak in terms, mostly, of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States. I certainly don't claim to know what that Church and those churches will have to become, only to have some serious speculations about what they can start to do and what they can no longer pretend to be. Mostly, I'm dealing with public issues, political and economic and moral aspects of our various communities.

I've speculated and now believe fairly strongly that all that is worthwhile in human civilization will be found in the Body of Christ rather than only what Christians do on Sundays or Jews on Saturdays. On the other hand, it's true that such human activities as musical composition in Heaven would be a form of worship. The point is that the Body of Christ doesn't include only what the Church is properly responsible for, not only what is supervised by bishops and carried out by priests with some assistance from the laity.

## 477.2 The Christian Church: Organ of the Body of Christ?

There is a question mark ending the title of this section, but I'll take the answer to be, "yes," without more discussion than can be found in the next paragraph about the nature of the Body of Christ or in more detailed statements to be found in various chapters in this collection of what were originally weblog writings. The Christian Church is the most important organ in that Body but not its entirety nor does it have the competence or authority to control that Body even in its pilgrim form in this mortal realm.

In what could be called the end of Medieval Era or the early phase of the Modern Era, the Church, the Catholic churches and all other Christian churches, started the painful process of backing down from Christendom's triumphalistic phase in the late Medieval period. She admitted that She has not the competence or the authority to govern nations or economies. Yet, the lesson hasn't truly been fully learned. Having taken up, at least

sporadically if not usually with any competence, their task of teaching the faith and guiding moral development, Christian churchmen repeatedly jump from general moral truths to specific policies as if the Church was only kidding in Her confession that She had not been given by God the power or the competence to run nations or economies.

I would recommend that the Catholic Church take seriously what was proclaimed by the Vatican II Fathers: the laity have their own competence and their own important roles. I would add that the bishops have neither the competence nor the authority to screen those laity, by coincidence—at this time—sharing the bishop’s ignorance on politics and history and economics and science, who will be sanctioned by the ecclesiastical hierarchy as being the true spokesmen of the Catholic (or other) Christian laity.

To be sure, there have been Catholic and Orthodox and Protestant clergymen who were not only competent in fields such as political theory and political practice; they were downright brilliant. This doesn’t justify the American Catholic bishops to dominate, or suppress, a process which should be a Christian witness to, for example, a nation supporting wars which have proven to be unjustified in retrospect. In general, while muttering some appropriately radical words about what might be called ‘the preference for peace’, the bishops and other Christian leaders generally go on to support the next war even as our country is bankrupt and is suffering the sort of collapse into moral disorder you’d expect in a country where the citizens are being trained to support a government resembling some weird combination of the Roman imperial bureaucracy and the Mafia. Even such strong and faithful Catholics, such as Pat Buchanan and Joe Sobran, were ignored when they tried to publicly discuss the moral problems in the American wars, especially in Asia and the Balkans, over the past two decades or so.

Similar critiques can be made in pro-life efforts, economic and political reform efforts, general moral reform efforts, and more. This isn’t the place to make those critiques but rather to make the claim that there is a great deal of expertise, of moral strength, of wisdom, to be found in Christians excluded from many of the processes of Christian witness and action on many important issues. Conservatives and libertarians, but also non-mainstream liberals and leftists, are the most likely to be excluded unless they play by the rules and within the constraints set by clerical and lay do-gooders of a herd-like cast of mind.

The Church has the responsibility and duty to teach the truths of the faith, theological doctrines which do have great implications for our polit-

ical and economic and technological decisions and moral doctrines which have more direct implications. She doesn't have the competence nor the authority to produce an understanding of the underlying subject matter, political or economic or social or other. She doesn't have the competence nor the authority to propose possible solutions to problems or to identify problems which might emerge or to even define the possible ways in which we can move toward a better political or economic system or how we can better raise children or how we should distribute ourselves over the earth's surface. It's most certainly the case they have just set out on the immigration issue with the goal of feeling good about themselves rather than learning about a very complex issue, without seeing the great damage they did to those already resident in this country and (often no longer) sitting in the pews. For one possible problem with the bishop's theory that we are morally required to admit all immigrants and treat them as if members of our communities, see Chapter 218, *Networks of Public Spaces Rather Than One Square*, which discusses the discovery of Robert Putnam, a Harvard professor of political science that:

[T]he greater the diversity in a community, the fewer people vote and the less they volunteer, the less they give to charity and work on community projects. In the most diverse communities, neighbors trust one another about half as much as they do in the most homogeneous settings. The study, the largest ever on civic engagement in America, found that virtually all measures of civic health are lower in more diverse settings. [From an article no longer on the website of *International Herald Tribune*.]

The point is that there is an awful lot which lies outside the experience or knowledge of Christian clergymen or mainstream Christian activists, though members of either of those groups could, in principle, be knowledgeable. At the same time, I'd guess that they wouldn't be invited to future meetings or elected to responsible positions in groups dealing with various issues if they were to offer opinions differing from the mainstream liberal views.

The bishops, and hosts of invincibly ignorant Catholics in general, have made the mistake described by Kenneth Minogue in *The Liberal Mind* [95]:

[I]t is characteristic of liberalism to make politicians of us all. . . Indeed, to be liberal *is* to accept an obligation to be concerned with matters beyond our direct responsibilities. [page

109. Those not acquainted with Professor Minogue's thought should be aware that, like many other historians and political-scientists and philosophers, he defines liberalism to include all ideologies which exaggerate our individualistic aspects. This includes classical liberals as well as collectivist liberals, Rush Limbaugh as well as Barack Obama.]

We like to stray "beyond our direct responsibilities" but we are also concerned with matters beyond our competence and we don't like to get anyone else involved unless they already believe what we believe, act as we act, feel as we feel, share our ways of discussing political and economic and moral problems. And we should be wary of expanding the public square in a society of diverse political, economic, and moral beliefs, as I discussed in Chapter 461, *Through the Looking-glass: Religious Liberty and Religious Toleration*, where I wrote "We shouldn't become dependent upon power-centers which might one day call upon us to act against our principles. In fact, I'll claim that religious neutrality on the part of governments is possible only if religious conflicts deal with issues not really important, at least not in our public life. In that case, religious freedom has no particular value and religion itself becomes the purely private affair advocated by extreme liberals of the modern era."

If they are to live up to their real responsibilities, rather than the false responsibilities of dictating the shape of various sorts of human systems, Christian leaders including Catholic bishops should learn how to live in a more open process of discussion of problems and possible solutions, of problems and opportunities which might arise some time in the future. As that discussion proceeds and as Christians or others begin to propose solutions or to form groups to implement some plan of Christian witness *perhaps* tied to specific policy proposals, Christian leaders should begin to provide moral guidance which will only be possible if those leaders manage to regain the respect they lost generations ago. Perhaps it's most important to note that this sort of a process would work best, and may have started somewhat spontaneously, if Christian leaders and educators had done their job of educating (do not read 'indoctrinating') those in their care and evangelizing others.



# 478 Something is Missing Even in the Best of Modern Political Thought

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1483>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/01/07.]

This is a very good discussion of some important aspects of our national political mess in the United States: *Liberal Constitutionalism and Us* at <http://libertylawsite.org/2013/01/07/liberal-constitutionalism-and-us/>.

At the same time, something is missing and that something is a more general understanding of our world, in fact, of Creation as a whole. Until we have that understanding, one which encompasses Christian revelations along with—so to speak—the thoughts of Einstein and Darwin and also those of Lord Acton and Wallace Stevens, we are merely floundering with our efforts to understand and maybe reform specific realms of the world. God’s story, Creation in a general sense or this world in a particular sense, is the setting for all other stories; God’s story is the stuff from which the lesser stories are formed; God’s story, as best understood in modern terms, will give us our best ideas of the Almighty’s purposes as Creator.

The above paragraph is an effort to put my position in a short way which might appeal to Christians thinking in modern secular terms. I write this as a Christian thinker who has, I think with some substantial success, tried to produce an understanding of Creation, the abstract truths and the concrete things and the stories we live and the grander stories being told by God. From my viewpoint, Creation is a whole in a meaningful sense, this world is a lesser whole but itself has the important characteristics of unity

and coherence and completeness—as do those human animals who achieve the status of ‘personhood’.

The story God is telling is the birth and death of the Body of Christ beginning with the incarnation of the Son of God as Man. The Body of Christ contains as members those who will be raised to share the life of God through union with Jesus Christ, the head of the Body, but the Body is itself an entity not fully definable as a gathering of its individual members. Even our political and business activities have to be understood as activities directed towards the development of the Body of Christ, in a contemplative way and not in a way that provides direct practical guidance. Our current crises in Western Civilization, our various processes of decay which we so dimly perceive and so poorly understand, are caused by that root cause: we are the heirs of Christian peoples (more accurately—baptized and poorly assimilated pagan peoples) and we are trying to live within a Civilization which had a greatness coming directly from its Christian ways of thinking and feeling and acting. Again, we were never truly Christian peoples but that might not be possible in this mortal realm and, since this is the story being told by God, it seems to be His will that we develop towards our best states rather than somehow popping into those states by instant conversions of individuals or communities.

This is the big picture from the Christian viewpoint: this world is the story of the development of the Body of Christ and of the members, and failed members, of that Body in this mortal realm. We Christians need to set in this context all that is and all that God is bringing into existence by a pure creation or by shaping existing stuff.

I’ve claimed over the past few years in a number of writings on my main weblog, *Acts of Being* at <http://loydfueston.com/>, that the Body of Christ isn’t just the Church. Rather is the Church an organ of that Body, the organ of worship and spiritual and moral guidance. There are other organs in this entity, the Body of Christ, which is complex beyond our current descriptive capabilities. To move toward better capabilities, we need to draw upon the fullness of created being as currently understood. There is an understanding of created being which is slowly coming into view and it will, as one example, force us to use the more complex geometries of modern theories of spacetime in place of the Euclidean geometry found in such phrases as “the straight and narrow way.”

We also need to move toward developmental models in our moral and political and economic thought.

We need ways to describe, that is—understand in a narrative sense, those complex entities such as modern communities or the individuals formed within those communities. We and our communities, including our political communities, are far too rich and complex and dynamic to fit within the traditional concepts and languages of political and economic and moral philosophies and sciences of all sorts.

Even our more substantial poets and novelists haven't yet caught up. I write novels and have not yet finished a novel more than suggesting what can be done to heal our badly damaged individual and communal selves. My finished and downloadable novels, such as *A Man for Every Purpose* [37], have been efforts to describe the damage. Even *The Hermit of Turkey Hill* [36], set in the 1930s and with a protagonist based on a grandfather I never knew, was—from an abstract perspective—an effort to describe the stresses upon various levels of moral and social order at a time when the stresses had not yet caused major breakage, at least not in smalltown New England.

There is much to be done, much to shorten the coming periods of chaos as a new phase of Christian civilization forms. Describing broken political entities which are set in a Western civilization reduced to ruins populated by the barbarian children foreseen by José Ortega y Gasset is a good and useful task toward a greater understanding that will help the creative reformation to advance in a smoother way that might lead to better results. Yet, this part of our effort will work better if the analysts realize and explicitly consider that Western Civilization was a work of Christians and their God; our civilization will not survive if it has no Christian understanding of Creation to guide it. If I'm right, it's God who is forming the Body of Christ and, if we don't do our part right, God will continue rolling forward and crushing all who don't learn to be part of the Almighty's story—see the books of the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah for details of the damage God inflicted on His own people when they refused to move properly with that story which is this world. (There are good insights in those books, although the views of even Isaiah and Jeremiah were necessarily local and simplistic compared to modern understandings of our world.)

In any case, God will eventually raise up those with a broader and deeper understanding of our world, including even our political entities. It's quite possible God is doing this now even as those in the mainstreams of human civilizations move along, sleepwalking?, with understandings of the world which correspond not to the richer and more complex understandings

of spacetime or physical matter nor to the increasingly rich and complex reality of modern human communities.

The main point to take away is that a Christian people need to understand the world according to their revealed truths. This might not have been so obvious even in some of the writings of Aquinas because he was a Christian fish living in a Christian ocean. The ocean is increasingly non-Christian or even anti-Christian and the Constitution itself and the more general political constitution of the United States were shaped by men who were on their way out of the Christian story. The United States, as it currently exists, will itself be seen one day as a nation formed as part of the process of decay in the West.

# 479 A Medicine Which Saved Lives and Destroyed Moral Order?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1518>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/01/31.]

Some Christians think that God being all-good and all-powerful and all-knowing could have created a world without evil. Maybe. But it wouldn't be our world. It wouldn't be the story of the incarnate Son of God sacrificing Himself to the Father. From that main theme, we can consider salvation of the individual and salvation within the communal Body of Christ.

Those engaged in the strange enterprise of justifying the Creator tell us: "God can't have created all that is not Himself, else He would be the Creator of evil. Surely, we can say evil has another source. Maybe a great servant of God, call him the Angel of Light, was given a good substance but he chose to rebel and to oppose the all-good God, becoming evil in the process."

That sort of an explanation leaves us having to deal with the nature of the will which first chose to rebel against God. St. Augustine and others have tried to sneak by the issue by saying that evil isn't something that exists but rather a privation in being. Try telling that to those who've survived or even studied the horrors of the Nazi death-camps or the horrors of war or those of nasty diseases. Those few German scientists and assistants who survived Marburg Disease a few decades back had gone through such pain that they were insane, having extreme forms of schizophrenic symptoms. We can speak about children with incurable cancers or burn victims. Is HIV retrovirus a privation of being? In a sense, it is something of a re-

gression from a more complete form of life, but some more complete forms of life also inflict great suffering upon other creatures.

Maybe we have no right to question God's Creation in this way? Maybe we show ourselves to be the morally insane thinkers which Hermann Melville thought all Americans to be? Maybe we should accept Creation and try to learn about the story God is telling, the story which is this world? Try to learn about the story and try to play our parts well?

Evil remains, whether we truly believe in the God of Jesus Christ or not. This includes the sort of morally disordered behavior which harms others, including future generations, even if it allows us some sort of false sense of freedom. If we believe in that all-powerful God, we have to accept that He created a world in which evil can appear and sometimes grow into great monsters or sometimes remain in the shape of a man who drives home drunk most evenings or a mother who refuses to respond to her children's emotional needs. The Jewish scholar Martin Buber took the position, somewhat controversial amongst other Jewish thinkers and unthinkable amongst nearly all Christian theologians and philosophers, that the story of Adam and Eve was really a revelation by God that He could create a world with both good and evil without the evil touching His own Being. The story God is telling seems to not just allow for evil but to use processes which do lead to results we human beings consider evil. The Catholic novelist and Thomistic thinker Flannery O'Connor was particularly good at showing that the good under development can take on grotesque shapes, shapes of evil and suffering and great pain. There is every reason to believe this is a result of God's shaping of this particular concrete, thing-like world and not the result of some fall of man or cosmic fall.

Created being, at least the thing-like created being of this world, has the potential for good or evil. Volcanoes can wreak horrible suffering and death and so can power-hungry men as well as men who think they can bring the world to a radically better state of affairs.

Our Manichean ways of thought lead us to believe that evil has invaded the Creation of a God who is all-powerful except when He's not. Surely, says Mani and his followers, evil can't be a part of true being, however defined. It must be a result of some defective and false being or even an Augustinian privation of being. I suspect this is why Catholic theologians and ecclesiastical leaders assumed that the birth-control pills (and related technologies) were the source of the breakdown in sexual moral order in recent decades. Suppose instead, a single technology brought both great

good, the relief of suffering, and also the possibility of sexual moral disorder, a disorder which was realized the decade before the birth-control pill hit the pharmacies, a sexual moral disorder which plays a major role, at least in my opinion, in the general breakdown of Western Civilization, the destruction of political and economic order which can be seen as the destruction of vast amounts of material and immaterial capital.

There is an article, *Penicillin, Not the Pill, May Have Launched the Sexual Revolution* at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/01/130128082906.htm>, indicating that the more troubling scenario might well be true. In the referenced article, we can read:

The rise in risky, non-traditional sexual relations that marked the swinging '60s actually began as much as a decade earlier, during the conformist '50s, suggests an analysis recently published by the Archives of Sexual Behavior.

“It’s a common assumption that the sexual revolution began with the permissive attitudes of the 1960s and the development of contraceptives like the birth control pill,” notes Emory University economist Andrew Francis, who conducted the analysis. “The evidence, however, strongly indicates that the widespread use of penicillin, leading to a rapid decline in syphilis during the 1950s, is what launched the modern sexual era.”

A little later in the article, we can read:

A few physicians sounded moralistic warnings during the 1950s about the potential for penicillin to affect behavior. Spanish physician Eduardo Martinez Alonso referenced Romans 6:23, and the notion that God uses diseases to punish people, when he wrote: “The wages of sin are now negligible. One can almost sin with impunity, since the sting of sinning has been removed.”

Such moralistic approaches, equating disease with sin, are counterproductive, Francis says, stressing that interventions need to focus on how individuals may respond to the cost of disease.

Noble goal. Replace moralism with individualistic utilitarianism. Neither is very attractive. Neither passes any good sniff tests for what might

be vaguely labeled 'truth'. Both are extremes in a way of thought which can be seen as Manichean in a general sense, a rejection of concrete reality in favor of idealistic views of created being which isolate good and evil. These sorts of views, Catholic 'Jansenism' or Protestant 'Puritanism' or the original pagan 'Manichaeism', sometimes even extended to blasphemous ideas of the Being of God Himself.

I'll not write the dozens of pages it would take to repeat even a summary of my struggle, largely on the website, *Acts of Being* at <http://loydfueston.com/>, to produce a better view, one which considers modern empirical knowledge in light of the Christian revelations which are a major part of the foundation of Western Civilization.

An intelligent understanding of reality, including human reality, can't be based upon the imposition of so-called ideals, *a priori* schemes, upon a reality which won't obey orders from human thinkers. Nor can any intelligent understanding of reality be based upon a literalistic reading of alleged truths from facts. An intelligent understanding of reality recognizes that 'brute facts' themselves, even the most brutal of 'brute facts', cannot be understood directly. An attempt to do so will result in literalistic distortions of reality; some philosophers have labeled such distortions of reality, distortions of created being, as 'Gnostic'. In many cases, perhaps most, 'literalistic' and 'Gnostic' are pretty much the same.

Neither moralism nor cost-benefit analyses form a suitable or adequate basis for understanding man as a moral being. Neither leaves open the possibility of some sort of true nobility in our human natures. Neither could play a role in the formation of any form of human community which we could possibly consider desirable.

# 480 Remodeling the Caboose as the Train Wreck Progresses

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1554>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/02/28.]

With a new pope to be elected soon, the Internet as well as print publications are filling once more with suggestions about radical or moderate reforms. “Let priests marry.” “Ordain women priests.” “Be more liberal allowing reception of the Sacraments.” “Allow divorce and remarriage.” “Allow artificial birth-control.” “Re-consider abortion, use of embryonic stem-cells, etc.”

Similar periods of frenzied proposals for reform come with greater or lesser reasons in various levels of American government, often when the results of a particular election disagree with the recommendations of some part of the pundit class. Often the suggested reform is the elimination of the Electoral College.

These observations could lead to the criticism of efforts to build a better world in the way we might build a better car or house. The point I wish to raise here is a little different, though related. We can’t even make a truly better car, at least for anyone but a hobbyist, if we simply set out with goals focused on the hypothetical car itself. For nearly all users of a car, it must be designed to consider a greater context, the roads and what is to be moved and the needs to park it securely or even the possibility that we don’t need so many cars. Over time, this context corresponds to some fairly substantial understanding of the existing economy and society and polity, the existence of proper mechanics and the property crime-rate and existing or likely restrictions on use.

The West, and probably most of the rest as well, is being destroyed

in various ways; it's a slowly progressing train wreck. Do we Catholic Christians have problems that can be fixed by letting priests marry? Can we fix our economic problems by selling houses more rapidly to each other? By nursing each other or teaching each other's children? By selling body parts from lab-grown embryos to each other that we might live a good, healthy 90 years after retirement? Let's assume you choose a consistent program of reforms. Do you think it will really fix anything or just start a new round of power plays so that the pros and cons fight for control of the government to enforce one set of reforms on all of us? Or to undo reforms they deem unwise? Are we more than a reform program away from an all-out breakdown in social order? A civil war?

Despite the efforts of thinkers such as Kenneth Minogue (see [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Kenneth\\_Minogue](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Kenneth_Minogue)) and Alasdair MacIntyre (see [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Alasdair\\_MacIntyre](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Alasdair_MacIntyre)), we act and usually think as if our problems are so shallow that they can be fixed by some reform program, putting down a new carpet in the caboose as the train continues to crunch up against a cliff wall. We in the West no longer have a largely shared moral or cultural vision; Christians and atheists and neo-pagans don't even truly share a physical universe, let alone a morally purposeful world. We can't even talk to each other in meaningful ways, as MacIntyre noted. We have such an exaggerated view of our individualistic natures that we can't form coherent communities, as Minogue gave us reason to fear.

There were deep divides amongst the east coast colonists in 1776 and perhaps deeper in 1787 as groups at the Constitutional Convention carried out various conspiratorial schemes or obstructive acts. Yet, the misnamed Federalists and badly misnamed anti-Federalists shared a more than substantial heritage from Western Civilization. That heritage even resulted in understandings of reality which were plausible given what was known, though less plausible after the discoveries of Darwin and Einstein and the events of the two wars in which Europe tried to commit continental suicide followed by a string of stupid and criminal wars by the American Empire. We are heirs of the idiots and scoundrels who thought to reshape the world by throwing huge armies of Englishmen and Frenchmen against huge armies of Germans or the equally great idiots and scoundrels who thought to reshape the world by sending large armies of American young men into jungles or deserts occupied by peoples who didn't want to be reshaped.

We no longer have a living and worthwhile tradition to defend, not in

the traditional European Christian churches nor in the major countries of the West. We're in a position more similar to that of the Christians around 400AD who were heirs of a Church tied to a Roman civilization which was no longer seen as having much to offer the world, a civilization falling apart so that it seemed to Augustine and others that it might bring the Church down as well. Those Christians, and their pagan neighbors, found themselves largely incapable of even speaking about hypothetical futures because they'd inherited the view that Rome, so corrupt and so vulnerable to barbarian invasions or conquest by the East, would always be the Rome of the Caesars.

I don't know many supposedly well-educated Christians who know much about the history of their beliefs, about the work of Augustine and Gregory and others that proved to be the building of the foundation of Western, Christian Civilization. I suspect those pioneers of Western Civilization might well be astonished as they look down upon what happened from their efforts to carry forward Christian traditions, knowledge of the Bible, and some major pieces of pagan, Mediterranean culture. From what I've read, Augustine and Gregory both were pessimistic about the future but they did God's work as it presented itself to them and that proved to be good enough. In any case, neither Augustine nor Gregory were under any illusions that the decaying Roman Empire, something of a house for the Christian Church for a couple of centuries, could be reformed or even kept alive in a weakened state.

Some of the suggested reforms for our various communities, Catholic Church or the United States or the NFL, might well be good or at least worth trying. But they won't help in this year of 2013 or for years to come. We're morally irresponsible, devoted to keeping ourselves comfortable and to maintaining our favorite human institutions as the train wreck goes on. We ignore the disaster we are part of or sometimes even admit it to pretend we can stop it and magically undo the damage. I think we can greatly shorten the period of hardship, and lessen the chances that Christianity will shrink to a small size, if we face up to the situation and respond bravely in light of a true Christian faith or at least a well-motivated pretense.

I'll leave behind the analogy of a train wreck to make my main point clearly. We modern human beings are out of synch with reality, Christians most of all. A family line of animals out of synch with their environment will not prosper and might well die off. A human community out of synch with the greater world of which it is part, however limited or expansive

a view it might have of the world, won't prosper and might well die off, leaving behind barbarian communities lacking the higher sort of view which is necessary for a civilization or even a smaller-scale culture of a higher sort. Barbarians are often surprisingly capable in technological fields, if only because of a need to produce high quality weapons and they can produce individual cultural works anticipating a more noble future, but a barbarian is not capable of even understanding the concept of civilization, let alone being capable of building or maintaining one. That is a necessarily circular definition. How do we know, how did Ortega y Gasset know, that we are barbarians? Because we show no appreciation for the heritage of the West, don't generally recognize something is seriously wrong, and show no capability of fixing even specific problems such as our inability to educate our children properly.

If we Christians, or any other people in one region of the world or another, were to move on to building a new civilization, or re-forming an old civilization, it will be necessary to first regain touch with empirical reality, that described by the great thinkers of Western Civilization, most dead but a few still above ground. If we are to claim to speak in the name of the Creator, in any meaningful sense, we should have a better understanding of the Creator's work, a better understanding of stuff and relationships and the complex, multi-layered story He is telling, the story which is this world. We should at least be able to give a plausible explanation for the Creator offering to share His life with a primate, cousin to chimpanzees and descendant of creatures not so much different from the fish we have for dinner. We should be able to give a plausible, if vague and highly qualified, answer to the question: Where is Heaven and what is it like?

Dantè was able to give such an answer within the context of the world as understood by some of the best minds of his age and, some centuries later, Copernicus and Galileo gave us good reasons to doubt that answer. Later researchers showed Dantè's answer was definitely wrong, though he expressed some other truths on his wrongfully described journey.

Nowadays? We mutter something about there being no conflict between science and religion while waving our hands about in a spastic manner. There truly is no such conflict if science and religion are well-matched in sophistication and in recognition of reality as best understood at the time. There definitely is a conflict between science and religion when we deal with a science which has advanced to a sophisticated understanding, in part, of created being as described by modern, disciplined research and a religion

which still talks and teaches as if created being is what it was understood to be before Darwin and Einstein.



# 481 Conservative Politics in light of Evolutionary and Developmental Processes

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1557>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/03/06.]

Kenneth B. McIntyre's review of the book, *Oakeshott on Rome and America* by Gene Callahan, was published at the website of the magazine *The American Conservative*. I've not read that book but my comments deal with basic lines of thought found in Oakeshott's major writings. In McIntyre's review, *Oakeshott vs. America* at <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/oakeshott-vs-america-112/>, we can read:

So what is rationalism, in the Oakeshottian sense of the term? First, it involves the claim that the only adequate type of knowledge is that which can be reduced to a series of rules, principles, or methods—and thus it is also a claim that “knowing how” to do something is nothing more than “knowing that” the rules are such and such. Second, because of this denigration of practical knowledge, it is a claim that rational action can only take place following the creation of a theoretical model. As Oakeshott once observed, modern rationalism is literally “preposterous” because theoretical reflection can only occur after a practice already has made itself distinct and more or less concrete.

Finally, as Callahan points out, since rationalism is a mistaken description of human knowledge and its relation to human

activity, it is also an impossible way of acting, politically or in any other sphere. Human action, including political action, is inherently an engagement of practical reason working within a particular tradition or and attempting to follow through on some of the inchoate suggestions that the vagueness of the practice offers. The opposite of rationalism for Oakeshott is not irrationalism but authentic practical reasonableness. Thus, and contrary to many of his reading-impaired critics, his critique of rationalism is not a critique of reason but a defense of it against a false modern conception of it.

To use one of Oakeshott's favorite examples, if one has no knowledge of cookery, a cookbook is useless. If, on the other hand, one is an experienced chef, a cookbook is superfluous. The cookbook is relevant only in a situation where either the great majority of cooks are relatively inexperienced and there is a dearth of connoisseurs or in a situation in which the traditions of cookery are in a state of confusion and a reminder is needed of some of the tradition's neglected resources.

Oakeshott used the term "ideology" to describe the attempted application of this rationalistic style to political activity. The rationalist's or ideologist's desire is to solve permanently the problems of political life and leave everything else to administration. Yet politics isn't concerned with the search for truth. Instead, as Oakeshott noted, "it is concerned with the cultivation of what from time to time are accepted as the peaceable decencies of conduct among men who do not suffer from the Puritan-Jacobin illusion that in practical affairs there is an attainable condition of things called *truth* or *perfection*."

In Chapter 448, *Predators, Producers, Sheep, and the Love of Liberty*, I wrote about the conflict in the fundamental understanding of liberty between the views of Oakeshott and the views of libertarians. I wrote, "Libertarian versions of liberty seem, by a naive analysis of historical timing, to be founded upon what I'd call a semi-metaphysical principle sufficient to ground their pessimistic attitude towards government, which attitude seems to be a reaction against the strange monsters which arose in early efforts of predators and idealists and realists and simple folk to develop governments suited to the needs of modern complex societies[.]" and concluded "

Obviously, I'm closer to the views of Michael Oakeshott than to those of Ludwig von Mises. Oakeshott was one of the very few true conservative intellectuals in the 20th century. Amongst his other peculiarities, he considered the claims of the *Declaration of Independence* to be mere silliness, the stuff of delusions. It wasn't the case that Oakeshott had no principles and no respect for rights of some substantial sort. It was the case that he grounded his beloved Englishman's freedoms in flesh-and-blood, dirt, and history."

In my terms, different from but overlapping Oakeshott's understanding, I claimed that, "man is an empirical being in an empirical world. Again I don't 'reduce' man and his world to a simple empiricist chaos, but there is much work needed to be done before we can have a modern Christian view with the contextual explanatory power of the view St. Augustine developed 1500 years ago, a view which largely held until the early modern period and a view I'll partly—and only partly—revive as part of my effort to contribute to a modern Christian understanding of Creation."

From this viewpoint, we can see how a proper form of abstract reasoning can help in concrete reasoning. In Chapter 408, *The Need for Abstractions in Moral Self-understanding*, I claim with respect to *King Phillip's War*—see [http://http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/King\\_Phillips\\_War](http://http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/King_Phillips_War), a war waged by some of the Indian tribes of New England against the European settlers and some Indian allies, that:

Instead of moving towards a proper abstraction that would have allowed a defense of their own culture but also an understanding of the human good in a different way of life, the European settlers raised their particular way of life to a self-righteous ideal. A conflict of cultures was seen as a war between God's servants, the White settlers, and Satan's slaves, the Indians. This stream, which may have been nascent in Puritan thought from the time they first stepped into that wilderness region of the New World, developed fully during the lead-up to the war as the Puritan leaders dealt with the growing resistance of the Indians to the expansion of settled ways of life.

Those European settlers in New England were guilty of the mistake of ideology discussed by Oakeshott, but the mistake was fixable not by a retreat from abstract thought but rather by a better abstract thought.

This better abstract thought would be generally invisible to politicians and others working in practical fields; it would be embedded in the ways of thought which are part of a better-formed civilization, one we can form if we have the will. Human life has become so complex that even practical thought has a lot of abstract thought buried in it.

In the realms of politics and history, Oakeshott takes the same common-sense position that I take: schematic knowledge is largely false knowledge. I've written against this idea that schematic knowledge is true knowledge. For example, we most certainly can't rebuild someone else's country: see Chapter 415, *Why We Can't Build or Rebuild the Countries of Other Peoples*, For pretty much the same reason, we can't really build a good country for our own selves. We can put up infrastructure, gradually and a little bit ahead of need is best. We can build education systems and hope, if we are wise, for a great deal of flexibility, to allow response to the needs of individual students and also to new needs of the entire body of students as the world changes around us. Those responses should be experiments at the level of concrete human beings, particular teachers interacting with specific students in the case of education. We don't need educational theorists with half-baked doctorates nor do we need new ideas in education from marketing people at electronics companies or even publishing firms. Similar comments can be made about our medical systems, factories, and many other components of our country including most especially the military.

We should avoid too much design. Most certainly should we avoid designs which tightly constrain the options of future generations as I pointed out in Chapter 459, *Progressives Kill Progress in Future Generations*. Development that even allows for outright evolution, and the necessary death to specific institutions which are no longer needed, is ideal though perhaps beyond our current capabilities.

In one of my early blog essays included as Chapter 405, *Ways of Thought in the Modern West*, I drew some insights from the historian Carroll Quigley. He had claimed that Western Civilization is founded on the principles of moderate realism. I made it more explicit that moderate realism includes "modern science, in which category I'd place all disciplined ways of thought which accept reality. In the words of Professor Quigley, moderate realism is the outlook defined (loosely) by: The truth unfolds in time through a communal process." A little later, I wrote, "Moderate realism is unique in its basic willingness to be shaped by responses to reality and Thomism reached a highpoint of sorts by the teachings of Aquinas on the importance of the

act-of-being, his existentialism, and by his teachings on the formation of the human mind and moral nature by way of responses to environments. Under Thomism, or even less complete systems of moderate realism, philosophers and even theologians to some extent pay at least as much attention to sensory perception, to empirical data, as does a farmer or a road-builder. Under Thomism, there is no clear divide between theologians and philosophers and physicists, not because theologians or philosophers can dictate to physicists, but because they each have important ways of dealing with empirical data and penetrating more deeply into being and into the meaning of Creation and its various phases and parts. In this unified way of approaching God's unified Creation, we can see the truth of one of the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas: We know even God through His effects in Creation."

Practical politicians in a complex setting, such as the Founding Fathers when they were doing something rather than spewing forth the occasional metaphysical gibberish, hold some understanding of reality. In the countries of Western Civilization, politicians dealing with very complex settings will hold a more elaborate view of reality than, say, Genghis Khan, but the worldview of even Winston Churchill was largely held in a subconscious way. More recent politicians in the West don't act as if they even hold any coherent view of reality, but that's a complex situation not yet well-described by historians.

I'll now try to explain how we can start the process of rebuilding a Christian civilization in the West or perhaps on the Pacific Rim or some other place. We need first to have a plausible, in fact—powerful, understanding of Creation, of created being—stuff and relationships and narratives. We need to have some good understanding of the story God is telling. Most likely, the proper understanding of this story will be a revised and greatly expanded version of the Augustinian understanding of human history.

We need first of all to pay proper respect to created being. Placing knowledge first, modern thinkers also place mind ahead of created being, where mind is considered to be something with existence independent of created being. In my way of thinking, more plausible in Christian terms and also in terms of modern empirical knowledge, the mind is the immaterial aspects, relational aspects of that extremely complex and flexible organ, the brain <sup>1</sup> Those immaterial aspects come from two processes. First are the

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<sup>1</sup>Yet, in a fuller sense, the 'mind' or 'soul' includes the immaterial parts of heart and hands.

evolutionary processes which shaped that brain and also inclined it toward developing, more or less naturally, some very basic ways of thinking and learning. That brain and mind are then shaped by responses to created being, that of our own bodies and also that which lies outside of us. The reader wishing to explore this issue in terms of modern science could read such books as:

- *How Brains Make Up Their Minds* by Walter J. Freeman who is both brain-scientist and philosopher and an admirer of St. Thomas Aquinas,
- *Bright Air, Brilliant Fire: On the Matter of the Mind* by Gerald M. Edelman, and
- *Adaptive Thinking: Rationality in the Real World* by Gerd Gigerenzer.

Under the illusion that we have some sort of ‘mind-stuff’ independent of reality, minds capable of evaluating sense impressions and turning them into knowledge, we tend toward the view that we have schematic knowledge we can use to filter those impressions and to enforce some sort of order upon created being. This schematic knowledge seemingly comes from transcendental regions of pure truths. There is no evidence that we have minds independent in any way of the stuff and relationships around us. The assumption that we have those sorts of minds came from the efforts of ancient and Medieval thinkers to deal with a mystery they couldn’t explore: the formation of the mind in an entity seeming no more than flesh and blood, including a brain which seemed too well-formed to, for example, learn how to turn concrete examples, often quite disparate in appearance, into abstract categories such as ‘dog’ or ‘cat’. In recent decades, scientists have developed instruments and techniques to explore the ways in which human minds form and we can see mind embodied in brain connections and activities. These modern empirical results tell us mind is the same sort of embodied entity as human moral nature as discussed by Aquinas—see the above referenced *How Brains Make Up Their Minds* for a very good discussion of the Thomistic theory of intention, that is, of the formation of human moral nature by way of a goal-directed growth process.

We can ascend to more abstract realms of being, we can receive revelations from God, but even this knowledge of abstract being and of revelations come through the stuff of our bodies or the stuff around us. We have

brains inclined to develop in certain ways which were shaped by evolutionary forces over millions of years and those 'preliminary minds', in a manner of speaking, are more fully shaped by our active responses to reality. Modern politicians and Christian leaders and men of the West in general prefer to believe they can shape reality to the minds they imagine themselves to have.



# 482 Are Rational Political Arguments Possible in the Modern West?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1560>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/03/09.]

The *Library of Law and Liberty* website has another interesting article, this time dealing with some of the thoughts of the American Jesuit, John Courtney Murray. In this article, “*The True Sage of Woodstock*” at <http://www.libertylawsite.org/2013/02/26/reconsidering-the-true-sage-of-woodstock/>, Richard Reinsch writes:

How can reasonable men and women reclaim equality over and above egalitarianism? The first principled step is to get right with our compromised *Declaration of Independence*. This *Declaration* both affirms equality in self-government and reconciles our deeply contrasting Lockeanism and Calvinist Christianity as the basis of our liberty. This is an American Thomism of sorts, a reconciliation of seemingly opposed principles on the head of deliberative republicanism. It’s probably our best hope.

I have confessed to believe, along with Michael Oakeshott, that it’s misleading and can be dangerous to think a stable political system can be well-founded for a nation by documents such as the *Declaration of Independence* or the American *Constitution*—see Chapter 481, *Conservative Politics in light of Evolutionary and Developmental Processes*. The general view expressed in that title, that the thought of Oakeshott is still more powerful

after being merged with the thought of the sociobiologist E.O. Wilson, will play a role in the rest of this essay.

A nation, established as the United States is now or emerging as it was in the decades around 1800 and for a while after, needs some sort of rules for its political, justice, and economic systems. And more. But the argument Oakeshott made throughout his career as a political philosopher, and most certainly my Darwinistically and Christologically expanded version of the argument, claims we can't impose those sorts of rules upon, say, a cluster of human communities which reside in the same area. Even if those human communities seem to an outsider to have very similar cultures, as is true of Afghanistan to the western eyes, there might not even be any such rules acceptable to most of those communities, partly because they are communities and not just groupings of individuals but perhaps because the environments and the developed state of those communities aren't appropriate for stable, larger-scale political or justice or economic systems.

Reinsch's article is largely an appreciation of the political thought of the American Jesuit, John Courtney Murray who believed strongly in the formal political structures developed by the American Founding Fathers. Murray is quoted in the article as saying: "Civilization is formed by men locked together in argument."

What happens when those men locked in arguments about meaningful matters have a different view of what the world is? Christians believe in a Creation, a work of the God of Jesus Christ, a world with moral purpose in its workings and its goals. Pagans might believe in a world of eternal return, a world perhaps itself rational and perhaps not. Utilitarians, to be a bit simplistic, believe the world to be merely a place of things which might be useful to our efforts to attain pleasure rather than pain. Far worse are those in the Modern Age, indeed they are found in all ages of men, who seek a rather more vulgar form of pleasure than Bentham and his followers would have ever allowed.

Argument too easily becomes combat, at first in words and then maybe with guns and knives and bombs. This happened even between the supporters of the Stewart's ideas of royal government and the opposing, initially unorganized, ideas of the non-conformists. Eventually, those ideas came together in the Cromwellian Republic with its respect for some ideas similar to those of the American Founding Fathers, ideas which proved to be somehow consistent with brutal massacres of Irishmen and Highland Scots as those same ideas in our American heads have proved to be somehow con-

sistent with the dispatching of large armies to inflict high levels of collateral damage upon the world. In any case, the followers of the Stewarts and the followers of Cromwell would seem to have more in common in understanding of the world than do modern Christians and many of our opponents. How can we Christians have rational arguments with them? How can they have rational arguments with us?

There is a lack of common beliefs, and the possibilities of violence, in our arguments over such matters as abortion. Moreover, most Christians seem to think like modern secularists though they insist they can do so and come to traditional Christian doctrines, at which point we see their thinking is no more than assertions linked to ideas pushed into their heads perhaps in Sunday School or CCD. These Christians provide information-theoretic arguments to support a contention that a fertilized egg-cell is human. They appeal to squeamishness and sentimentality with grotesque images for those, including probably themselves, who can't hold a moral belief unless violations of that belief produce disgusting results and great pain for some creature we can sympathize with. We need a Kantian categorical imperative against abortion rather than the traditional Christian teachings that "what might be human should be treated as human" and "human creatures belong to God in a special way because He has claimed us in that special way and not because we're inherently God-like."

Let me go on, though the situation would seem hopeless to a man examining our current mess through Christian eyes if that man were bereft of Christian hope and a strong enough faith in the goodness of God to carry him through some nastiness in this concrete realm of Creation. Let's recover a reason for hope and a way of showing our faith in God to be consistent with the empirical reality which is this concrete realm of God's Creation. In other words, let us have confidence in God as Creator. More on that later.

Reinsch describes Murray's 'American Proposition' in these terms:

Its components are human dignity, constitutionalism, government limited by law as given to America by the common law tradition, self-government as faith in citizens to exercise the duties of moral judgment in basic political decisions, and the constitutional consensus that forms the Proposition and serves as the basis for rational argument and the compromises that it forges. This is the deep background that enables "the de-

liberate sense of the community” effectuated by our republican institutions to be reasonable.

One interesting aspect of Murray’s thoughts in this area is his insight that political associations differ “from associations like the employer-employee relationship, voluntary associations, or married family life where ‘the forces of life itself’ define the association more than reason. Rather, the essence of the political association ‘is its rational deliberative quality, its dependence for its permanent cohesiveness on argument among men.’”

I’d say he’s as wrong in this claim as is anyone who thinks human nature can be split into only one of its aspects, mind and heart and hands. We can’t believe those with bloated and undisciplined hearts by a misunderstanding of mind. What can be said about a man can be said about a human community which is each of its members in the large. Each of us, however non-political we might think to be, is the entire polity in the small and the polity is each of us in the large, our minds and our hearts and our hands.

Yet, there is a sense in which Murray is right in associating political systems to the mind in a special way. Traditional thinkers would have claimed he was positing an ideal. I would say he was foreseeing a future development of human political systems or, as I have been claiming recently, political organs in the Body of Christ.

Political systems in this mortal realm are, in a strong sense, more mind than heart or even hands, but are not such in their ultimate development nor in their original states. In Chapter 418, *As Go the Immune System and Neurological System*, I argued that, “[a]nalogies can be taken too far and too literally, yet I wonder if we can apply to the human social organism, ultimately the Body of Christ, the example of a long-ago and primitive immune system ‘spinning off’ a neurological system,” and went to note that “[s]omewhat, that effort to distinguish between ‘self’ and ‘non-self’ led to a central nervous system, ultimately thought, as well as to defenses against diseases.”

I also proposed this as an important question for Christians:

Government as we know it has grown out of systems to identify unfriendly or alien human beings (or sometimes to subjugate the other) or to protect against non-human dangers to the physical and moral aspects of our communities. As we mature towards the Body of Christ, is our government going to split into

a policing (immunological) system which operates with some independence but under conditions where it has only as many resources as it needs for the task at hand and a planning and thinking (neurological) system which plays a role in the ongoing functions of the parts of the Body but also plays a central role in understanding the environment of that Body and planning for the future?

I don't know the answer to that question and think that some future Christian thinker might propose an alternate and more meaningful question about the ultimate state of the political organs in the Body of Christ. In any case, it's time for Christians to relearn the art of Christian thinking, an art which can lead to a truly Christian understanding of Creation and to a refounding of a Christian civilization, whether it's based in the West or in Asia or on the Pacific Rim. We have to recover the confidence in God in His role of Creator which is expressed in the philosophical school of moderate realism whose true nature was expressed well by the historian Carroll Quigley as "Truth emerges in time through a communal process" and expanded by me to "The human mind develops in time through a communal process." Once, if imperfectly and incompletely, the Western mind, at least the minds of Aquinas and Shakespeare and Newton, were encapsulations of some understanding of this world, and more, and those encapsulations were images of some major part of Western Civilization as it developed. There's still more: I've claimed that Western Civilization is the most complete embryonic Body of Christ we've yet seen. It might be dying in the West and might come to life in some other region, perhaps Asia or the Pacific Rim, but the pilgrim Body of Christ will live and we will know it by its strongly Christian understanding of created being.

Developments which emerge in time can be expressed in written documents, but those words on paper can only provide a snapshot of the emerging and developing and evolving entities. Any efforts to stick with those documents as the Body of Christ matures, or as history moves forward—in non-Christian terms, will lead to a nation no longer holding a plausible understanding of itself, no longer having a plausible way to order its political activities. Yet, the origins of the political organs of the Body of Christ are still with us. Deflected from healthy development, those organs will yet recognize the alien, whether the European Jews of the 1930s or the Leftist radicals of the 1950s (even the anti-Stalinists) or the Islamists of the

21st century. Even domestic police might get into the act, waging war first against violent and brutally exploitive drug-lords and then against everyone who pops a pill or smokes a joint as they waged war against everyone who drank a beer or a martini not so many decades back. There remains yet the possibility that American Christians will get some of the treatment that some of them are advocating for those Islamists.

We're a long way from having the sort of political organs which can show mind-like attributes, at least on a consistent basis. For now those mind-like attributes seem almost like a strange dream in the midst of a West which is lost in the Cosmos as Walker Percy said. Until those mind-like attributes develop at the communal level, rational argument at the individual level will be sporadic and marginal, not even to be found at many universities from what I read and hear. The opposite is also true: until individuals are capable or and willing to engage in rational argument, the mind-like attributes will show sporadically and in marginal ways in our communities. We're not dealing with simple systems with easily stated cause-and-effect relationships but rather with the sorts of complex systems which mathematicians and biologists and political scientists and others have only recently begun to study.

And so I return to a more fundamental level to claim that rational argument doesn't bind together a civilization and certainly doesn't form it. A common story of what exists, of Creation in Christian terms, binds peoples together in a civilization, an embryonic Body of Christ, most of which have miscarried. Human beings, individual and communal, can adopt the story, learn to live by the story, and develop together. Rational argument can exist within that story and perhaps between those who hold differing stories.

Rational argument about meaningful matters between different groups isn't even possible unless those groups already share at least some version of the story and stories underlying a large-scale, 'multi-cultural' community. Even if multiple civilizations come to exist, they will inter-communicate on rational terms only to the extent that they produce men like the old-fashioned Jesuit missionaries, St. Francis Xavier and companions, who were able and willing to embed themselves in the ways of another civilization while holding on to their Christian faith.

Rather than trying to lead a return to the *Declaration of Independence* or the *Constitution* of the United States, rather than compromising their own faith in the interests of moralistic campaigns, American Christians

should get to work on figuring out how to live the Christian life, in their minds and their hearts and their hands, in this age decaying into barbarism. I'm doing my part by trying to produce what I call a worldview, an understanding of our world and of all of Creation in light of Christian revelations. My efforts will produce something good to the extent, and only to the extent, they are part of a greater communal effort, an effort of businessmen and musicians and artists, of scientists and poets and spiritual leaders, of engineers and house-builders and retailers.



# 483 The Foolishness of Overriding Development Processes

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1570>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/03/22.]

I've argued repeatedly that we need to accept that we live in a world of evolutionary and developmental processes. This isn't just a matter of intellectual correction. Much of the suffering in recent centuries was caused by our prideful attempts to control dynamic entities, even our own children, as they go through maturing processes of various sorts. Many acts of mass-murder by revolutionaries, many imperialistic acts so damaging to other countries, were the result of efforts by self-defined elites to create a brave new world of some sort.

Most of the alleged beneficiaries of these acts of conscious or unconscious cruelty had, and have, enough self-respect to at least resent all that we could label as social-engineering, including the replacement of troubled neighborhoods by high-rise concrete crime zones. That resentment is only part of the reason for the failure of urban-planners to turn Harlem into a prosperous region of New York City, the failure of social-workers to rescue children by destroying what's left of family ties, the failure of Judge Garrity to raise the quality of education for African-American children in Boston by putting them on buses for hours each day, and the prior failures of Bolsheviks and Maoists and others to transform their countries into workers' paradises. The methods themselves, even if they had been implemented with the self-sacrifice of the Ukrainian Kulaks or that of the prosperous Iraqi middle-class, were grossly defective, out of touch with re-

ality. These grand projects of rebuilding Harlem or building a new nation in Iraq or rebuilding Haiti (see Chapter 415, *Why We Can't Build or Rebuild the Countries of Other Peoples*) are efforts to impose human schemes upon God's world. Don't try to fool Mother Nature and don't try to force the Creator's hand. The results can be ugly and painful. It's far better to work with Mother Nature and her Boss.

Jane Jacobs saw the problems in urban-planning schemes early on. Wikipedia's article about her, see [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Jane\\_Jacobs](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Jane_Jacobs), begins:

Jane Jacobs (May 4, 1916 – April 25, 2006) was an American–Canadian journalist, author, and activist best known for her influence on urban studies. Her influential book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) argued that urban renewal did not respect the needs of most city-dwellers. The book also introduced sociology concepts such as "eyes on the street" and "social capital".

Jacobs is well known for organizing grassroots efforts to protect existing neighborhoods from "slum clearance" and particularly for her opposition to Robert Moses in his plans to overhaul her neighborhood of Greenwich Village. She was instrumental in the eventual cancellation of the Lower Manhattan Expressway, which would have passed directly through Washington Square Park, and was arrested in 1968 for inciting a crowd at a public hearing on the project. After moving to Canada in 1968 she joined the opposition to the Spadina Expressway and the associated network of expressways in Toronto planned and under construction.

Development and evolution aren't pain-free paths to perfection. There's plenty of pain and this world is mostly made up of ad-hoc entities which are good enough for now but might have to be far different next year, let alone a century from now. The world doesn't stay put long enough for it to even be desirable for us to attain a state of perfection. If we could attain such a state during our lifetime, it wouldn't be perfection by the time we attained it.

It's a fact in this world that evolution and development sometimes lead to deaths and other ends of something once good or potentially good, yet,

evolution and development are the ways of this world. Though change can often appear suddenly, as a result of external events or as a result of the buildup of stresses which unleash at once, this is mostly a world of gradual processes, at least in the macroscopic realm of things.

Yet, evolution and development are the ways of the world, the ways chosen by the Creator. To be complacent and not to try to make things better is a sin for a Christian; to try to enforce our desires and schemes upon the world is also a sin for a Christian. We are called to cooperate with God's world, the story He's telling, and to try to bring about as much good as possible. Not to try to ease all pain and suffering but to bring about as much good as possible. Those are different goals and conflict with each other.

What about American cities? Some of them were magnificent and livable at least into the World War II era at what now seems the end of a great expansion of prosperity for all American workers, from ditch-diggers through engineers and on to industrialists. By way of human beings living together, neighborhoods developed and no one cared that those neighborhoods were homogeneous, neighborhoods of Italian-Americans or Irish-Americans or African-Americans. Some cities dominated by conservative ethnic groups even had neighborhoods of artists and wannabe artists, true Bohemias. Those neighborhoods were mostly at peace with each other and shared many public squares.

By the 1950s, something had gone wrong, and urban renewal programs shifted into higher gear to rebuild neighborhoods such as those in Harlem for which the description 'troubled' is an understatement. The experts had arrived and were working as if guided by a sinister invisible hand to make things far worse, even threatening to modernize New York City by a highway project through the middle of Manhattan which would have destroyed much of the city, including Washington Square, where Jane Jacobs lived. She set to work. She was right. Now, truer experts, those who study reality and those who think about ways to make things better rather than thinking to make a new reality are still at work, as they will be so long as there are human communities in this mortal realm.

This is an interesting article about work done by one of those experts, Katherine King of Duke University: *Jane Jacobs Was Right: Gradual Redevelopment Does Promote Community* at <http://www.theatlanticcities.com/housing/2013/03/jane-jacobs-was-right-gradual-redevelopment-does-promote-community/>

4917/". She even found it conducive to good neighborhoods to have residences with their own direct door to the street, townhouses rather than flats or other sorts of multi-unit buildings. An interesting finding, one which makes some sense after being established as a fact but it wouldn't have likely been conjectured by someone working from some schematic representation of reality any more than Darwin himself could have anticipated the many strange and inconvenient facts he discovered.

I don't know if we Americans will ever learn better, but we'll soon be forced to act better as we realize we are no longer an extraordinarily wealthy nation.

## 484 The Fragmented States of America

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1586>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/04/10.]

An article about the analysis of monetary flows in the continental states of the U.S. tells us, “By combining network theory with the travels of our dollar bills, the ‘real’ effective boundaries in a new USA are far simpler, reflecting where money ‘stays’ as opposed to more arbitrary state boundaries.” These mathematical analyses result in 8 such regions where “money stays.” The resulting map can be found in the article, *The 8 United States Of A New Monetary America* at [//www.zerohedge.com/news/2013-04-07/8-united-states-new-monetary-america](http://www.zerohedge.com/news/2013-04-07/8-united-states-new-monetary-america). There is also a link at an open-access science website to download the article summarizing the mathematical analysis. This study looked at the regions as replacements for the 50 states in a continuously existing United States, but I’ll shift to the idea that these regions might well define sovereign nations—at least until processes of federation produce a more coherent republic at a larger scale.

What I find interesting is that the regions correspond well to those proposed by a Russian academic, Igor Panarin, who proposed in the 1990s that the United States is politically incoherent and would collapse as a nation and form into regional nations—see *As if Things Weren’t Bad Enough, Russian Professor Predicts End of U.S.* at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123051100709638419.html>. It also corresponds to regions I’ve seen proposed, seriously and tongue-in-cheek at the same time, because of cultural differences within the United States. For a variety of reasons, I’ve also claimed that a similar breakup of the United States into such regions would produce more coherent political systems and also more coherent cultures.

Once able to live as independent political and economic and cultural communities, those regions would, in my opinion, be wise to move toward a smoother integration into a North American or even western hemisphere federation.

Powerful armies and predatory banks can both be used, and arguably are being used in Europe and the United States, to protect centralized powers which would be endangered by even the attempt to reorganize countries or institutions so that they are more coherent, in both structural ways and dynamic (narrative) ways.

I would emphasize that a federation still larger than the United States makes good sense and would seem a logical development in a world I believe to be the story of the formation of the Body of Christ, an all-inclusive human civilization in which the most important organ is the Catholic Church. Under this viewpoint, the end-point in this mortal realm would be a Christian civilization which includes the entirety of the human race as well as a bewildering network of networks of nations and worship communities not fully under the ecclesiastical hierarchy, of educational institutions and symphony orchestras, of businesses and nature clubs, of extended families and urban neighborhoods,

For a discussion of how I think human communities should develop, see Chapter 481, *Conservative Politics in light of Evolutionary and Developmental Processes*. Don't expect a description of desirable communities nor a recipe of how to build an allegedly good community. Human communities are more like organisms than machines, potentially like a world in the sense of a coherent narrative and not like an engineered building. Clearly, no one intended for these regions of more coherent cultures, regions which also are where the "money stays" to develop. No government agencies regulate them and their cultures or flows of money. In fact, government agencies try to encourage or even force the homogenization of culture and economy on the national level.

These regions developed despite the desires of the American central powers. They developed because of processes involving both individual human beings and small communities of human beings and the way they interact with others.

# 485 Getting Public Religious Issues Upside-down and Inside-out

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1601>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/04/22.]

This article, *What Keeps the States United?* at <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/what-keeps-the-states-united/>, is a well-written and clearly reasoned review by Joseph Baldacchino of a book, *Rethinking the American Union for the Twenty-First Century* edited by Donald Livingston. (I haven't read the book though I've read writings of some of the authors.) It deals with the general problems in American political and economic and cultural communities which I discussed in Chapter 484, *The Fragmented States of America*. The review comes to a conclusion similar to my claims, though I would have gone beyond words about 'Christian traditions' to write of communities actually shaped in response to the Creator and His work in a special way, a way at least hinting of what we will be in our individual and communal human beings if we are chosen to enter the completed and perfected Body of Christ. I also concluded that we're not capable of reforming the United States as it stands and would be wise to voluntarily separate into smaller republics which could then start the hard and multi-generational work of doing it better, even to rebuilding not just the United States but a larger scale North American or even Western hemispheric republic or "federation of republics."

It's clear there are very deep political and other problems in the United States in this year of 2013. The wrongful ideas and attitudes and ways of

acting which underly those problems probably originated in the West in general and—I think—were nurtured most tenderly in the United States. See Gore Vidal's novel *Empire* for a view of our corruption around 1900 from the viewpoint of the likes of Henry and Brookes Adams as well as men of political action such as John Hay. I've also read works by other thinkers of that time who came to a similar conclusion, such as the Irishman W.E.H. Lecky or Lord Acton who was worried about the damage Americans would do to themselves and their country if American leaders meddled in the complex affairs of Europe and Asia. Our leadership elite has been bad for a long time—Tocqueville found them to be scoundrels in the 1820s, as soon as the Founding Fathers' generation was gone. Yet, we can't blame them entirely. Better men, such as Ron Paul, arise sometimes and we're not interested. In the likes of George W. Bush and Barack Obama, we have the leaders we deserve, even the leaders we want in some sense of 'want'.

So things are bad and Mr. Baldacchino is here to tell us what I also tell my readers: very fundamental reforms are needed, not short-term, painless, technical fixes. Here are his concluding paragraphs:

Like many conservatives, the book's authors seem to think that the principles of the U.S. Constitution could be revived if only more people could be persuaded of its correct interpretation. But the original Constitution and its liberties presupposed Americans with certain character traits and cultural habits. The moral, religious, and social practices prevalent in America in the 1780s were grounded in a Christian and British tradition. Only a society with that kind of public ethos would pay more than lip service to a Constitution of checks and balances.

Returning to the Constitution of the Framers would require nothing less than a revival of the kind of civilization and character type from which it is indistinguishable. This cannot be accomplished quickly, through political speeches or decisions. It would require protracted moral-cultural regeneration of Americans, one person at a time.

My title doesn't refer to either the reviewer or the authors in the book getting public religious issues upside-down but rather to the lack of understanding on the parts of the leaders of American Christian communities, the

American Catholic bishops and other Catholic leaders as well as the Protestant leaders, ordained and lay. In their current battle in favor of religious freedom, they have gotten wrong the main point of the above paragraphs from Mr. Baldacchino's review: the Constitution is grounded upon Christian beliefs as manifested in a particular British cultural tradition. Our sorts of freedoms come from Christianity and whining as if the Constitution is what allowed Christians to be 'free' in a Western Civilization of mysterious origin shows ignorance, cowardice, and faithlessness.

The religious and other freedoms implicit or explicit in the Constitution weren't a result of the words or the political struggles at the Constitutional Convention but rather the background of those words, the background from which those various freedoms emerged after centuries of struggle by Christian peoples to overcome the temptations to misuse of power which seemed to overwhelm the Western Christians as soon as they came into power. The overcoming of these temptations involved, among other complex events, the renunciation of certain advantages of power and wealth by their holders, Popes as well as princes and kings and merchants and rentiers. The actual history is certainly ugly, perhaps at its worst when it is decent and morally well-ordered men who regress to an abuse of power, usually in an effort to reach a greater good.

The result was ugly even after some had learned lessons from the disedifying wars over the control of a people's religious communities, the persecution of a Galileo who wished to simply pay attention to the Creator's works, the burning of Servetus and Hus by Calvinists and Catholics respectively. Over the succeeding centuries, political theories which justified rights and freedoms matured and were sometimes enacted in governmental structures and definitions of power. Yet, we still look at matters in the way I phrased it in the previous sentence and that is wrong, dualistically wrong in the eyes of a Christian. In fact, theories were, as usual, the description of empirical realities however dimly seen, however imperfectly and incompletely realized as the theories were being formulated. Yet, we modern men, including nearly all practicing Christians, have swallowed the modern liberal story of Western freedoms being a matter of some sort of progressive recognition of some allegedly metaphysically grounded rights. (See my book, *Human Rights: An Evolutionary and Christian Perspective* [47], for a radically different take of these modern rights and the allied freedoms. My take is both Augustinian and Darwinian.)

These rights and the allied freedoms were earned by sweat and blood

and tears and are not to be found in some metaphysical realm of truths accessible to the mind of any human individual but are rather the result of evolutionary and developmental processes in mostly the communal human being of the Christian West. Those rights and freedoms were largely character traits of Christian communities from the Western traditions. The modern political theories, at their best, were descriptions of a well-ordered Christian's mind and heart and hands, where 'Christian' points toward communal human being even more than individual human being.

If the Western realms, including the United States, are losing their formal respect for freedom of religion, then it's a result of the losses on the part of Christian communities. Fewer Americans and Europeans are truly attached to Christian communities, and this lack of attachment covers many who still show up most Sundays to attend Mass or other worship services. Even those attached to Christian communities seem not to have a true Christian understanding of the rights of Anglo-American traditions, typically seeing those rights in the way advocated by secularists. The American Catholic bishops and intellectuals seem to have mostly accepted this secularist justification of freedoms and rights. (And this secularist justification is probably derived from unhappy branches of Christian natural-law thought; there is a vicious circle of sorts being traveled, most especially in various Christian ghettos of thought.)

Christian communities of the modern West are more often than not gatherings of individualistic Christians cut off from a living tradition or sometimes gatherings of Christians trying to be in communion with each other in ways which were part of earlier phases of God's story.

If we Americans would enjoy the benefits of Christian civilization, Christian rights and freedoms, Christian political structures, Christian culture, then we as a national community must be predominately Christian. What we have lost in our political and economic and cultural communities can be described as "ways of the West", including the more particular ways of the Anglo-American regions of the West. If we've lost some of our most important freedoms, we've done so because we've not properly cared for and loved our communities which have, as a consequence, decayed to states of weakness and relative disorder. As Mr. Baldacchino says in his review: "Returning to the Constitution of the Framers would require nothing less than a revival of the kind of [British and Christian] civilization and character type from which it is indistinguishable. This cannot be accomplished quickly, through political speeches or decisions. It would require protracted

moral-cultural regeneration of Americans, one person at a time.” I’d purge the term “one person at a time” and insert something like: “in an iterative and recursive process involving individual human beings and old or new communal human beings.” A creature in such a world as this can enjoy only limited freedom if trying to be a freestanding individual. True freedom can come only when we share the life of God and that comes only when we enter fully into a Biblical religious community, when we accept the communal human being of the Body of Christ (or the People of Israel) as our own and contribute all we have and are to that Body.

Over the past two centuries, American and the British peoples have passed on their Christian beliefs and the closely connected traditions of particular political and moral order in an increasingly weak, hollow-chested, form. By cutting the communal ties, we cut ourselves from the tradition, the links, that would tie us to the historical events in which God revealed Himself and His plans for us, however little the greatest of Christian thinkers have understood those revelations. The Constitution is merely a piece of paper without those Christian beliefs and British manifestations of certain Christian traditions. Logically enough, our politicians and judges treat the Constitution as a paper covered with words which mean what they wish them to mean at any instant, any point of fruitful crisis. Christian leaders, including American Catholic bishops, should be worried about their failure and the failure of their predecessors to nurture Christian beliefs in those under their care, the failure to pass on some manifestation of Christian traditions. It’s quite possible that much of this failure is due to forces beyond their control, but they have the duty to be honest with their own selves and with their fellow-Christians about this situation. We don’t need any Bishop Alfred E. Neumann: “What, me worry?”

In any case, we aren’t losing our religious and other freedoms because politicians or judges suddenly decided to take them from us. Rather is it the case that our ancestors long ago began a gradual process that we’ve continued: step by step, we’ve passed on progressively weaker versions of Christian belief and traditions until many decided it wasn’t even worth going to Mass or other services if, for example, God had gained the interesting trait of all-forgivingness. We tore ourselves from our communal human beings so that we could become modern, radical individualists. Gatherings of such individual human beings have nothing to do with the Biblical traditions of religious communities being shaped by God: the people of Israel in the Old Testament and the Body of Christ in the New Testament. We

modern American Christians, in fact—all Americans, are no longer peoples capable of being free nor are our Christian leaders capable of being the leaders of free peoples. We rely on the Constitution's illusory promises, once well-grounded to be sure, when we should be learning how to share the true freedom of God.

I'll invite the interested reader to explore my ideas about individual and communal human being in my blog writings at *Acts of Being* [38] or in my recently released, downloadable book, *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53]. In part, this book develops an understanding of the Body of Christ in which the Church is the most important organ and not the entirety of that Body. I think that we've passed into a part of God's story which is so complex and rich as to overwhelm our priestly orders and the lay bureaucracies which are the institutional church. If I'm right, recovery will come as new Christian communities develop to deal with educational matters as well as to handle relationships with political and economic and cultural institutions. These new communities won't exclude ordained men, religious men and women, or lay employees of Church institutions, but these new communities will not be under the control of the official Christian institutions. For at least the beginning of an approaching reform and revival—which might be very painful, the new instruments of a greater Christian civilization will likely be dominated by the laity outside of Christian institutions.

## 486 Conspiracies Confirmed!?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1604>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/04/29.]

This essay is written in response to an article which is highly rational and not ‘conspiracy-minded’ according to the current mind-set: *Everything Is Rigged: The Biggest Price-Fixing Scandal Ever* at <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/everything-is-rigged-the-biggest-financial-scandal-yet-20130425>. This article deals with the price-fixing activities of money-center banks and allied financial institutions, activities which are proving to be wider ranging and larger in scale than even cynics, or even-even ‘conspiracy theorists’, had guessed. I’ll return to this article’s topic after dealing with some slightly more general issues.

Any coherent response to the title, *Conspiracies Confirmed!?*, depends upon the definition of ‘conspiracy’. There are those who see grand conspiracies, many of whom are good thinkers and are capable of honestly dealing with evidence of large-scale criminal acts on the part of political or military leaders, officers of criminal investigation agencies or national security agencies, bankers or executives in the petroleum industry. The list is somewhat open-ended though we can rapidly run out of potential criminal conspirators who are meaningful on a national scale or even the regional scale of a large country such as the United States. When we move down toward city streets, we’re speaking of the variety of neo-Nazi, African-American, Latin-American, and other gangs which fill—very roughly—the ecological niche once dominated in some cities by the Mafia and related gangs. Those who understand the nature of these street-level criminal conspiracies insist on thinking that there are no corresponding gangsters and criminal conspiracies at the level of the centralized governments. The great historian, Lord

Acton, writing in an age of far less moral decay, told us that the problem with powerful centralized governments is that they attract men with the moral characters of gangsters. (Along with a larger body of men willing to go above and beyond the call of duty and a much larger body of ordinary decent folk who just want to be paid for a day's work while accumulating benefits toward retirement.)

Criminals are many in all ages of men and in a morally disordered age will operate in a manner almost open. The United States is morally disordered for sure and so are the remainder of Western countries. After a couple centuries of destruction of their social order by colonizers (including American and British drug smugglers from as early as the 1700s) and then their own home-grown communists, China seems to be even more damaged than the United States.

Disorder reigns, despite the number of human beings who are at least decent when times are good and a fair number of human beings with deeper moral integrity. (The weaker and less discerning have shown surprising strength in community when they've had good leadership; as examples, consider the individual families or parishes or towns who risked their own lives to help Jews and other victims of the Nazis, but, so far as I know, only when leaders were strong and of good moral character.) At all levels of the West and China, of most African and Latin American countries, in all realms political and economic and judicial, there are pockets of gangsters who engage in various sorts of battles against each other and against the befuddled general citizenry as well as a scattering of would-be honest political and other leaders who are now in quite over their heads. The gangsters battle each other in the way of barbarian warriors who are fighting for the right to loot from the general citizenry.

Gangsters. Merely criminals and not wizards of great occult power. Some of these gangsters are pirates and some are failed and incompetent Alexanders. (See *Pirates and Emperors* at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pirates\\_and\\_Emperors](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pirates_and_Emperors) if you've never heard the story.) These criminals leave behind tracks not so hard to see, if not so grand as those of Alexander, but we modern Americans, and others in the West to a lesser extent, insist on seeing our leaders in terms perhaps appropriate to the generation of leaders known at the Founding Fathers, men who were sinners like the rest of us but also more noble in many of their public activities. Even our two would-be Napoleons, Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton, were at least interesting men of moral substance,

not mere thugs as nearly all leaders of the modern West have been, including the ‘great’ presidents of the United States. We try hard to fit what happens into the narratives pushed into our heads during our public school days but it be impossible to fit *Operation Keelhaul* (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation\\_Keelhaul](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Keelhaul)) and related operations against civilian refugees, the War Against the Vietnamese Peoples, the Cold War as a whole, the take-down of the Twin Towers (impossible that the government’s story is true according to any firemen or engineers I’ve found willing to talk even ‘in secret’), the current and ongoing theft of the assets of ordinary Americans to keep money-center bankers, central-government politicians, and military contractors flush with cash. This is just a sampling of historically recent, large-scale criminal conspiracies for which we have detailed facts or at least strong evidence of the circumstantial sort.

This stuff simply doesn’t fit into the narrative most Americans and Europeans hold even when we add in some well-known aspects of the Gilded Age and its Robber Barons, most of whom seem to have at least been competent thieves who didn’t need to destroy a billion dollars of wealth to steal a few tens of millions. With these odd facts sticking out all over the place when anyone tries to fit them into the stories we were fed in American high schools—many weren’t bad stories for teenagers who need to have higher standards before learning about sinful men—then some will try to generate their own narratives, sometimes involving grand mystical conspiracies run by Illuminati or Freemasons or other wizards behind the screen or the *Comintern or Communist International* (see <http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Comintern>) which was created to “fight by all available means, including armed force, for the overthrow of the international bourgeoisie and for the creation of an international Soviet republic as a transition stage to the complete abolition of the State.”

So there are some gangsters, ideological or other, who admit to enough that the conspiracies aren’t even secret. Over time, the victims and others also come to know about many individual criminal conspiracies (projects), such as criminal exposure of workers in an industry to poisonous substances or bid-rigging for highway construction or laundering of drug-cartel money. We now learn from, Matt Taibbi, an honest and insightful investigative journalist, that *Everything Is Rigged: The Biggest Price-Fixing Scandal Ever*.

The money-center banks and some other well-placed financial big-boys

have been systematically colluding to set precious metal prices as well as a variety of loan and investment rates, in the process stealing from municipal governments, school districts, states, entire countries, the endowment funds of charities, pension funds, those who borrow to buy houses or cars or iPads; all of us. Anyone who's borrowed money or put money in the stock markets or bond markets in recent decades has had their pockets picked. So far, the American and other regulators have let them off with fines which were a fraction of executive bonus pools and, when some of the injured parties brought civil suit, a judge let the banks off after the lead attorney for the rate-collusion defendants argued that "while the banks may have lied to or cheated their customers, they weren't guilty of the particular crime of antitrust collusion." Taibbi adds, "This is like the old joke about the lawyer who gets up in court and claims his client had to be innocent, because his client was committing a crime in a different state at the time of the offense."

Essentially, they defended themselves by saying those who thought the banks were anything other than self-interested parties getting together to collude toward their own greater profits had deluded themselves and deserved what they'd gotten.

We still probably know only a part of the greater story—more of these schemes are coming to light, but what is known paints a picture of a vast conspiracy which is pretty much a bankers' version of a Viking invasion, probably complete with starving or enslaved masses before our economic problems are over. It's likely that these schemes have been the proximate cause of our current economic and political disasters. I say, "proximate," because much of the world was fragile after centuries of exploitation of various sorts and the countries of the West had been keeping open their self-inflicted wounds from World War I and other strange and stupid events. Since few are even talking about those problems, major collapses of our institutions, including entire countries, would have come at some point even if we and our leaders were honest in the more personal ways.

You can't solve the problems you refuse to acknowledge and to investigate whether those problems are criminal conspiracies or the problems of a civilization with eroded foundations. But this is odd. As I noted near the beginning of this essay, those who see street-level conspiracies (involving a few millions at their grandest) refuse to admit that larger opportunities, the wealth controlled by large countries or money-center banks or the power of the American military, will simply draw more ambitious gangsters. In a similar way, those who speak of moral decay in such matters as sexual

behavior or cultural standards refuse to see the decay is still more advanced in our political and economic behavior, in our government and business and religious institutions.



# 487 Does Expensive Weaponry Undo Western Traditions of Liberty?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1607>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/05/02.]

Despite my—so to speak—metaphysical biases toward empirical knowledge, I carry with me a human respect for ‘ideals’, loosely defined, so that I don’t like the idea that liberty is gained and held by a balance of weaponry between the citizenry and their government. I do accept the arguments in the end, partly because the number of innocent human beings murdered by evil or psychotic private citizens is vanishingly small compared to the number murdered at the orders of the political leaders of centralized governments, including the United States as well as the British Empire, the German Reichs, the Tsarist Empire and Soviet Union, Communist China, and so on. For example, retired high-level CIA and U.S. military officers, as well as a handful of journalists with moral integrity, have supported the estimate of 176 children being killed by Obama-ordered drone strikes in Pakistan alone. Maybe if we were more worried about American government crimes, then we wouldn’t have such a problem with large-scale killings in the United States. Europeans should be able to make similar statements.

We Americans, and most Europeans, have been living for generations in an oasis, surrounded by the deserts our own leaders, business and cultural as well as political, were creating throughout many regions and realms of our own countries as well as the colonized or otherwise exploited countries of Latin America and Africa and Asia. We were protected by some sort of magical field that protected us from those who would enslave us in various

ways. And then the urbanized, middle-class and upper-class Russians found out what it was like to be a serf. The Jews of Germany and, in a lesser but significant way, the Christians and non-believers of Germany, discovered what it was like to be at the wrong end of the weapons of brutal rulers. Now, to their great surprise, Americans and others—including Germans once again, are learning a brutal truth of history—allow yourselves to become dependent upon centralized powers and those dependencies will eventually be used against you.

We are particularly vulnerable now, circa 2013, to be pushed back into serfdom. There are various reasons for this but one has to do with those guns and other weapons. In *Tragedy and Hope*, published in 1966 and available on the Internet as a pdf file, Carroll Quigley said that the modern ‘democratic’ forms of government as well as the various modern ‘rights’ of individuals are endangered because the governments of the world can now afford and can use weaponry more expensive and more powerful than that available to the ordinary citizenry. Under this way of thinking, which certainly carries some truth, the American colonists were able to successfully rebel against the British government in 1775 because the weapons available to the British army were, at best, as good as the hunting rifles owned and often used by many the colonists. The British cavalry were mounted on horses, at best, the equal of those ridden by the horsemen under the command of “Light-Horse Harry” Lee or Marion Francis. This is not to deny the general superiority of the British army and the unlikelihood of rebel victory, at that time, without intervention by the French. It is to say that, even if worse had come to worst, the American colonists would have put up a surprisingly good fight.

Nowadays, bands of heavily armed and heavily armored men and equipment can be quickly assembled and sent on missions through Boston, to choose one purely hypothetical event in a city once the center of a struggle between soldiers of a world-spanning empire and farmers and tradesmen with good muskets and knowledge of a landscape suited for partisan fighting.

Yet, a simplistic application of Quigley’s thesis doesn’t work. The Afghans and Iraqis, Hezbollah in Lebanon, have shown that even tank columns and soldiers with expensive, hi-tech weapons and armor are vulnerable to disciplined partisan fighters.

I’ll not go more deeply into the problems we’re facing as Western Civilization breaks down in fundamental ways, though our current economic

problems can provide enough material for contemplation of the problems we're facing and the likelihood that a corrupt power-elite will defend their own wealth and power by impoverishing many in the West who thought that good times had come for time without end. Even so sober a historian as Jacques Barzun speculated in *From Dawn to Decadence* [9], published in 2000, that we're entering a period when the public school systems will be shut down as impoverished children are sent back into factories or onto the farms. What will happen when we are told by militarized IRS agents to hand over more money to the government though our children are hungry, public schools are being shut down, and child-labor laws are being repealed?

We might be returning to the Age of Chivalry. That is, we, or our children, might find out what it's like to be a serf herded into the factories or mines of fields by warriors mounted on expensive transportation and wielding expensive weapons. Apparently, despite the speculations of modern liberals such as Francis Fukuyam, the reports of the end of history have been wildly exaggerated. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis\\_Fukuyama](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Fukuyama) for a short discussion of Francis Fukuyama and his work.

Believing that we have enough freedom of a creaturely sort to at least try to make tomorrow's world as decent as, or better than, the world we inherited, I'll claim that we are the problem. These problems were developing and began showing themselves as early as the American War Between the States or at least World War I, and we and our ancestors ignored them, preferring to accept any gifts offered by the gods of the marketplace. We didn't want to stop the rolling good times to contemplate the possible dangers of our growing dependencies upon various sorts of centralized institutions run by technocrats or the complementary dangers of the growing cost and complexity of modern weapons. Even with problems becoming obvious, many I know take, implicitly or even openly, the position that they'll keep their heads down and try to make it through the remainder of their own mortal life with as few problems as possible. Let the next generations eat moldy bread while working in hell-hole factories.

We have allowed those technocrats serving the central powers to gain nearly complete control over our ways of making livings, our ways of housing and feeding our selves and our children, the viability of our religious organizations so dependent upon tax exemptions and government grants, and so much else. And they have very powerful weapons. We have not, and cannot have, the weaponry to defend our selves and our children against

politicians, generals, policemen, bankers, and others in the power-elite. We also have not the toughness to fight in the way of those Asian tribesmen who've been willing to die by the dozens, and to see many children die, to kill one American or British soldier. This problem of unmatchable weaponry wielded by those serving centralized powers is a secondary problem, but it likely will play a role in the creation of the next phase of human civilization, complicating and endangering the building of a new Christian civilization.

# 488 We're All Barbarian Children on This Bus

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1621>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/06/03.]

I've just finished reading Barbara Tuchman's *The March of Folly* and considered it a perversely entertaining read about a disedifying aspect of much of human history—the sheer stubborn stupidity of many political leaders. After quick discussions of Jeroboam, son and successor of King Solomon, and the legend of the Trojan Horse—which likely had some historical foundation, she discussed in some factual detail six Renaissance Popes who were taking care of their families' wealth and power while ignoring or aggravating the problems which led to the Protestant-Catholic schism, the British botch of their relationships with the North American colonies—all of them though Canada remained part of the Empire until helping to form the Commonwealth and Florida remained part of the British Empire for several more decades, and then the disaster many of us remember too well: the war of the American government against the Vietnamese peoples.

Tuchman seems, to this non-historian, to have carried out a good analysis of each of these disasters before coming to the wrong conclusion, though not a conclusion fully wrong to be sure. She concluded that Johnson and Nixon, for example, represented failures of reasoning, failures in the realm of individual thinking. They could have seen what needed to be done if they had simply engaged in more disciplined (individualistic) reasoning processes. There is a valid insight underlying this but her insight would have been far more valid if she had had a better and more complete abstraction of what it is to be a human being of a higher sort, a civilized sort, or—still better to a Christian—a human being responding to empirical reality in

such as way as to shape his own being to the thoughts of God as manifested in Creation.

It is a little surprising that she didn't come to a more coherent understanding of these follies of political leaders; she does seem to have been a proper admirer of Edmund Burke, a true man of Western Civilization and not a man to slight a well-disciplined human mind but a man with an appreciation of the other aspects of human being, starting with that aspect of the human mind which is formed over generations and cannot be brought into a well-ordered form by the will-full efforts of any one individual or even any one generation. This aspect of the human mind, intellect, was defined well by Jacques Barzun [7]:

Intellect is the capitalized and communal form of live intelligence; it is intelligence stored up and made into habits of discipline, signs and symbols of meaning, chains of reasoning and spurs to emotion—a shorthand and a wireless by which the mind can skip connectives, recognize ability, and communicate truth. Intellect is at once a body of common knowledge and the channels through which the right particle of it can be brought to bear quickly, without the effort of redemonstration, on the matter in hand. [page 4]

I discussed this subject in Chapter 127, *Intelligence vs. Intellect*.

We have to deal not only with conscious reason but also with a ingrained practices and habits which correspond to reasoning processes acting over multiple generations. Some are aware of these reasoning processes, though that awareness can mess us up as much as thinking too much about that shot of the basketball or wondering, “Do I breath in as I begin my swing at the tennis ball?” In any case, many in a well-ordered human community will not be aware that many of their ‘prejudices’ are not given truths but rather capitalized experience which may or may not be valid now or in the future as we learn more or better about God's thoughts as manifested in Creation. Some may see this lack of full awareness of most human beings as good or bad; I see it as simply the way we are and see the need for each human being to somehow accept their own role and the roles of others, whether that human being is someone unconsciously embedded in a tradition or someone with conscious awareness of a tradition, to defend it or critique it.

Matters get more complicated, at least partly because we have no settled ways of speaking about human being which deal properly with all we know about that human being from our religious and other traditions, from literature and philosophy, from biology and the other sciences (perhaps especially mathematics) which tell us so much about the proper ways to think about the foundational stuff of our being and the being of our world or even all of Creation.

My thoughts about human being began to cohere into a framework which can properly organize our empirical and other knowledge in the spring and summer of 2012 as I was reading E.O. Wilson's *Sociobiology: The Abridged Edition* [151] and Jacob Neusner's *Judaism in the Matrix of Christianity* [97].

I'll lead with my conclusion as I can best state it for now: the human being can be usefully and morally described in terms of mind and heart and hands; all three have immediate and individual aspects but also longer-term and communal aspects. The immediate and the individual are not fully the same nor the longer-term and the communal.

As individuals, we can critique the communal beings in which we participate, though we should remember not to play around with explosives unless we know what we are doing. Most of us will not even be aware of the true nature of what I call a worldview; many of us don't realize that most of what we see as absolute truth and most of what we vaguely realize to be weaker truths are what we could call mediated truths—a worldview which is the capitalized experience of something like a civilization, spiritual experience as well as more strictly empirical experience. To complete this quick view of human knowledge of human being: a civilization is a mortal embodiment, quite imperfect and defective, of the Body of Christ as organisms on Earth have been in some sense mortal embodiments of that perfect man who was Christ after His resurrection. Whether I'm writing about the moral aspects of human being as individuals developing communal being or about the biological aspects of human being as individuals constrained to act in the interests of family-lines, I'm really writing of the evolutionary and developmental processes which lead to the formations of evermore complex individual and communal human beings, ultimately to the Body of Christ and all of His members in Christian belief.

Let me quote a brutally honest statement of Professor Wilson [151]:

Camus said that the only serious philosophical question is

suicide. That is wrong even in the strict sense intended. The biologist, who is concerned with questions of physiology and evolutionary history, realizes that self-knowledge is constrained and shaped by the emotional control centers in the hypothalamus and limbic system of the brain. These centers flood our consciousness with all the emotions – hate, love, guilt, fear, and others – that are consulted by ethical philosophers who wish to intuit the standards of good and evil. What, we are then compelled to ask, made the hypothalamus and limbic system? They evolved by natural selection. That simple biological statement must be pursued to explain ethics and ethical philosophers, if not epistemology and epistemologists, at all depths. [page 3]

Even this statement is wrong, though it's as correct as any such statement in the greater context of Wilson's thoughts about the social nature of human beings. We as individual human beings are ourselves and also the members of family-lines in an evolutionary sense, but also members of communities which have formed over time. This expanded view, well developed by Wilson and colleagues in a number of books and articles, adds the 'socio' part of 'socio-biology'.

The example I'll sometimes use to bring out the main point is reproduction, the center of evolutionary reasoning. Having babies and raising babies is expensive in the human species. Our raw biologically founded sexual desires and the pleasures which can result from fulfilling those desires are the ways in which nature encourages us towards ethical behavior in the context of biological organisms. We have babies to continue the family-line and perhaps help it to expand greatly. The value of human life rests first of all upon the animal foundation of natural selection: those family-lines containing members which reproduce successfully might survive into the future—pure luck also plays a role. I suspect natural selection has been misunderstood and feared by many who would protect moral order just because it developed in a period in which our individualistic beings were being aggrandized at the expense of our communal beings. If Darwin had grown up in a Civilization not undergoing a strange form of decay, he would have likely developed his theories in the direction taken since then by Wilson and other sociobiologists. (I believe there are hints of such developments in Darwin's writings.) If his Christian critics had not been decaying into a

state of radical individualism, they would have been able to tie Darwinian ideas into an appreciation of the communal aspects of human being.

Liberal individualism is little more than a secularized form of literalism of a general sort, including Biblical literalism: what is concrete and immediately perceptible is what is real and all else exists only in a nominal sense; moreover what concretely exists is transparent to human thought properly disciplined to the will. (In other essays, I've claimed this error has been growing in the West since Duns Scotus and William of Occam and other radical philosophers at Oxford in the 14th century first began their attack upon the traditional Christian understandings of mind and of human being as best refined to that time by St. Thomas Aquinas; those radical philosophers over-glorified the will and led too many to very bad states of thought and feeling and action.)

What we can perceive immediately is indeed a very concrete form of being and is only a starting point, from a metaphysical viewpoint, for analyses which penetrate being, heading deeper into ever more abstract regions of being ending in the level of abstract being which is the raw stuff of Creation, what all the rest is shaped from, the truths manifested by God as sufficient for this Creation including the story He wishes to tell in this concrete world, the story He will continue in the world of the resurrected.

Our individual intelligences operate over short spans, perhaps the length of our own lives though some families and other institutions have leaders who think over longer periods and there are human beings who have a bit of trouble with five minutes from now. Our intellects operate over the spans appropriate to our communities. Our biological urges are more limited in many ways but operate over spans appropriate to our genetic family-lines. We are driven to struggle to survive through famines and wars and horrible diseases, driven to reproduce even when it seems irrational to have children, by our genes in which are encoded, as Professor Wilson wrote, the foundations of not only the subject matter of ethics but also the very beings of ethical philosophers. And so we can see that our feelings and biological urges are less irrational and more in the nature of a sometimes harsh but rationally understandable ethics frozen into our DNA. Our passions are the most immediate part of us, hard for our reason to control even when we know our passions are inappropriately directed, but they serve needs evolved many years ago and are still being refined, as, for example, nerve-cells first evolved hundreds of millions of years ago but are still being reshaped to various purposes in the human brain and the brains of many species.

Life is good, not because it can always be said to be good by human standards but because we are the descendants of those who survived and did well enough to reproduce during good times and bad times. The claim that life is good is clearly only sometimes true but our family lines wouldn't exist if we didn't struggle through the bad times as if it be clearly true that life is good but for the current bad stretch. It would seem that God etches some harsh truths on stone tablets and encodes some other harsh truths in our DNA.

Harshness is part of life in this vale of tears, but only part. There are lines of Jewish thinkers and leaders who can see that the goodness of communal human life, family and synagogue and other communities, comes from a properly formed set of feelings and emotions. What evolution gave us for family-line survival can also work to the formation of morally good human communities, from marriages to nations and right to the Body of Christ.

The passion of man for woman, though it can go bad, is also the bond which ties husband to wife in a fruitful and wonderful marriage. (Most human relationships lie probably in a middling position on that spectrum from bad to wonderful; bad can dominate in periods when communities don't properly form their young men and young women.) This is a short statement of the traditional Jewish viewpoint [97]:

The doctrine of emotions in the view of the sages who created Judaism remained always the same. The reason derives from the social realities that give meaning to emotion and definition to the possibilities of feeling. If we begin with feeling, we end up in society. [page 51]

A little more discussion can be found in Chapter 282, *Do We Need Heart and Hands as Well as Mind to Understand Reality?*.

See my freely downloadable book, *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53], for more discussion and a proposed framework for understanding our individual and communal human beings.

Let me get back to Tuchman's criticism of the leaders in Troy, of Jeroboam, of George III and Lord Townshend and various others, of John Foster Dulles and John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger and many others. She speaks of their failure to use

their powers of reasoning properly without seeming to realize that communities are formed precisely by the strengthening of the communal aspects of our human being, by at least a partial submission of the individual aspects of our being. Only a thinker too well-formed to Enlightenment understandings of thought and human being would expect modern politicians, especially those who succeeded in American political machines, to be the rebellious thinkers who belong to the community and yet are willing and able to critique the mind and heart and hands of that community. Even the often courageous and intellectually substantial Winston Churchill had a career of disaster-causing errors redeemed by his bulldog courage, not brilliant policies, when facing the dangers of Nazi Germany. Then, after falling into a cleansing depression when he saw that he and the other leaders of the West had participated in intensifying the ongoing processes of barbarization of the Anglo-American countries in their efforts to fight the freshly barbarized nations of Germany and Russia, Churchill regained the wrong sort of courage and gave his famous iron-wall speech where he pointed into regions where militarists and national security thugs would shape the views of politicians rather than having a communal cleansing by way of return to free societies. Free societies are necessarily formed in morally well-ordered civilizations; at best, barbarian societies are struggling toward a true freedom, despite some silly glorification of ancient German tribal customs.

We still had the military power, the industrial productivity, the scientific knowledge, the political organization, of the most advanced civilization that the human race has yet seen, but we were becoming barbarians even before the process accelerated in the early 1900s as we Anglo-Americans raced the Germanic and Slavic and Japanese and Chinese peoples toward ever lower states of moral order.

The problem is not that Lyndon Johnson didn't use the full power of his political reasoning to see the nonviability of South Vietnam as an independent country. The problem is that the United States had become a country where the head of state was not in any true sense a citizen of Western Civilization nor even of the United States as defined by the traditions accepted by the Founding Fathers. Lyndon Johnson was a radical individualist who'd been herded together with many of his fellow American individualists and had acted according to his primeval communal instincts but those instincts had never been refined to accord to the better traditions of the West, the legend of King Arthur or the historical reality of the great-souled Charlemagne and the truly great Alfred and the admirable St.

Louis. Johnson had all the bad characteristics of Andrew Jackson without the virtues such as his battlefield toughness and willingness to take an unpopular stance. Johnson was the sort of modern American individualist and cynic who would have seen through all false legends and whitewashed biographies of George Washington and would have concluded Washington was simply another scoundrel who'd had better press than most. Johnson would not have had a clue why it was that Washington as a teenager had been so impressed with a stage play about an idealized Cato that he would have set his life's goal to be as devoted to public duty and public honor as Cato had been. (And Cato was a noble man though missing some of the benevolent virtues which are part of Judaism and Christianity.)

Thinkers of all sorts, including historical analysts, need to be able to step back far enough to see the ways in which the truly great leaders, Cincinnatus and Cato and Benedict and Alfred and George Washington, have shaped themselves in response to reality under the guidance of some noble tradition. Even Otto von Bismarck, that nationalist SOB was cool-headed in his political conspiracies, not vengeful or hateful, and he knew history well enough to know that large wars or constant wars of any size will destroy social order in a country; a war fought for motives of conserving some great good might still lead to revolution and loss of that great good along with much else. He was a man emerging from barbarism and possessed the warrior attitudes of his Germanic ancestors but the same can be said of Charlemagne and even of King St. Louis to some extent.

A society well-ordered to the demands of a noble tradition can produce, if all goes well or at least okay, a body of politicians and other leaders who will reflect some sort of strong order. The conclusion changes not at all when shifted to cover other complex human communities such as the Catholic Church or the various Jewish communities, even a military with a strong tradition of selfless service, such as the American or British or French armed forces. Nearly all of these communities, and many others, are in various stages of moral decay. We need to step back and see that this is the situation: we are barbarians in control of a modern city. Much that seems civilized about us is no more than our ability to somewhat use and crudely maintain complex infrastructure and to still make the clothing of civilized men and even put it on our own bodies without hurting ourselves. We've been stripped of that capitalized experience which shows itself yet in the *Rule of St. Benedict* or the writings of Shakespeare or the letters and speeches of George Washington, a man of more limited mental power

than Hamilton and Jefferson and Adams but all the more impressive for his absorption of so much of the political and moral wisdom of the Western tradition, British branch, as it existed in the late 18th century. If we could pause from our pedantic discussions of the Constitution long enough to read Washington's letters, written as he was holding the future of the rebelling colonies in his hands, we would probably understand much which is beyond the direct reach of our individual thinking powers.

Tuchman seems to have concluded that Dulles and Kennedy and Johnson were something like a George Washington gone wrong. They were nothing of the sort. If anything, the more intelligent of these individualistically best and individualistically brightest could be seen as Jeffersons or Hamiltons unleashed in a West collapsing into moral disorder.

As I already wrote: Johnson, and all the other recent American presidents and most other leaders, were men and women who wouldn't have had a clue why Washington so admired Cato. They certainly wouldn't have understood a man I mentioned earlier, one who did rise to a state of high literacy and the highest moral order during a period of barbarism: King Alfred the Great. Johnson and Nixon and all the others were outsiders to the traditions of Western Civilization, the traditions which are manifested in us as intellect defined so well by Barzun and also as feelings and emotions disciplined to higher moral purposes as discussed by Neusner. To the extent that Nixon's 'moral majority' existed, it was a mob of consumers who knew how to behave well in department stores and steak-houses, not a community bearing the traditions of the West.

It's been *Lord of the Flies* time in the West for a good number of generations. Barbarian children ruling over other barbarian children and often exploiting them in ways criminal and immoral.



## 489 Jefferson is Weeping but Jefferson is Somewhat Confused

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1644>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/07/05.]

Most human beings alive in this year of our Lord 2013 freely and fully accept the evidence that the human race wasn't a special creation by God. Our ancestors were knuckle-draggers who rose from that position to one we consider, with some prejudice perhaps, to be more noble.

Remarkably, many who have accepted our biological situation continue to believe that human 'rights', political and other, did somehow come all at once, fully mature and fully belonging to our ancestors and most certainly to us. One question would be: which ancestors? Was it men born in the Enlightenment who had full possession of those Lockean rights to life, liberty, and property or perhaps the Jeffersonian rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? Or was it men lucky enough to have been alive when Hobbes published *Leviathan* and political individualism of a modern sort came into existence? Or maybe we should look at periods of Roman order or Greek experiments with democracy? How about the age of the ancient Hebrew judges when we are told by the Biblical writers that there was true order but of a generally bottom-up sort favored by libertarians and anarcho-capitalists.

And so it is that we have one of the most interesting and most courageous legal and political commentators of this period, Andrew P. Napolitano, joining Jefferson in his noble confusion: *Jefferson Weeping* at <http://original.antiwar.com/andrew-p-napolitano/2013/07/03/jefferson-weeping/>. I'm in strong agreement with what might be called the 'feeling' side of the argument: freedom is a great good and one

all human beings with a Biblical faith should accept. Yet, I see serious confusion in some of Judge Napolitano's claims in this quotation:

When Thomas Jefferson wrote the *Declaration of Independence*, he used language that has become iconic. He wrote that we are endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights, and among them are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Not only did he write those words, but the first Congress adopted them unanimously, and they are still the law of the land today. By acknowledging that our rights are inalienable, Jefferson's words and the first federal statute recognize that our rights come from our humanity—from within us—and not from the government.

The government the Framers gave us was not one that had the power and ability to decide how much freedom each of us should have, but rather one in which we individually and then collectively decided how much power the government should have. That, of course, is also recognized in the *Declaration*, wherein Jefferson wrote that the government derives its powers from the consent of the governed.

At the website *The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash*, found at "<http://vbm-torah.org/archive/intparsha68/18-68mishpatim.htm>", we can read in a commentary on the Talmud and ultimately on the Pentateuch: "The slave who rejects freedom believes that he has discovered an easier mode of service. However, static obedience is not what God desires. That person ultimately remains a slave." It's part of a discussion of the reason for mutilating the ears of a man who voluntarily takes on slavery, perhaps when offered freedom. There is good reason to believe the ancient Hebrews, and some modern Jews and Christians such as myself, would say that one who voluntarily takes on slavery, as opposed to a conquered and captured man, has placed himself outside the people of salvation, the People of Israel or the Body of Christ or both in some of my speculations. One who favors security over freedom "ultimately remains a slave," and cannot share the life of that only truly free Being, God. He has condemned himself.

So I'm a strong supporter of Judge Napolitano's advocacy of freedom, but I also can see clearly that much which is promised to us by God, and in

some way becomes an obligation upon us, isn't realized, at least not completely or perfectly, in this vale of tears, in this mortal realm. More exactly, we are born into a realm dominated by evolutionary and developmental processes, as was the point of the beginning paragraphs of this essay. If human beings evolved and if they can develop into different creatures as they respond within their personal capabilities to a complex and changing world, why would we think that the biologically mythical Adam and Eve become suddenly real when it comes to human rights? Where is the evidence that ancient communities were fallen versions of communities free by God-created nature?

Often, I repeat earlier claims and speculations, sometimes as part of a general effort to refine my own ways of understanding and stating them. In this context, it seems more appropriate to recommend that any interested readers download my recently released book about human nature, *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53], or one of my earlier books which specifically addresses human rights in the context of a world dominated by evolutionary and development processes, *Human Rights: An Evolutionary and Christian Perspective* [47]. You may also wish to download a catalog of my writings, including my collection of essays from my blogs which is updated once a year: *Catalog of Major Writings by Loyd Fueston* [52].



## 490 Economics Allowing for Communal Relationships

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1674>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/08/14.]

In the recent article, ‘*Networked Minds’ Require Fundamentally New Kind of Economics* at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/03/130320115105.htm>, we learn that scientists have discovered the existence of “networked minds”, a concept overlapping my concept of “communal minds.” Jacques Barzun covered some important regions of this territory in the 1950s with his book, *The House of Intellect* [7] and others were very tentatively exploring this territory at least as early as St Paul with his vague references to something he called “The Body of Christ,” the perfect man which is Christ and which is all of us. According to Jacob Neusner—see *Judaism in the Matrix of Christianity* [97], the sages who founded modern Judaism in the century or so after Christianity came to dominance in the Roman Empire were very concerned with the ways in which our feelings lead us into social ties, into communities. I discuss these matters in Chapter 127, *Intelligence vs. Intellect* and Chapter 282, *Do We Need Heart and Hands as Well as Mind to Understand Reality?*, and in a greater context in my book which is available for free downloading: *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53].

The first paragraph of the article, ‘*Networked Minds’ Require Fundamentally New Kind of Economics* at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/03/130320115105.htm>, is:

In their computer simulations of human evolution, scientists at ETH Zurich find the emergence of the “homo socialis” with

“other-regarding” preferences. The results explain some intriguing findings in experimental economics and call for a new economic theory of “networked minds”.

Later in the article, we can read about the core findings:

Prof. Dirk Helbing of ETH Zurich, who coordinated the study, adds: “Compared to conventional models for the evolution of social cooperation, we have distinguished between the actual behavior—cooperation or not—and an inherited character trait, describing the degree of other-regarding preferences, which we call the friendliness.” The actual behavior considers not only the own (sic) advantage (“payoff”), but also gives a weight to the payoff of the interaction partners depending on the individual friendliness. For the “homo economicus”, the weight is zero. The friendliness spreads from one generation to the next according to natural selection. This is merely based on the own payoff, but mutations happen.

For most parameter combinations, the model predicts the evolution of a payoff-maximizing “homo economicus” with selfish preferences, as assumed by a great share of the economic literature. Very surprisingly, however, biological selection may create a “homo socialis” with other-regarding preferences, namely if offsprings tend to stay close to their parents. In such a case, clusters of friendly people, who are “conditionally cooperative”, may evolve over time.

If an unconditionally cooperative individual is born by chance, it may be exploited by everyone and not leave any offspring. However, if born in a favorable, conditionally cooperative environment, it may trigger cascade-like transitions to cooperative behavior, such that other-regarding behavior pays off. Consequently, a “homo socialis” spreads.

As I understand matters, they reasoned that cooperative individuals could come to some sort of dominance in a society so long as selection allowed ‘other-regarding’ individuals to congregate in dense enough populations and one possible way for that to happen is for children to stay near parents. With strong families, a society can depend much upon the commons and can be something of a welfare society because of lessened danger

of being taken advantage of by free-riders. From strong families and the other-regarding behavior natural to genetically related creatures, networks of trust can be built to do business in efficient and friendly ways and to accomplish many other goods such as caring for the disabled without families and to help to educate all future citizens and not just your own children.

The viewpoint in the design and analysis of the research seems to me to start from the modern view of human beings as being autonomous and then to try to correct that view. Thus it is that their model of social man is a networked individual rather than a creature with both individual being and social being as is true in my ways of thinking as well as in the discourse of some others with some ties to the ages prior to modernity.

Yet, there is something of the nature of networks in our communal being and there is also much that is good in modernity though it tends to be, consistent with the modern view of human beings, clusters of good thought and good art and good actions connected by loose networks rather than by a coherent narrative of the meaning of it all. In any case, the networking of individuals gets at only part of human communal being but it's a true part just as genes are an important foundational part of human being and it's only when scientific thinkers use words, or even imply words, such as 'just' or 'only' that genetic thinking threatens our understanding of our human being and, in fact, all of created or contingent being. As Pope Benedict XVI said in 2008:

Modernity is not simply a historically-datable cultural phenomenon; in reality it requires a new focus, a more exact understanding of the nature of man.

It was this quote that inspired the title, and partly the spirit, of my book: *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53]. Research done in genetics and sociobiology and biochemistry and social networks can help us to achieve this "more exact understanding of human being," but it needs to be brought into a coherent narrative which gives meaning to it all, which narrative would be the core of a civilization.



# 491 Is Detroit the Result of Slash-and-burn Politics and Economics?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1680>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/08/26.]

In this essay, I'll sometimes write about the West as a whole and sometimes try to be more particular, especially in giving examples, by writing from the American viewpoint. In fact, it's at least arguable that the current moral and social disorders of the West began in the United States. Henry James is said to have claimed, circa 1900, that the United States would corrupt the entire world. I've claimed a number of times that Europe was a bit tired and in the process of fading by 1900 and the US, materially prosperous frontierland of the West, failed to take up the task of maintaining and advancing Western Civilization; Americans didn't seem to have realized, and don't yet seem to realize, that a civilization needs to be maintained or advanced. We assume the existence of Western Civilization and move on to drill oilwells and build amusement parks.

We Americans think ourselves to be sophisticated residents of a advanced and complex civilization. At a moment's notice, we can throw up more magnificent skyscrapers or factories in Detroit and Chicago and...

Maybe we've hit a roadbump or two, but we look back just a few decades and see that we were building cities on a scale beyond the dreams, or nightmares, of our ancestors. We now have smartphones and ebook readers which can carry large personal libraries on a tablet smaller than the keyboard I'm now using. We have remarkable space exploration technology and desktop computers which can hold more information than the largest libraries of the

ancient or Medieval ages. To be sure, we still seem capable of developing new and exotic technology though we are having more trouble, especially in the US, building and maintaining the workaday pieces of our civilization. I think that we are far worse than that when it comes to the 'soft' components of our civilization, especially the literary and other intellectual components which feed into our understandings of who we are and what our world is. We're still pretty good at hard sciences though some, such as the late Jacques Barzun, have claimed we're living off the creative advances of the decades around 1900; he was speaking of physics as well as pictorial art and literature and music.

Have our human beings developed as fast as our populations have grown and as our technology has developed? Even in science and engineering where we seem to know so much about the early periods of the expansion of our universe and are on solid ground for planning a colonization of Mars, have we come to better understandings of what our goals should be or do we just do what is possible and what strikes our fancy?

I've endorsed the claim of Ortega y Gasset that Western man has fallen back into a state of a barbarian child. Maybe the better claim is that, by the middle of the 19th century or so, Western man had matured to the level of a 12 year-old and then maybe fell back a couple of years of maturity over the next century and a half. We've continued to grow in many ways and haven't taken care of some of our basic hard and soft infrastructure and don't seem much interested, as a general rule, in developing new ways of organizing our communities or our individual lives. Even without our recent orgies of debt accumulation, many local ecological and moral and social problems were growing as we concentrated our efforts and resources upon the tasks of getting a new stadium for the regional NFL franchise or putting more computers in front of illiterate and innumerate and quite bored students.

The demands of our rapidly growing human communities, the need to feed and clothe and supply water and remove sewage and to develop proper political systems and to also develop private economic systems, maybe require more than even that 12 year-old man of the 1800s would have been able to deal with let alone man of the 21st century as he regresses toward infancy. The leaders of the West are acting as if they're as clueless as any Joe Six-pack who sits in front of the television, letting it numb him into a morally culpable state of ignorance and stupidity.

Our huge and dense populations as well as our rapidly advancing tech-

nology seem to be demanding of us a level of sophistication and complexity which we can't yet provide in the economic and political realms. A loose interpretation of the history of the 19th century, the golden years of classical liberalism, might indicate we had passed through a period in which individual human being had developed very rapidly in some ways but the development of communal human being was at best slower and maybe some important institutions had grown fast but into deformed, parasitic entities. Wealthy and highly centralized governments, had been hijacked by men I'll label, following Acton, as having the "moral character of gangsters."

A mature human community should be able to recognize those who serve their personal goals at the expense of the community and maybe some number of innocent individuals in particular. I believe it was GEM Anscombe who pointed out that a society is in deep trouble if it needs a formal resumé to tell if someone is a good man or woman. In fact, we use those formal resúmes for purposes other than judging character, but we are in a situation where we can't recognize those gangsters Acton warned us about. We put great wealth and power in the hands of such criminals, members of criminal networks if not quite gangs organized as tightly as the Mafia, and they get to work. This isn't to excuse us. If we can't distinguish between good moral character or bad, or—worse—prefer the ones with bad moral character so long as they promise us some good share of the loot, then we're almost certainly incapable of governing our complex communities.

Can it be true? Are we functionally primitives relative to our social and physical environments? Are we much like those rainforest natives who slash and burn to produce some open land which will be very fertile for a couple of years and decreasingly so after that? After that period of great fertility, the demands of the crops are too much for the soil and the tribe moves on.

Are our communities not fully such? Are they merely gatherings of selfish individuals? Do we seek short-term profits for our own benefit no matter the cost to our children or to our neighbors? Do we fail to make a proper effort to build the fertility of our country, the economic fertility and the political fertility and the cultural fertility?

Our publishing firms once had great potential, however much they failed spectacularly with Herman Melville and some others. True it is that junk books about buffalo hunters and tamers of the Wild West sold well while *Moby Dick* quietly died. The situation hasn't changed. Good books die while easily marketed low-quality books dominate our best-seller lists, though now receiving reviews which make them seem like real literature for

real, thinking readers. For a number of decades, the profits of the publishers were good and some good books were published; occasionally, an author of substance would even prosper. Then the publishers were sold to corporations with an eye on next week's bottom line. The slashing and burning began in earnest and soon literacy standards were falling. (In such a complex situation, there is no way to label the acts of the publishing companies, the American educational system, and the entertainment industry as being the real 'cause' or driver. They were all correlative and interactive factors, along with a number of others.)

I was told by a psychology graduate student that researchers had found that the average reading level of American newspapers had reached fourth-grade by the late 1990s—that is, fourth-grade standards from prior to 1965 or so. Soon enough those newspapers were going bankrupt. Why bother reading that stuff if you do have reading skills enough to handle even a decent mystery novel? Why bother reading if your reading skills have fallen with those of the average American?

Slash-and-burn business techniques had reduced the publishing industry to a farce of sorts and it was time to move on, to social websites or video-games or maybe televising the shocking and awful destruction of Baghdad or other foreign communities, that sort of destruction being something of an accelerated slash-and-burn process. The self-destruction of the publishing industry ran parallel to similar processes in education and other realms of culture.

We can't create much that's worthwhile and increasingly rely on Asians and others to produce the physical goods once so well made in Detroit and Hartford. All we can do is slash-and-burn, destroying human communities to break free the exploitable individuals, taking good advantage of their raw intelligence and making sure they never develop a proper intellect (communal form of intelligence). Literacy skills and general thinking skills were never so high in the general American public as some reactionary dreamers seem to imagine but they were developed well enough to hold up the profits during several decades in which there were grand profits from cookbooks and books of self-centered spirituality and novels written by untalented writers determined to prove their sixth-grade teacher was right: "You are such a creative boy." They sought to prove that writers were to write and not think; they did prove that many writers could publish without showing signs of having learned how to think.

Since I'm an author who's banged his head against the walls of the

publishing industry, I've concentrated on the destruction of the literary culture of the West by seekers of short-term profits. Heaven help any who would wish to be serious readers of serious new books; heaven help those who own shares of the publishing firms, perhaps in their pension funds; the party's almost over. The editors have slashed and the marketing executives have burned and the ground is now sterile. Time to move on. If only we had a place to go.

If there's a lot of ruin in a country, there's more in a civilization, but it's still a finite amount of ruin. Eventually, the seeds don't germinate or perhaps they come up as sickly and malformed things.

We seem awfully close to that point of sterility in the West and many of our communities are there, cities and maybe entire countries and vast realms of Western culture.

The Western publishing industries are dying. Our newspapers and most mainstream magazines are no better off. Detroit is dead with many other American cities following. American infrastructure is said by many to be very low-quality relative to most other developed nations, but they'll follow us soon enough. Our military fights, destroys cities and the infrastructure needed for the care of millions of civilians, and can't seem to win wars, or maybe they and their political bosses do a bad job of picking wars to fight.

It would seem that the economic and political and military realms of the US are in trouble as deep as the cultural realms. I think the West as a whole is in it as deep as the US.

This is to be expected. We have slashed-and-burned and built cities on the cleared land. Most realms of Western life are increasingly sterile, growing from wretchedly impoverished soil. It turned out that we were living on inherited resources without contributing much, but I've suggested in the past that this has been true from the beginning in the US regarding many aspects of human civilization. We could dig mines and build factories with the best of them but it's beginning to look as if we never matured as a people in many ways, never learned how to build cities with staying power, never learned how to build the modern equivalent of the cathedral at Chartres, never learned how to build the narrative which would have made us truly a people. At some point, the Europeans seem to have decided to join the American party and joined us in our decay into deeper and deeper states of barbarism.

Our businessmen think of themselves as entrepreneurs on the march looking for the city which offers the best tax deal and already has a well-

educated body of workers and good infrastructure for the exploiting. Our Christian houses of worship, liturgies, intellectual works, literature, and music are bereft of imagination—I'm being kind. After a good start by Francis Parkman and Herman Melville, Americans seem to have lost interest in any effort to find a meaningful narrative of this country and acted as if determined to destroy any narratives in the minds and hearts of all Western peoples. In any case, we declared the United States to be a special place filled with special people and then went on our special way. We combine greed with soullessness and preciousness and put it in a narrative which is kind of a football game between the American cowboys and all the bad guys.

Football and cowboys have been very profitable for the American regions of the West. Complex histories which show the great potential still found in the West aren't any more profitable than discussions on the deck of a whaling ship about how it was we were failing to live up to that potential.

Is it any wonder that even the greatest of American cities seem little more than gold-rush cities only a few corporate relocations or unwise government fiscal decisions away from becoming ghost-towns?

Detroit and Chicago, and many other American communities, are more sterile than mules, intellectually and economically and politically and culturally, but we have no fresh regions of forest to start slashing and burning. This is despite the large expanses of physical lands available to Americans. We had already chosen the best of those lands, most especially the best with regard to water and some other key resources. More importantly, the forest was never really just the woods of Kentucky or the plains of Nebraska. The forest was also the civilization which came with the European settlers, even those with very rudimentary educations and only a bare grasp of the history of their own people. That civilization was in the minds and souls and customs of those settlers who were already giving themselves over to a booster mentality. We are no longer a people in touch with the Western Civilization which made it possible for the Founding Fathers to establish a country with some serious amount of respect for both individuals and groups, with a somewhat denatured Christian faith which at least made possible some degree of moral self-governance, which gave us both the common sense and the dreams which powered us on our slash-and-burn journeys across the continent and through our own minds and hearts and hands.

So, I ask, "Is Detroit the Result of Slash-and-burn Politics and Economics?"

## 492 Who Are the American Elites and Are They Conspirators?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1701>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/10/01.]

Conspiracies. Don't underestimate the number and importance of conspiracies in human history, conspiracies political or economic or even cultural but usually criminal and often highly immoral. Don't overestimate their importance in the general scheme of things but don't forget their sheer abundance indicates they play a role in God's story—I'll pass over a discussion of what that role might be but I've proposed before that men of high ambition and great energy, even Alexander the Great and Genghis Khan and Caesar might sometimes be a yeast of sorts.

During periods of disorder, when human communities can't protect themselves and when the less corrupted leaders of those communities are often clueless, conspiracies of tightly connected insiders can be quite effective. Trust and openness are destroyed by various factors and those who keep secrets are in their domain, sometimes describable as a sewer or swamp. Greater community loyalties, even to communities of religious faith or to nation, are overwhelmed by those who hold a fanatical devotion to blood-relatives and brothers from fraternal organizations. New dependencies are forged for the disorganized masses, often using unsustainable promises by governments or corporations or religious institutions. The appearance of Obamacare, the culmination of 'research' done as early as the Nixon administration, is closely related to the previous six or so decades of a big Cold War, lots of little hot wars, political murders, invasions and destruc-

tions of countries powerless before the great powers, large-scale thievery of middle-class wealth by a coalition of politicians and bureaucrats and central bankers and others. [Obamacare is only one example. I've read that Bob Haldemann has written that a legalization of homosexual marriage was discussed during campaign strategy sessions of the Nixon insiders. This situation, as such, doesn't argue for the goodness or badness of government-sponsored healthcare or expanded definitions of marriage, only that any alleged reforms can be tools for the expansion of power by elites.]

There are rational thinkers out there who know some history and as much of current events as can be known by outsiders. Most can be found in the alternative press rather than the mainstream press, though some, such as Seymour Hersh, work in both realms; others get published at least occasionally in mainstream media. One of the more important websites in the alternative press realm, potentially very dangerous to current power-holders, has published a short article about the changing but somewhat stable 'dominant corporations': *These Are The Ten "People" Who Run The World (For The Last 20 Years)* at <http://www.zerohedge.com/news/2013-09-27/these-are-ten-people-who-run-world>.

I'd take the title for the above linked article as being a bit tongue-in-cheek, but it does point to a problem in the alternative news-media. Even the most rational thinkers in that alternative media know enough history and see current events clearly enough to detect criminal conspirators but they often overestimate the competence of the conspirators and greatly overestimate their cohesion and even assume a level of organization like unto that of the 3rd Army as it marched across Europe during WWII. We're dealing with a situation more like that of an extreme separation of classes, such as Roman Patrician clans versus plebeian communities. But worse. As I'll explain later, our elite is partially hidden, even when publicly known they act in many ways through their secret organizations whether fraternal organizations or government national security agencies. The entire system works to push our hidden elites toward outright criminal activities, worse in many ways than other abusive systems such as that of the Roman Republic.

Let me turn to a historian of a recent generation, Carroll Quigley. In *Tragedy and Hope*—available in larger libraries and also on the Internet as a pdf-file for free download, Quigley engaged in history verging on journalism. In the early sections, dealing with the period which happens to have been the time in which the American Empire was expanding out-

side of North America—the decades around 1900, Quigley claimed there to be three groups of elite power-holders, the bankers and the politicians and the monopolistic capitalists. In terms of the American turn to empire, three good examples are JP Morgan, William Howard Taft, and John D Rockefeller. (By ‘bankers’, Quigley meant not the mortgage officers at old-fashioned local banks; he meant investment or merchant bankers and the closely allied central bankers. And note that Rockefeller’s heirs were bankers, the result of a transition he began by moving from Cleveland to New York City where he began to control his largely industrial empire through banks.)

I don’t think Quigley’s scheme works for the world after 1950 or so and I think the power-holder groups were under transformative stresses for a couple decades or so before the breakdown. Yet, it is the only analysis of this sort I find fully convincing, as much as I respect the more recent analyses of those who write under the name of Tyler Durden at *Zero Hedge* found at <http://www.zerohedge.com/>, Sibel Edmonds, James Corbett, Peter Dale Scott, Alfred McCoy, and a surprisingly large number of others not writing at the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* or their allegedly conservative little brothers. I find Scott’s general talk about the ‘deep state’ most convincing; basically, the deep-state is a sewer running under the governments and banks and other powerful institutions of the modern world; those sewers are inhabited by two-legged rats who move currency and arms and drugs for terrorists or for the ‘black operations’ guys at the CIA or the Mexican drug cartels or others of that ilk. Yet, even Scott’s analyses, as he himself acknowledges, don’t lead to a clear view of what’s driving the central institutions of our world; such a view likely might not be possible for a generation or more. And, maybe, the power-elites are currently as poorly organized and as ineffective as the above ground institutions such as the US Department of Justice or the MacArthur Foundation or Bank of America or Microsoft.

We need to gain some plausible view of the power-holders or power-elites if we are to protect our individual selves, our loved ones, our communities. If we set out to protect ourselves from falsely viewed power-holders, we’ll at best waste our energies and more or less consciously allow our attention to be wrongly directed. Even if our view is wrong but plausible, we can start to act in ways which might be effective as we will be re-forming our communities.

In any case, I find my analogy of modern gangsters of the state and

banking complex and so forth more apt—parasites and cancers inside the bodies we call human communities. This is partly because of my Christian orientation and my updating and enlargement of the human understanding of the Body of Christ. As a consequence of this line of thought, I've moved in my mission of trying to understand God's Creation toward an emphasis on human moral being—individual and communal. In a sense, my interest in these matters can be labeled as 'abstract' or 'academic', but that doesn't at all dull my concerns, my feelings, about the various victims of the seemingly stumbling and out-of-control power-holders of the 21st century. My concerns are still more personal in that I count myself, as writer and thinker, among these victims and think there to be many out there who could contribute to a richer and more sustainable civilization and those writers and thinkers, artists and dancers, tinkerers and farmers, are more or less deliberately excluded from access to cultural and economic resources as much as the better sort of political and social and religious leaders—this is my reason for thinking of the large foundations, MacArthur and Ford and so on, as part of the mechanisms of confusion, perhaps intended by the elite to be instruments of control.

I've dealt with the issue of conspiracies in various places but first came to my current understanding of what is truly happening when I set out to learn about a man who had held that the human race is split between producers and exploiters, with the producers often being unaware they are living on a battlefield of sorts. That was Thomas Jefferson. His friend, John Adams, had a different take as I discussed in Chapter 440, *I Have a Problem with Many Conspiracy Theorists*:

Something of a rational and more limited conspiracy is not only plausible but likely in a world where some would control the rest of us for their own purposes. In terms used by Thomas Jefferson: exploiters divide themselves out and try to form a class that dominates the producers. Jefferson seemed too willing to assume that some Providence or providence would protect American producers and keep the exploiters under control. His friend, then non-friend, then friend again, John Adams, agreed about the division between exploiters and producers but didn't think there was much chance the exploiters could be controlled unless the United States recognized an aristocratic class of some sort and put specific constraints upon them, even if only the

constraints of honor which have done a fair amount of good in channeling the exploiters in somewhat better directions. Of course, when Vikings are attacking there is an obvious role of honor for warlords. It's not clear what legitimate role there could be for our modern-day central banks and big-city banks. They seem to exist only for their own purposes.

Let me put this in more explicit terms. Americans decided in complicated ways, through political and other channels, that they wouldn't tolerate any class system, however restricted, however much the upper classes would then be subject to codes of honor and other customary restrictions—which sort of restrictions have typically been more effective in other countries than positive laws. As a consequence, wealthy and powerful men went partially underground to protect their family's wealth and power and to be able to pass it on more or less intact, which generally meant passing it on to a dominant son. More interesting in its dynamics was the way in which those sons and their brothers in blood or in class attitude formed conspiratorial fraternities at the great universities of the United States and somewhat similar institutions in New York City and other centers of wealth and power.

We ended up with such a strange entity as the Bush family, discussed in the book *Family of Secrets* by the journalist Russ Baker. Alongside, or perhaps behind, the Bushes are their Walker cousins and their allies such as the Dulles brothers (in the previous generation) and the Harrimans (also in the previous generation?) with their particular sub-house of the House of Rockefeller. Immense wealth and power held by men descended in part from those who'd made their fortunes as early as the 1700s in opium smuggling in Asia or capturing slaves on the western coast of Africa and transporting them (nasty business) to the slave-markets of the Americas. The natural and human resources of the northeastern states of the US, along with the Midwest and Great Lake regions and other regions such as Latin America, were developed partly by way of these criminal gains. It was hardly a break with their traditions when these families used the American Navy and Marine Corps to carry out labor negotiations in foreign lands and private armies as well as local police to shoot down strikers at American mines and factories.

Raised to honor a mixture of ordinary and noble and criminal ancestors, the young men of these families took to such activities as espionage

and counter-espionage work, drug-smuggling in the modern style (the CIA in Southeast Asia starting in the Cold War and maybe the preceding hot war), weapons and currency and drug smuggling to support efforts to overthrow Castro or to put into power a variety of thugs in Latin America or other easily victimized areas of the world. They continued to receive training in brotherly loyalty and keeping secrets in the fraternities and other societies of a secret nature, such as *Skull and Bones* at Yale—see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skull\\_and\\_Bones](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skull_and_Bones) for background information.

There is a peculiar sort of brotherhood to be found in pirate bands and mercenary bands and such criminal groups as the Mafia; this brotherhood is a perversion in many ways and a strong image in other ways of the complete and perfected brotherhood to be found only in the Body of Christ on the other side of the grave. In its corrupted form in this world, a brotherhood can teach a fanatical secrecy and can demand a loyalty overlapping family ties but overriding even patriotic ties. As John Adams feared, eventually Thomas Jefferson came to share this fear, this attitude on the part of the American elite, driven by the desire to pass on wealth and power in an egalitarian country and also the desire of young men for adventure, leads to a form of criminality not to be found in officially recognized aristocracies in the West. Think of Tom Sawyer playing not at being Robin Hood but rather at being a CIA ops guy organizing psychopathic young Saudis to kill Russian and Afghan civilians in order to sucker the Soviets into an very unwise invasion. Search on the Internet for Zbigniew Brzezinski's interview in the 1990s where he admitted it was the US which started the trouble in Afghanistan for the purpose of giving the Soviets their own Vietnam. I think that if he confessed to this, then the whole story is probably even nastier and might involve, as one possibility, the movement of CIA drug manufacturing to Afghanistan as the Communist government of Vietnam drove them out of Southeast Asia.

We Americans have apparently corrupted much of the world by making it more or less obligatory for our allies and enemies to have this mish-mash of investment bankers and related lawyers, national security apparatchiks, allied or subservient politicians, subservient judges and law-enforcement officials and journalists, even subservient cultural and religious leaders. We also damaged Latin American and some other regions of the world by financing and training some ruthlessly stupid (stupidly ruthless?) colonels and police-chiefs and presidents or Shahs or Poobahs. Human communities

are never morally pure but we Americans seem to have set out to reduce the entire world to Caligula's palace, rooms devoted to exercising absolute power in the cruelest and more arbitrary manner and other rooms devoted to various sorts of moral degeneracy.

The United States has a solid streak of criminality running through its national character. It is hardly a coincidence that this particular criminal streak likely developed first in the elite of the New England Puritans and other Christian communities of related Manichaeistic outlook. See Chapter , *The Need for Abstractions in Moral Self-understanding* for my take on early signs of the moral blindness which I think to underly the corruption of the American intellect and then moral character. I use "intellect" as defined by Jacques Barzun in *House of Intellect* [7]: "the capitalized and communal form of live intelligence." I discussed this issue in Chapter 127, *Intelligence vs. Intellect*.

I don't think the American power-elite is a tightly organized hierarchy and it includes far more than those who have strong criminal inclinations, though many of those are willing to benefit from horrible crimes. It's more of a class separated from the rest of us. Yet, it's even more; they inhabit a different world even as they live among us. They fight against each other, Skull-and-Boner John Kerry against Skull-and-Boner George W Bush, but they unite when it counts—against the lower classes. And they occasionally admit new members, such as powerful, self-made industrialists or bankers or politicians, perhaps even one so truly lower-class as Bill Clinton.

So, I come around to asking: what are the powerful economic and political interest groups which correspond to the investment bankers, politicians, and monopolistic capitalists of 1900 or so? Do the traditional families who have summered at Newport or the Hamptons for generations still dominate? Does that pushy son of Italian immigrants with his Harvard MBA and his control of a major corporation enter automatically or does he sometimes remain outside the magic circles where men of rigid loyalties control voting rights in some of the secret decisions which determine the fate of industries or countries or rising politicians?

At the very least, we need to account for the national-security complex, with its especially strong links to the gangster undergrounds of our age, and also for the armaments-energy complex, if such is still one complex as it seemed to be for much of the Cold War era.

We would also need to account for what's happened in politics—the traditional machines, such as the ethnic (Irish and Italian and so on) machines

of Boston and New York City and Chicago, don't seem to be tied in to the power elites in the 21st century. Does anyone other than the bankers and lobbyists get to say which politicians are the peoples' favorites?

What about the strangeness of modern banking, especially at the money-creating central banks of various closely related types? Traditional bankers who make loans and collect payments of various sorts over years will favor deflation, as Quigley noted, but Morgan and allies created the Federal Reserve banking system which has always produced at least modest inflation. At times, in Germany and other countries during the 1920s and in many countries in the early part of the 21st century, central banks have created powerful inflationary forces, much of the actual damage not showing up fully as of 2013. But our economic systems seem to be a bit like tanks of highly pressurized gases which have not yet exploded and for which there is no known way to release the pressures. I think J P Morgan would be as confused by this situation as would be Nathan Rothschild or Lorenzo Medici. But I could be wrong as I clearly don't understand this situation now that the bankers have run out of middle-class money to steal.

On the whole, I don't feel confident that I could identify the groups which interact to form the power structures of the modern world though I'm sure that they are more than one and probably less than five.

American national-security complex? Almost certainly but they seem to be clownish in their own murderous and thieving ways and may lose power at any time.

Some power-hungry group masquerading as bankers? Almost certainly.

Armaments-energy complex? Likely.

Other corporate complexes? Maybe.

Something like a political machine? I don't know, but such an insightful thinker as Angelo Codevilla seems convinced politicians are the most powerful part of the ruling class, dominating the corporations and banks. Codevilla, I should note, has experience in the centers of power and wealth having been an official in the Reagan administration and having seen, in his opinion and mine, an honest effort to return government to the citizens being sabotaged by action of members of the power elite who had worked their way into Reagan's inner circle.

Military services? Not yet but our idiot politicians seem to be pushing them toward a coup with the formation of so many special operations groups verging on revivals of the SS.

Local police? Might be the regional warlords in a few decades if things get really bad, especially if they continue along the path of militarization.

Religious leaders? There is no one comparable to either the ruthless but devout Innocent III or the morally degenerate Alexander VI, no one who seeks to serve Christ by becoming Caesar—Augustus or Nero.

The question remains unanswered in my opinion: “Who Are the American Elites and Are They Conspirators?”



# 493 Christianity First Destroyed Rome and Now Has Barbarized Human Reason?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1706>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/10/03.]

In a typically erudite book review, *The barbarism of reason: John Gray on the Notebooks of Leopardi* at <http://www.newstatesman.com/books/2013/09/barbarism-reason>, Gray tells us:

With astonishing prescience, [the Italian poet Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1837)] diagnosed the sickness of our time: a dangerous intoxication with the knowledge and power given by science, mixed with an inability to accept the humanly meaningless world that science has revealed. Faced with emptiness, modern humanity has taken refuge in schemes of world improvement, which all too often—as in the savage revolutions of the 20th century and the no less savage humanitarian warfare of the 21st—involve mass slaughter. The irrationalities of earlier times have been replaced by what Leopardi calls “the barbarism of reason”.

I detect a bit of the modern hubris in the words “an inability to accept the humanly meaningless world that science has revealed,” a now-centeredness and me-centeredness that—quite properly—rejects received understandings of the world. Having rejected what was received, there seems to be no will to try to find a new meaning; it could be argued that Leopardi and Nietzsche

and Gray are not honest men so much as they are the weak-minded and weak-souled descendants of better men.

Maybe they were justified in their display of self-proclaimed honesty? Maybe Leopardi and Nietzsche and Gray rejected what was received for a valid reason? After all, modern science had cast too many doubts upon a Christian understanding of this universe. Why? Because that Christian understanding was yoked to an understanding of physical reality which was pre-Galilean when the trouble started and had only barely made peace with pendulums and falling apples when Darwin came along and then Einstein and then Schrodinger. . . Let's not forget the geneticists and brain-scientists and all those mathematicians who found that Aristotle and his followers had misunderstood numbers, and certainly infinity, in a fundamental way that had deep implications for understanding the human mind as well as the nature of truths of various sorts. That Christian understanding which had outlived its plausibility was also tied to ancient metaphysical systems not fully compatible with modern science, though they could be enlarged and enriched in various interesting and promising ways.

None of this is an attack upon ancient or Medieval scientists and philosophers and theologians but only a recognition that they did their best with what they knew and they didn't know much that Galileo did know, let alone the scientists and other empirical investigators of succeeding centuries. In fact, it's at least arguable that the work of historians and literary exegetes did more harm to the general acceptance of the Christianity than did the work of physicists and biologists. Many men seem willing to live in a divided world where they accept one body of truths on Sunday morning and another when they watch specials on space exploration or modern medicine, but there seems to have been few Christians whose somewhat naive faith was unaffected by more sophisticated ways of reading the Bible or by the biographies on the "historical Jesus". (I'm under the impression that the generally more younger generation isn't so willing to believe different 'truths' in different contexts; they prefer a more consistent cynicism.)

To an extent, the Enlightenment—at least in its later stages—was something of a public recognition of a failure of Christian thinkers to deal with empirical knowledge that showed our prior understanding of created being was no longer plausible. Reality is reality is reality or created being is created being is created being. What comes to us, what forms our minds, comes from empirical reality and enters us through our senses. This seems to be a point as horrible to Leopardi and Nietzsche and Gray as it was to

the Inquisitors who would have tortured and executed Galileo if Bellarmine had not stopped them—though he was merciful rather than truly understanding what Galileo was saying. I have no particular problems with this basic fact of our perceived realms of reality and the other realms which are implied; in fact, I consider the effort to understand God’s work as Creator to be a bit intoxicating.

Ultimately, what we are seeing in Leopardi and Nietzsche and Gray is not a failure of understanding but rather a failure of a model of human being which came from Occam and the other radical philosophers at Oxford at the very end of the High Middle Ages. At that early time, those philosophers raised will, including that dangerously mythical entity of free-will, to such dominance that it gradually destroyed the Christian understanding of the balanced human being shaped by responses to God’s Creation, a creature of mind and heart and hands in which the mind played a special role of guiding that shaping process and of moving into the future in an orderly way. The “naive acceptance of reality” preached by Aquinas and some other Scholastics was replaced by a refusal to humbly accept what was not understandable in terms of our own private schemes of thought, what was not acceptable to our personal doctrines as to the nature of truth. (I’ve found the best descriptions of this balanced human nature in the explanations of Jacob Neusner of the views of the sages of post-Constantinian Judaism. See Chapter 282, *Do We Need Heart and Hands as Well as Mind to Understand Reality?*,

To summarize a number of my analyses, what we are seeing isn’t anything which could be labeled “the barbarism of reason” but rather a crippling of the human mind by subjection to a mythical entity, the “will,” which could be nothing but our mysterious master or else a bad way of speaking of complex interactions of those aspects of human being which are mind and heart and hands. It is in those complex interactions that our freedom lies, including the freedom which can come into alignment with the story God is telling, the story which is this world. In that story lies meaning, if it can be found, “if it exists” as some would say.

Is modern reason barbaric? No, but reason (mind) separated from feelings (heart) and acts (hands) is but a pitiful fragment of human being. The same can be said of heart or hands; human being is mind and heart and hands—though ultimately one if we are to be true images of God on the other side of the grave. If reason seems to have dominated human being in the modern world, it’s because of an imbalanced and radically incom-

plete understanding and development of human being that was ongoing as European Christians found themselves near or in the explosion which was the modern exploration of empirical reality, an effort requiring high levels of development and use of mind and heart and hands.

I've stated some conclusions drawn from my extensive writings on this topic and I'll try to make a basic point more clearly: human being, mind and heart and hands, was torn apart first by those who had an excessive regard for heart in the form of will, just as it is still being damaged by those who have an excessive regard for heart in the form of compassion. This isn't an academic issue nor one of individuals simply messing up their personal development. We human beings have communal being as well as individual being; ultimately, those who are saved will share the being of the Body of Christ. Even in the more mundane terms of this world, we have intellect or "the capitalized and communal form of live intelligence"—see Chapter 127, *Intelligence vs. Intellect* for a discussion of this distinction of the two aspects of the human mind as made by Jacques Barzun in *The House of Intellect* [7]. The will as glorified by modern advocates of an excessive regard for individualism has especially damaged human intellect. Set free from the guiding wisdom of intellect, the individual with his live intelligence can be something of a monster or at least a barbarian. More importantly, the Body of Christ in His mortal manifestation is Himself in a defective form because of the willful misunderstandings we modern men nurture about human being and about created being in general.

## 494 When a Government Oversteps Its Proper Domain

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1710>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/10/05.]

A number of those most consistently and honestly upset by Obamacare seem to be libertarians and I'll side with them on this issue though I consider myself to be what some have called Orestes Brownson—a radical conservative. I'll ignore the clueless conservatives and liberals who think moral order to be a gloss upon their favorite campaign slogans.

I would defend and nourish the inherited truths of Christian tradition but have been forced to see that those truths currently bear too heavy a load of human beliefs whose truth was contingent upon knowledge which was once plausible but no longer is. Those sorts of beliefs, we can even call them 'lesser truths', are necessary but we are bound to always update our understanding of Creation to reflect the best knowledge we have. In terms acceptable to those with a variety of beliefs: it's a simple matter of recognizing our concrete reality which doesn't contain all truth but can't be incompatible with any truth, however grand or abstract.

I dealt with some foundational issues of politics in Chapter 452: *How Much Health-care Do We Need?*, Chapter 457: *Moral Order vs. National Welfare Systems*, and Chapter 487: *Does Expensive Weaponry Undo Western Traditions of Liberty?*. See Chapter 424, *What is politics?* for a discussion of the fundamental nature of politics.

I've also written essays in which I've claimed the United States to be an incoherent collection of political entities held together by the wealth of the government in Washington coming from its power to collect lots of taxes. Our incoherent understanding of what a "political community" truly is, and

the bad policies we've adopted as a consequence, has damaged the United States, probably beyond repair. See Chapter 484, *The Fragmented States of America* for a bit of background on my views of our current political mess.

A nation held together by the force of arms and systems of bribery which are made possible by the tax-collection power of the central government isn't a real nation; to the extent it be coherent, it has the order of an ant-hill with a host of parasitic queens and has not the order proper to a human community. I'm greatly disturbed by the inclination of so many Christian leaders to see the gathered hoards of money and then to think of all the alleged good to be done with it, good done at the point of guns bought with money collected with earlier threats of violence.

I have an extremely low opinion of the government of the United States as it has developed after World War II and a merely low opinion of that government as it was between the time the Founding Fathers left public life and the beginning of the Cold War. The Founders were human but not merely human; they were men of substance, of moral character, though sometimes that character was infected with too much ambition or greed. Arguably, the Founding Fathers were as good as it can get at this stage of the evolution and development of human being, individual and communal. Americans accepted without protest the transition from those Fathers to the self-serving scoundrels Tocqueville found in political power by the 1820s. Tocqueville's head was full of images of great American leaders because of the stories of his father's friend, the Marquis de Lafayette, and that young Frenchman was horrified at what he found in that age just after the Founders' age. He was disturbed by what it might say about the public moral character of the United States, though he struggled to find good in this country. The future is here and I'm not frightened so much as I'm disgusted by the opportunities thrown away by Americans even as they pretended, and still pretend, to have made good on their opportunities.

We Americans have the government we deserve as numerous commentators have warned us, but we don't feel any need to examine our own slavish attitudes, figuring that we'll take any master who promises to ease the difficulties of life in this mortal realm. And, by way of an expansion into the most fundamental realms of human life, education and healthcare and regulation of a huge number of human relationships, the Federal government seems to have done well in providing for us, until you look at the longer-term, the years when future generations will be paying for our irresponsible and self-centered uses of power over the various assets of our

human communities. Government has become our means of stealing from our children and grandchildren, of stealing from our various communities.

I'm not opposed to government as a matter of principle, though I admire some libertarians who do take that stance. I can admire the courage and integrity of those who take positions I consider quite wrong, at least when they place some true moral goods, such as peace and freedom, at the center of their structures of belief. Currently, it seems as if there are ten morally courageous libertarians for every morally courageous conservative such as Pat Buchanan; the number of morally courageous collectivist liberals has grown vanishingly small since the passing of the generation of Lionel Trilling and Edward Shils.

I believe this world is the story of God forming the Body of Christ, a human community enlarged greatly but one like unto the community which formed around Jesus of Nazareth during His life on earth, a human community which is the mortal form of the true Body of Christ—the community of those sharing God's life on the other side of the grave. This is not a hierarchical community, as Christ Himself told us in His actions on earth and especially in His various commandments that all be servants of each other, including His special commandment at the Last Supper which was directed at those called to any sort of leadership. Even the Head of the Body is Himself a servant in a true way and not a servant whose entire duty is to give orders to the other members of that Body. Christ is not King so much as He is the Soul, the unity, of the Body of Christ because He is the divine stuff from which that Body and all of Creation was formed. For various reasons, including respect for all of God's creatures and also a respect for our lack of knowledge of the true status of a particular human being, we Christians are bound to act with some degree of charity to **all** human beings, sometimes that charity taking the form of only non-intervention in their affairs. In a proper and usually modest way, we serve all, but we clearly are bound strictly to always serve those close to us in a strong and primary way.

It's perhaps more useful in most analyses of practical matters to speak of our relationship to the Body of Christ in terms of dependencies, a relationship said by some in history and sociology to be the true cement of human communities. We are fully dependent upon our Maker and this is a tie which determines our loyalties in a radical way and forces us to be loyal first and foremost to the Almighty. See my article, *Justice: The First Step Towards God*, which can be freely downloaded at <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/justice.pdf> for a discussion of

this issue which builds upon a claim of St Thomas Aquinas.

We are loyal, if only grudgingly and as a matter of justice, to that upon which we are dependent, but we should be truly loyal to that upon which we are willingly or even enthusiastically dependent. If the governments of this world care for us, feed us, pay us, we are very much dependent upon them. In my way of thinking, we should have good governments which can provide certain sorts of protection: defending us against hostile foreign powers, keeping our streets safe, protecting us against—for example—rent-seeking classes or corporations, and perhaps providing some buffer-zones for the interaction of groups and communities which have incompatible ways of—for example—setting the price for the exchange of money for goods. I would willingly accept my dependence upon such a government and would willingly accept my duty to be loyal to that government; others accept their dependency upon a government claiming omnicompetence and thus making a claim upon our total human being and they offer up a total loyalty which subordinates their loyalties to family and local communities and ethnic groups and certainly God and Church. The problem for now is that the rent-seekers are strongly attracted to the power of central governments and are willing to promise the sheep an end to all ills.

Some who think the government to have overstepped its boundaries, place those boundaries more tightly than do I; some even advocate the elimination of all entities I'll just describe in naive terms as 'central governments'. There are many such thinkers in all age groups but a seemingly larger percentage in the younger groups; after all, it's the younger men and women who are looking at miserable working lives with poor pay and low benefits. Of course, those younger men and women won't be able to subsidize the Social Security and Medicare benefits of us in the older age groups, especially when the choices come down to schools for their children vs medical benefits for an older generation whose members believe the world owes them a prosperous retirement and expensive medical treatments for their sedentary, overweight bodies. The Boomers and members of the X-generation will soon enough learn why the Millennials are so cynical and apathetic; if disaster strikes at its earliest possible point, then even the parents of the Boomers will smash into reality in their last years.

In any case, with Obamacare, the rubber has truly met the road. If this is implemented, it will be another massive program to further cripple a badly limping economy with the fees for the breakers of kneecaps passed to future generations, bills which will not be paid because the only way to pay

them will be to sacrifice the needs of another and younger generation, closing schools or restricting them greatly, letting American infrastructure—already something of a joke in the developed world—deteriorate further, dipping into the already dwindling supplies of job-creation capital, and so forth.

Let me state a couple truths of human being:

1. The younger generations will be morally well-ordered only if Grandma and Grandpa put in a sustained effort during their Golden Years to pass on stories reflecting moral truths and the particular ways of living which embody those truths within particular family-lines or ethnic groups, however imperfectly those truths are embodied.
2. The younger generations will have good economic opportunities only if Grandma and Grandpa make the proper sacrifices from their accumulated surpluses.

What to do? The Catholic bishops have nobly offered their descendants for martyrdom while preferring to imagine that Obamacare can be baptized once it's magically stripped of 'prejudice' against Christians. As for me, I'm forced to anticipate some sort of martyr's future because I can't imagine a program, healthcare in this case, can be properly implemented if it involves moral issues upon which Christians differ in their own ranks and upon which Christians differ greatly with most pagans especially those of a post-Christian variety.

So it is that I a conservative Catholic will align myself with morally well-ordered libertarian thinkers such as Matthew May whose declaration of independence, *Guest Post: I Will Not Comply*, can be found at <http://www.zerohedge.com/news/2013-10-02/guest-post-i-will-not-comply>. In political terms, his statement climaxes in his statement: "I will not comply because I am a free citizen of the United States, not a subject of its government."

True enough, for a libertarian or for a Catholic trying to update traditional understandings of the Body of Christ: we would be free citizens of a true and morally well-ordered political entity, but we find ourselves as target subjects of a bloated government inhabited by rent-seekers of a variety which would amaze even Mark Twain and may well have amazed Gore Vidal during his last years. There are substantial differences between

my understanding of human being and that of libertarians: I consider our social natures to be true created being, communal human being, and not just some tendency for our individual selves to form external relationships. In other words, I consider the Body of Christ to be real and not just a way of speaking of a gathering of individuals bound by a particularly important contract. I find my belief in human being, individual and communal, to be more compatible with the findings of evolutionary biologists than are the beliefs of any version of modern liberalism, libertarian or collectivist.

Yet, there is a point where respect for reality, however understood, leads all men who would be morally well-ordered and who would live in a society morally well-ordered to stand up and say, “No,” when any part of the greater human community—ecclesiastical hierarchy or government, oversteps its realm of competence, its realm of moral operation. My difference with libertarians, including those who claim to be Christian, is my strong belief in the reality of human communities, the reality of human communal being, and ultimately the reality of the Body of Christ.

# 495 Quietly Charitable or Quietly Murderous But Always Quietly American

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1716>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/10/14.]

Pepe Escobar is a world-traveling journalist who's worth more than the entire staff at *CNN*, *Fox*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and most of the others in the American mainstream news-media. He seems to often be in the most dangerous regions of our planet and to have lots of solid information and to be able to provide insightful analyses based upon that information. In his essay, *Breaking American exceptionalism*, found at <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/World/WOR-03-011013.html>, he deals with a problem in the American moral character which has unleashed those dangers in many of those regions.

Much of his analysis takes a television show, *Breaking Bad*, as an allegory for what has happened to the United States: Walter White, a seemingly decent fellow who teaches high-school chemistry has developed a second life as Heisenberg, a drug-dealing gangster. As Escobar puts it:

Walt/Heisenberg is a scientist. His scientific genius was appropriated by unscrupulous partners in the past, who enriched themselves in a tech company. As Heisenberg, finally the scientific/mechanical genius comes to full fruition—from a wheelchair bomb to a raid based on magnets and even a remix of the 1963 Great Train Robbery in the UK, not to mention the perfectly cooked meth.

After making a few comments on various aspects of this double-existence, including a comment about Nietzschean nihilism, Escobar gets to the heart of the matter:

Walter White, once again, embodies “the myth of the essential white America. All the other stuff, the love, the democracy, the floundering into lust, is a sort of by-play. The essential American soul is hard, isolate, stoic, and a killer. It has never yet melted.”

Escobar’s analyses apparently come, at least partly, from his contemplations on *Studies in Classic American Literature*, a study of the American character by DH Lawrence and, in particular, of the Deerslayer character from James Fenimore Cooper’s novels.

I haven’t yet read Lawrence’s book, but this analysis seems close to that of Herman Melville regarding, first, the moral characters and thoughts of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, and, secondly, his generalization of his fears from that analysis to the typical American. Melville thought the American character to have a strong streak of moral insanity and considered that to be of the form of a rebellion against a God who didn’t give us as good a Creation as we deserve. In *Moby Dick*, the actions centered around Ahab who was a courageous and more self-honest version of Emerson. In his next novel, *The Confidence Man*, Melville specifically dealt with the egocentric nature of Emerson (the philosopher who spoke gobbledy-gook) and Thoreau (the practical pupil) and then that of nearly all the passengers on a steam-ship (Americans in general with Cooper perhaps showing up)—the selfishness of these passengers, oddly enough, showed up as a hardheaded and seemingly proper refusal to accept any of the claims of the Confidence Man. Nathaniel Hawthorne had an understanding which was different in details from that of Melville’s but essentially the same. Tocqueville also thought Americans to have had an odd ability to ignore the most brutally obvious facts if they disagreed with mainstream American viewpoints. I’ve also read that Henry James, Sr had similar fears of the exceptional nature of the American character. Escobar didn’t raise this fear but I think this American moral disease to be spreading around the world with American popular culture, though few peoples have moved over to a dreamworld so completely as have the residents of the indispensable country.

In Christian terms, Americans are a people lacking in true charity—the love that binds us into communities as strongly as our dependencies do; Americans practice charity largely as a way of feeling good about themselves. Alternatively, they could feel good about themselves by killing off those “red savages” who were servants of Satan. Update to a people who send off collections of dollar bills to feed the children in one country, perhaps Haiti, even as they send in a firepowerful, if not so competent, military to demolish a city in another country. Don’t children live in such places as Baghdad?

In Graham Greene’s novel, *The Quiet American*, set in Vietnam in the early 1950s, we read about a clean-cut, young American man who is an undercover CIA agent. He spends his days helping Vietnamese to build businesses, improve their farms, and so on; he spends his evenings providing support to criminal warlords who commit terroristic atrocities against the civilian population of Saigon. Lest you think Greene was imagining this sort of activity, I’ll quote General William Odom—see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_Odom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Odom), a prominent figure in the Carter and Reagan and Bush I regimes. In *American Hegemony: How to Use It, How to Lose It*, found at <http://www.middlebury.edu/media/view/214721/original/OdomPaper.pdf>, he tells us in ruthlessly honest words:

Because the United States itself has a long record of supporting terrorists and using terrorist tactics, the slogans of today’s war on terrorism merely make the United States look hypocritical to the rest of the world.

In other writings, Odom has put forth justification of the use of terrorism as a tool of American policy. American leaders, though not of the competent sort, aren’t so fully dumb as they might appear—they know quite well they use gangster methods to secure power and wealth around the world. They have souls which are “hard, isolate, stoic”; they are killers, though perhaps themselves too soft in body or too cowardly in physical ways to go forth into the action.

Life is more complex and more interesting than textbooks or newspapers can communicate, more interesting and less clear-cut than even the most complex of novels or history-books, let alone any movie or play or television

show. There are a variety of interesting angles for studying this problem of American “Exceptionalism”.

I’ve discussed this problem from various angles before, including one angle which I consider particularly interesting and insightful. In June of 2009, I published the essay, *The Need for Abstractions in Moral Self-understanding*, which is included as Chapter 408, in which I claimed:

Those who abstract only by idealizing their particular beliefs and ways of life will remain trapped by their prejudices, country yokels come to the big city and seeing no choices but to give up their ways of life fully or to react against the surrounding confusion by withdrawing into self-righteousness and maybe outright hatred. Only he who learns to abstract up to higher levels can truly see the viewpoint of others and see the goodness in multiple cultures which are in conflict even when he decides that he’s morally bound to side with one. For example, someone might see the goodness in the nomadic life of the New England Indians while deciding that a larger, more settled population is morally preferable to a nomadic society of the few.

Some of the Puritan leaders of New England during the period of King Phillip’s War were very well-read in Newton and all were well-read in the Bible and classical literature and Calvinist theology, yet they proved incapable or unwilling to ascend to a higher level of abstraction during the conflict with King Phillip and the tribes which followed him into war. Staying bound in their own concrete manifestation of Christianity and Western Civilization, they failed to see their position was not one of good and God-centered men fighting against a Satanic enemy but rather that of somewhat good and would-be God-centered men fighting to expand the domain of one manifestation of the Christian West. The enemy wasn’t Satanic but rather barbaric and nomadic. A suitable amount of competent abstract thought on the part of the European settlers of New England would have allowed them to see the true good they were defending but also the good the nomadic Indians were losing. A truer and more just peace might have been obtained even though I doubt the war could have been avoided.

Is it now possible for the West, as a civilization, to achieve greater competence in the abstract thought necessary to understand our complex selves and our complex civilization? We seem about to needlessly destroy our own civilization because of the same sort of self-righteous blindness which led the New England settlers to misunderstand their conflict with King Phillip and his followers. The New England founders dug a rut of sorts and we Americans seem to have traveled that rut in the ensuing three and a half centuries. We've even managed to idealize that rut into the path of truth and righteousness.

For now, I have nothing more to add to my public writings on this issue and probably won't be able to go beyond this sort of an analysis until I've made some progress in my project of expanding our stocks of words and concepts for moral, social, political, and other analyses. I've discussed this project in a few places and have also done some work in refining the implications of all of this for understanding human history.

As was true in the 1990s when I began writing novels about my disquieting suspicions that we modern men misunderstand the very nature of created being and of our place in the scheme of things, I have had vague, dream-like ideas and vague images about, in this more recent situation, moral spaces in which densities of human beings can pull individuals into increasingly vast populations or even into the equivalents of black-holes, moral spaces in which our imaginations travel strangely curved paths, moral spaces which we can reshape by proper efforts which are responses to the way things are now, and etc. I don't think we know how to balance our individual and communal selves in our brave, new world. See my freely downloadable book, *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53], for a background discussion of human individual and communal being. And a little more.

In any case, my mind is often working—if only in subconscious regions—on this problem of how to describe and analyze human being and, especially, the moral aspects of our beings. As I discussed in Chapter 110, *Intentionality as the Guide to Philosophical Thinking*, I try to be as Newton was in this way:

I keep the subject of my inquiry constantly before me, and wait till the first dawning opens gradually, by little and little,

into a full and clear light. [Sir Isaac Newton]

Most Americans would prefer to avoid this by defaulting to an existing 'ideal' which is almost always a generalization which is actually little more than a restatement in abstract and idealistic terms of concrete American thoughts and behaviors and feelings, as I discussed above in the long quote from Chapter 408, *The Need for Abstractions in Moral Self-understanding*.

I'll give one warning about all of this. There are more good critics than good prophets pointing to a plausible future. Nietzsche was one of those good critics; I'm of the opinion that Nietzsche actually did try to return us to the path of virtuous paganism and failed for a variety of reasons that don't interest me enough to explore. I've tried always in my writings, novels and nonfiction works of various lengths, to point toward a better future, a Christian future which might not interest some in this day and age. In the midst of all this modern disorder, I've always held and preached a confidence that God is in charge and is telling a story in which the Body of Christ is forming even in this mortal realm, and I've done so by considering both Christian revelations and modern empirical knowledge. What I propose is a story in which the United States had a special role to play, as did many large communities in history, and failed to take up that role. Some see suffering in the future for the American people; I see great suffering just because I think it plausible that God will yet force us to take up the role He had given us in His story. Since we have already messed up in many ways, I think we'll share that role with other peoples, probably the various peoples of the Pacific Rim. We're not likely to be dominant in any meaningful way, but we'll see what happens.

# 496 Conspiratorial Gangsters Are the Leaders Americans Want and Deserve

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1721>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/11/08.]

The center hasn't held and the pieces fly away. Without the most basic sorts of order, the sorts of order which are specifically labeled 'moral' aren't possible, at least not on a large-scale such as that of the United States or even that of the city of Springfield, MA less than a quarter mile away from me as I write. No one is foolish enough to deny that even street-gangs founded by teenagers have engaged and still engage in small-scale criminal conspiracies to control drugs and hookers and gambling. When the stakes rise high? Perhaps to control of the budget of the Department of Defense (DOD) with its Rumsfeld-announced missing money of about \$2 trillion? We could guess the harsh truth in Lord Acton's dictum that the problem (one at least) with powerful and centralized governments is that they attract men with the moral character of gangsters.

Let me diverge slightly on the subject of a corrupt DOD—which does not mean that the fighting men are necessarily corrupted though some would have to be to allow this level of thievery. David Walker was the government's internal auditor for much of the Clinton and Bush II administrations. He had the responsibility of putting the Federal government's accounts on a rational basis such as that used by businesses and he estimated missing DOD funds at about \$800-900 billion as I recall, still a large amount of money to have been embezzled, stolen, misused, or whatever. But remember that money spent as Congress had directed is still a source of power,

including that of paying for goods and services from businessmen friends and of giving jobs to specific individuals who support them politically or even types of individuals likely to support them.

I've read enough history to know that such observers as the Irish political scientist William Lecky noted that the American people were morally well-ordered but the American political class was the most corrupt in the world—circa 1890. This was the opinion of many observers even before that and of many more since that period. The United States has been an experimental dance along the edge of a cliff since at least the passing on of the generation of the Founding Fathers and it's quite possible that their Enlightenment ideas created the openings for such moral disorder at the leadership level, a disorder which eventually seeped into the most sedate of American smalltowns and city neighborhoods. We've fallen off that cliff and are yet to slam against the bottom.

Bertrand de Jouvenel, the French political scientist at his peak in the mid-20th century, noted that the United States political system was dominated by political machines operating behind the scenes, though everyone including the writers of *Miracle on 42nd Street* know of these machines which make money only by delivering the goods in terms of laws, judges, policemen, and so forth which are favorable to the paying customers. Intelligent politicians and judges and others are undesirable and those with moral character will make it impossible to guarantee the goods will be delivered. The reader can follow through to the disedifying conclusions which are, in fact, realized in American history.

Early on, the Tammany Society was formed—see the Wikipedia article at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tammany\\_Hall](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tammany_Hall) where we can read these introductory words:

Tammany Hall, also known as the Society of St. Tammany, the Sons of St. Tammany, or the Columbian Order, was a New York City political organization founded in 1786 and incorporated on May 12, 1789, as the Tammany Society. It was the Democratic Party political machine that played a major role in controlling New York City and New York State politics and helping immigrants, most notably the Irish, rise up in American politics from the 1790s to the 1960s. It controlled Democratic Party nominations and political patronage in Manhattan from

the mayoral victory of Fernando Wood in 1854 through the election of John P. O'Brien in 1932.

So it is that the American political system from that early year had a means for political opportunists and crooks (Aaron Burr, an early member, was more a case of an odd mixture of talent, moral substance, and a moral willfulness resulting partly from a rebellion against his father, the Calvinist theologian who was the first president of what became Princeton, and his grandfather, the famous Calvinist preacher Jonathon Edwards.) Don't think things have changed that much. Two men of different political attitudes but similar regard for their country, Eugene McCarthy and James Buckley, formed an alliance in the 1970s to fight the so-called election reforms which they claimed, rightly as it has turned out, to be no more than a means of consolidating machine power in the national committees of the Republican and Democratic parties.

Put that political corruption alongside the joyful discovery of certain types of humanoids that there was much money to be made in modern wars and the 007 or comic book mentality inculcated in the CIA black-ops officers and agents by Allen Dulles and you have a ruling elite which helped the United States along in the final stages of moving from barbarism to decadence.

Far too many of the ordinary citizenry, though seeming moral in much of their activity, have adopted the personality structures of decadent barbarism—we never really stopped being barbarians but now consciously glory in our low moral and cultural state. How many, including allegedly devout Christians and Jews, have set their children in front of James Bond movies to absorb a worldview of absolute good and absolute evil, where the guy who represents absolute good kills ruthlessly when he wills to and also takes advantage of buxom young ladies, while generally living it up on the taxpayer dollar. Then, off to church on Sunday go devout Christian parents and children to commiserate with fellow church-goers about the tendencies of modern young men to take advantage of young women or to respond inadequately to young women not meeting James Bond standards of breast-shape and breast-size. As for young women taking on their fate as sex objects?

So... Is there any order, hierarchical or otherwise, in this devil's playground filled with morally perverse adolescents? Can we identify gangs in the ruling elites or at least classes with well-defined interests? I can't present any good analysis laying out any such gangs or classes as I noted in

Chapter 492, *Who Are the American Elites and Are They Conspirators?*. I don't know if it is even possible to make a clean separation of corporate marketing departments in Lockheed and General Dynamics and those others who deal in all sorts of illegal weaponry and drugs and human slaves. Those who understand supply and demand in the fast-food industry think there to be a clean separation between different supply sources of weapons and also that the 'evil' weapon suppliers will deal in drugs and slaves but not the 'good' American corporate or governmental weapons suppliers. Against that, I'll merely point out there is one international market for weapons and there are degrees of sliminess but overlapping ways of satisfying demands.

I do have a warning for those who think the money flows from Wall St tell us the investment bankers control the politicians. Those money flows might well be not the buying of those elected leaders and government workers but rather the payment of protection money. After all, few will hear that bar-owners and other businessmen men in a city are paying money to a gangster and then conclude those businessmen are buying the gangsters. In fact, the relationship is probably more complex than either simple bribes or protection money. There is no doubt that J P Morgan and John D Rockefeller owned the souls of a lot of politicians, regulators, and so forth but Teddy Roosevelt proved a headstrong politician who realized the nature of his own power could stand up even to such domineering figures. Of course, they did him in in his second effort to win the White House on his own, but it cost them a lot and it was far from certain they were going to win against the Rough-rider even when they used all the means at their disposal, short of assassination. Which they might well have considered—I have no illusions about men who devote themselves to gathering in power and wealth.

The other warning I have is: conspiracies are tools and not any sort of structure, political or social or so forth. Conspiracies might be ongoing projects with vague goals, such as those of the think-tanks and Bilderberg meetings, in which an effort is made to gain disciples or to spread the message. Think-tanks and other groups can and have engaged in specific conspiracies, such as the justification of the criminal invasion of Iraq in 2003. These softer sorts of groups more often have vaguer goals, more long-range and compatible with the objectives of differing groups in the ruling class or academic class or whatever; the Rhodes scholarship program was such a longer-range project and never, to my knowledge, associated directly with any criminal conspiracy but rather with the effort of Cecil Rhodes and his

followers to unite the English-speaking world to engulf all of mankind in Anglo-American culture.

We live in an age when historical awareness is very high and very much manifested in various scientific or pseudo-scientific forms. I would expand this general idea to include all sorts of rationality, good forms and defective forms, including engineering types of design. Elitism has become what it always tends to become: a project by powerful and wealthy families with some sort of communal self-awareness—though still necessarily operating within the context of possibilities and constraints we can somewhat guess at and understand by way of the newer and more exact understandings of human nature made possible by the results of modern historical investigations and analyses as well as by the results of sociobiology and other sciences. The self-awareness within the flow of history has become more intense than it ever was—aristocratic classes have tended to simply assume their own ways of grabbing and using power without having much awareness of its artificial or constructed nature.



# 497 The Christian West Continues to Destroy Itself and Other Christian Peoples

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1726>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/11/09.]

I'll begin by saying that I believe God is at work even when morally disordered men are seemingly in command. It is God who is moving the story of the Body of Christ forward. We, all Christians in the most recent few centuries, have been following our own inclinations rather than paying attention to the Creator to understand what could be the meaning of all we're learning about Creation, including our own human natures. Yet, there is enough freedom of movement in God's way of telling this story that we, as individuals and communities, can damn ourselves by playing our roles wrongly. That God uses our cowardice and faithlessness to His own purpose doesn't lessen the seriousness of the crimes we commit to serve our own worldly purposes, even when those purposes are for the benefit of institutions originally founded to serve God and the Body of Christ.

As Dante's pilgrim found out at the very beginning of the *Inferno*, we can travel straight while God's path curves away from us. We should pay attention not to our own inner orientation but rather to that path or more generally to what is going on in the world God created, the world which is the story of the Body of Christ as it came to be and now develops. In particular, Christians of the modern West would be wise to distrust any good feelings which conveniently serve our individual or communal purposes, most especially the purposes of our political and economic communities, but also those of our ecclesiastical and educational and charitable

communities.

I've been listening to occasional ads on the radio station of the Hartford Archdiocese of the Catholic Church. These ads are a bit of a blur in my mind at the moment, but they are intended to direct listeners to one of the American government's retirement planning websites—I think that of the Department of Labor but I hardly care about that detail. These ads make a joke of anyone silly enough (or morally well-ordered enough?) to put their trust in their families or local communities rather than in the government in Washington, DC. I'll merely note the Biblical warning about not being able to serve two masters; the modern centralized powers, including the government of the United States, didn't become masters competing with God only when they began to more directly humiliate the bishops by using legislation and programs supported by those bishops.

Then, there is the ongoing horror of the destruction of ancient Christian peoples by the Western powers (rapidly becoming the comic non-powers) or their lovely allies such as Saudi Arabia or Qatar or the terrorist non-organization called Al-CIAda by knowledgeable observers. The most recent atrocity and cover-up I'm aware of is discussed by the reliable and insightful Srdja Trifkovic in his recent article, <http://www.chroniclesmagazine.org/2013/11/08/latest-massacre-of-syrian-christians-covered-up-in-the-west/> found at LatestMassacreofSyrianChristiansCoveredUpintheWest, where we can read:

When a false-flag atrocity occurs of which Muslims are the purported victims, the United States goes to war to save them—the January 1999 stage-managed “massacre” at Racak, in Kosovo, being a classic example. When all-too-real massacres of Christians by Muslims take place, they are unreported in the Western media and uncommented upon by Western politicians.

“Slaughter in Syria: 45 Christians Killed by Islamists in Sadad and Thrown into Mass Graves,” *CatholicOnline* reported on November 5 [at [http://www.catholic.org/international/international\\_story.php?id=53030](http://www.catholic.org/international/international_story.php?id=53030)]. The facts of the case are obvious from the rebels's own shockingly gruesome footage [at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sxT6C6rJLSw> or with English subtitles at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sxT6C6rJLSw>] and from the government

forces' initial video report after liberating the town. . . [Reader beware. The footage is gruesome as noted; for example, an insurgent kicks the bloody corpse of a Christian while calling him "Bashar's dog." These are the same rebels supported by the allies of the US government who buy lots of American weaponry and more from the US and at least weakly supported by the US government in more direct ways.]

We can read on to learn:

Forty-five innocent civilians were martyred for no reason, and among them several women and children, many thrown into mass graves. Other civilians were threatened and terrorized: thirty were wounded and ten are still missing. For one week, 1,500 families were held as hostages and human shields, among them children, the elderly, the young, men and women. . . All the houses of Sadad were robbed and property looted. The churches are damaged and desecrated, deprived of old books and precious furniture. Schools, government buildings, municipal buildings have been destroyed, along with the post office, the hospital and the clinic. What happened in Sadad is the largest massacre of Christians in Syria and the second in the Middle East, after the one in the Church of Our Lady of Salvation in Iraq, in 2010.

"We have shouted aid to the world but no one has listened to us," [Archbishop Selwanos Boutros Alneme, Syriac Orthodox Metropolitan of Homs and Hama] concluded. "Where is the Christian conscience? Where is human consciousness? Where are my brothers? I think of all those who are suffering today in mourning and discomfort. We ask everyone to pray for us."

Prayers they might get. In the same intercessionary prayers in which we American Catholics pray for the American soldiers who are being used to bring "peace" by overthrowing non-subservient governments in the oil-rich regions of the world. We might better pray for the souls of those young men and women (isn't it bad enough to send young men even when a just war is involved?) fighting in the service of a government recognized as evil only when it does something to impact the self-images or checkbooks of the American Catholic bishops or other American Christian leaders. I should

add that those who see some true good possibilities in the Islamic peoples should realize the American government and its allies do all they can to destroy any movements towards peace and tolerance in favor of the sorts of men who kill unarmed human beings in the name of serving Allah. All in all, those despicable figures are a bit like those Americans who knowingly kill unarmed human beings (such as the residents of Baghdad in 2003) in the name of serving the modern central powers such as the nation-state.

Western Christians aren't trying to serve God or to become part of the Body of Christ; they are trying to make the best deal possible, and to keep peace, with the devils which are the central powers of the Western world. And many who go to Christian churches on Sundays have integrated themselves into those devils.

# 498 Multiculturalism: Throwing Ourselves and Our Children into the Trash-bin of History

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1729>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/11/15.]

In 1973, Jean Raspail wrote the novel, *The Camp of the Saints*. That novel was a controversial and very pessimistic take on immigration and multiculturalism; it depicted France decaying into a state of violent incoherence in a multicultural age.

Recently, Raspail gave an interview which is discussed by Srdja Trifkovic, see the article *Jean Raspail's New Warning* found at <http://www.chroniclesmagazine.org/2013/11/05/jean-raspails-new-warning/>. In that article, we can read:

Forty years after publishing his prophetic dystopia Jean Raspail is still with us, ever more resigned that our civilization is on the "road to disappearance." As he explained in an interview published in *Valeurs Actuelles* on October 25 (transl. by ST), he has no desire to join the big circle of intellectuals who spend their time debating immigration because, in his view, such talk is useless:

The people already intuitively know that France, as our ancestors shaped her over the centuries, is on the road to disappearance. The audience is being kept amused by endless talk about immigration, but the final truth is never stated. Furthermore, that truth

is unsayable, as my friend Jean Cau had noted, because whoever says it is immediately hounded, condemned, and then rejected. Richard Millet [a prominent figure in French literature who lost his job and was hounded out of public life because he claimed that Anders Breivik, the Norwegian mass killer, was a product of multiculturalism] came close to that truth, and just look what happened to him!

What can be done? Raspail tells us:

There are only two ways to deal with immigrants, Raspail says. “Either we accommodate them, and France—her culture, her civilization—will be eradicated without so much as a funeral. In my view, that is what is going to happen. Or we do not accommodate them at all, which means we stop sanctifying the Other and rediscover our neighbors.”

You can read the above quote with “the United States” or “Great Britain” or “Italy” substituted for “France” and the truth remains, though American culture is far less substantial, less of a loss to the West. At the same time, the United States, if we had chosen to grow up as a people, was the logical center for a newly reinvigorated Western Civilization. Likely it is that such an opportunity for greatness is lost, though I feel it likely that the American people will participate in some substantial way in any new civilization growing up in the next century or so. But it’s far from clear we’ll have the stuff to take a truly central role.

In any case, we in the West have a mess on our hands, a mess productive of high crime rates and revivals of political irrationalism. The US Army is said to have many soldiers proudly wearing the tattoos of various gangs from the Latin Kings to the Aryan Brotherhood; from the modern individualistic viewpoint, there would seem to be remarkably few large criminal gangs which aren’t ethnically or racially based. The crime rates for the core American population of European-descent are about the same as for the old countries, but American crime-rates, violent and otherwise, are relatively high because of other ethnic groups, such as African-Americans and Hispanics.

Bishops and ministers and rabbis and Senators and professors and others so charitably offer up the lives of their fellow-Americans and also their

money through programs to bring in more immigrants to a country which still hasn't figured out how to assimilate African-Americans who've been here for centuries. All this while job-creating capital is dwindling and infrastructure is decaying in the United States. Bishops and Senators alike show no capability of truly raising these more recent immigrant groups out of their primitive cultures, their illiteracy, their lack of the sociability needed to form or join higher-level cultures—unlike the British and French and Italians and Poles and other European peoples, Hispanic peoples show no inclination to form social clubs or to found schools. After all, any efforts to help these people to assimilate to a more complex and more civilized life would require that they first raise their children properly. It's much easier to cry as the dark-skinned teenagers kill each other in between gathering in barbarian mobs to loot convenience stores to the sounds of songs which glorify rape and the killing of cops.

Our leaders have presided over the decay and sometimes violent destruction of what was given to them in stewardship. Yet, these men who couldn't even maintain the institutions of a phenomenally wealthy and powerful country think to help others to... what? Assimilation isn't in the cards and hasn't been for a while. Those leaders seem not to have the faith in moral order or higher culture or even the God of Moses or Jesus Christ to impose any of the Western ways upon the troubled and disordered alien peoples in our midst; nor can we help them to form their own higher-level cultures—they must take the initiative.

It might not be possible to bring these immigrants to a state of moral order in any foreseeable time. Raspail might be right; we may have admitted and may be feeding and clothing those whose role is to kill the West and all that was good in it.

Politicians and Christian charity-workers look at these unassimilable peoples lovingly as potential dependents and corporate executives look at them with dollar signs in their eyes. It's hard to believe that American cultures, mostly as vulgar as European peasant cultures without the vitality and dedication to biologically healthy ways of life, can stand up as our exploitive masters further degrade their products, communication devices and movies and popular music and political speech and acts, to accord to new mass-markets whose most aggressive and opinionated consumers are at the cultural level of pre-urban tribesmen. A fair number of the children of European descent are headed toward that state. Others are just going to be befuddled little soft things in a world demanding a large degree of

toughness.

Things will get worse, will be magnified by our ongoing economic and political problems which seem be solvable only by a wholesale reform of Western ways of life—a set of tasks well beyond the doing of soft Americans or Frenchmen and unimaginable to our Sudanese or Hmong immigrants. Whatever happens, reform or decay into a state of utter barbarism, things are sure to be ugly and painful and we seem to determined to make things as ugly and as painful as possible for the next few generations.

Mixtures of peoples, for good and bad, prevent the sort of moral coherence which allows a nation or smaller community to respond to problems. In fact, a mixture of cultures, even of morally well-ordered peoples, makes it difficult to even engage in the ordinary transactions of life. When we go to a store, we British-Americans, and likely others, wish to buy goods or services in the way to which we are accustomed, such as set prices, rather than find ourselves involved in a Middle Eastern negotiation for the price of oranges and beef roasts. I'm sure immigrants from the Middle East mistrust store-owners who refuse to bargain. We would like to assume our family doctors understand their role in the way of, say, a smalltown New England doctor rather than in the way of a corporate or government bureaucrat. Modern men of the West are restless and dissatisfied partly because we've gone multicultural in a willy-nilly manner that takes away one of the great advantages of human culture: we don't know what to expect of neighbors, merchants, providers of professional services, or public servants. We have lost our human cultures which were shaped to our customs and habits. Our leaders have given us only illusions of a kinder and gentler world, one whose best attribute is the impossibility of bringing it into existence.

We should not underestimate the importance, for good and bad, of the large-scale migrations of history; nor should we forget their relationship to periods of war and other forms of upheaval. We should not court the disasters attendant upon those large-scale movements of peoples into alien lands, disasters often leading to future goods of lesser or greater sorts, but only after generations of suffering and then hard work. In the cases of the United States and Europe, I fail to see much good coming from large-scale immigration from Asia and Africa and Latin America, especially at a time when our own troubles are maturing and are likely to result in reduced living-standards for the next few generations as well as being likely to result in a very shabby inheritance for our descendants in the political and cultural realms.

Yet, there are many out there, morally well-meaning in a juvenile and irresponsible way, who think that we—especially we Christians—can solve the problems of the poor by direct and simpleminded actions, though they would more likely claim the phrase, "direct and simplehearted," to be closer to the truth. Given my understanding of human being [53], there isn't so much difference between simpleminded and simplehearted. If you think it good to be comfortably dumb, you should also think it good to be simple of heart, undisciplined and spewing forth sentiments upon all who don't get away fast enough.

As I have noted repeatedly, we modern Christians tend to claim the world is simple when we set out to worship or understand or serve our Maker though we are awfully willing to recognize the complexity of the world when seeking to save our own lives by way of modern diagnostic machinery or surgical techniques, let alone the technological wonders of cable television or smartphones. See Chapter 582, *Taking the Fresh Fruits and Giving God the Leftovers*, for a very short discussion of this issue.

I'd like to point back to some of the chapters where I've discussed the moral disorder (lack of participation as worshipers or voters and uncivil responses to strangers and even those in one's own communities—sound familiar?) which comes to multicultural communities: see Chapter 218, *Networks of Public Spaces Rather Than One Square*, and Chapter 275, *We Prefer to Cooperate With Those Like Ourselves*.

I've also tried to address in a short essay the frustrations of watching well-meaning and intelligent men and women who seem not to see problems until they've run us over and passed by: see Chapter , *Reality Bites Back but Maybe It Started Nibbling Many Years Ago*; as some of us would have feared, they are now aware there are problems and are waging war against the symptoms. After generations of many Christians, including the domineering leaders of both the American Catholics and American Protestants, pushing for government programs which would make the ordinary citizens dependent upon centralized political and economic powers, Christians—including many leaders—are surprised, surprised that gambling is taking place in Rick's nightclub (see the movie *Casablanca* or just the short clips of that scene available on the Internet). This is to say, they were surprised that the sorts of men and women who seek political power would misuse the dependencies of the citizens upon the central government (and centralized medical industry corporations). Maybe it's unwise to expand the central government's power to cover all important areas of human life?

But, and this is a big BUT, would it matter in the long-run to a Christian if Western Civilization were to utterly collapse? If God is in charge, the story of the development of the Body of Christ in this mortal realm will continue, even if we find that Body suddenly centered on the Pacific Rim (one possibility and the one I think most likely). It will matter in the sense that we men of the West will have to admit to our failures of nerve, of faith, of the sheer guts that leads **good** men to live or die for God, family, Church, civilization, and nation—in approximately that order though clergymen and others with peculiar vocations might have a slightly different ordering to meet their peculiar duties.

Moral order, even when embodied in warrior societies or exploitive societies, is the raw stuff of the Body of Christ. When it is embodied in such a society as the United States has become, not the society Adam Smith lauded but the one he feared might arise? Yes, rather than full-chested Christian men setting to the task of being more active stewards of the world's natural resources, including human talents, we have become the genial men lacking the tougher moral characteristics—as Adam Smith feared for just a sentence or two before returning to his sometimes irrational optimism. Maybe we are invited to destroy ourselves and Western Civilization because Western men hollowed out their own chests—with more than a little bit of assistance from our mothers and our mostly female teachers.

It's a bit disturbing to think we are falling from the heights of wealth and power, of cultural accomplishment, because we have become fat, dumb, and lazy, but that might well be the best way to understand our current problems. If we were to recognize the real enemy is the Western man who looks back at us from the mirror, could we rescue the West, at least so that we can participate in the birth and development of a greater Christian Civilization? A somewhat more complete, if not yet a more mature, Body of Christ? I don't think there is much possibility for a large-scale revival of Western Civilization because I don't think Western men are honest enough, courageous enough, to face up to the fact that they lack balls, no matter how much muscle mass they develop in trips to the gym and no matter how many hours they put in viewing brutal sports events or the far more brutal assaults of the American military upon civilian targets in countries not able to defend themselves.

## 499 Creating Our Own Realities

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1732>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/11/18.]

I've written on this general topic before: see Chapter 408, *The Need for Abstractions in Moral Self-understanding* as one example.

Americans seem to love sloppy idealizations drawn from shallow and literalistic understandings of reality. We love witch-hunts of all sorts; we love to justify ourselves in the way of Emerson and Thoreau and Parker and other New England Transcendentalists and Unitarians who seem to have had a respect for common sense and reality only because they truly and deeply believed that common sense and reality were those wraiths which flickered across the stages in their own minds. Most of all, we love that strangely profound and profoundly strange thinker named Abraham Lincoln, though we like the folksy man of the people as he's depicted in movies and in public school textbooks—among other errors in our 'knowledge' about Lincoln: he started as a poor lawyer but quickly became a wealthy lawyer skilled in defending railroads and other corporations fighting against efforts of local communities to rein them in. The reality is more interesting but the American dreamworld is so comforting, I guess, though I'm not particularly comforted.

It's hardly surprising that a people convinced that every shadow passing across their minds is the hard stuff of reality would soon enough decay to a point where we can no longer produce heretics with stuff in their chests. At least Lincoln had stuff, but even Emerson, most of all Emerson, was always questionable so far as stuff goes—Melville had to dress up his character with a rebellious courage before Captain Ahab was born. I guess Emerson was an English country parson trying to present himself as a self-made frontiersman. If Melville had known, he could have waited until Lincoln

came along as a model for Captain Ahab. But maybe Captain Ahab was truer to Lincoln than to Emerson.

Garry Wills, in his honestly admiring book about what Lincoln actually did—*Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words that Remade America*, told us that Lincoln had little respect for the Founding Fathers or their *Constitution*, though he found *The Declaration of Independence* to be at least useful to his arguments. I don't know from what I've read, including the book by Wills, if Lincoln was aware that decontextualization is a form of abstraction more conducive to distortions than to truths. I suspect he simply wouldn't have conceded that such was an issue because he would have thought his dreamworld to be a greater and better reality. Then again, I'm simply not sure how Lincoln would have justified his all-too American style of abstracting from concrete reality in an effort to derive. . .

Not ultimate truths. Lincoln was too insightful in his glacial way not to see that his ways were incompatible with any recognition of truly objective or absolute truth. Yet, Lincoln was willing to engage in actions he knew to be enforcing his particular dreamworld, not nearly as trite as the current American dreamworld, upon the dreamworlds of other Americans as if convinced his dreamworld to be the true Gospel.

My criticisms of American transcendental ways of thought aren't consistent, at least not fully so, but I think this to be a result of trying to describe a rapidly mutating mind-infection of sorts. It's easier to produce coherent critiques of the American tendencies toward a strange sort of well-meaning antinomianism, closely associated with our Transcendentalism to be sure; I provided a very sketchy critique of those tendencies, the desire to sin without being guilty of sin, in Chapter 495, *Quietly Charitable or Quietly Murderous But Always Quietly American*. It's all part of one disordered American Mind.

In any case, I'd recommend a reading of the essay by Richard Gamble, *Gettysburg Gospel: How Lincoln forged a civil religion of American nationalism* found at <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/gettysburg-gospel/>. Gamble seems to be a thinker conservative in the true way of trying to preserve what was and might still be good in our heritage. He recognizes the true insights in Garry Wills' book but presents an analysis not only critical of the acidic effect of Lincoln's way of thought but also open to something which might be called "moral order." In fact, it be dangerous to present a firm view of moral order in an age such as ours; openness to objective truth is needed and parts of truth are revealed in the

Bible and in our traditions and in empirical knowledge.

I'd also recommend some time contemplating this question: is it knowledge of some external reality that is of interest or rather a knowledge which is participation in a being which is us as well as those rocks and rattlesnakes out there. I've dealt with this general issue in many and sundry essays and a few books; the freely available book, *Four Kinds of Knowledge*[43], is particularly important in this context.



# 500 Radical Individualism and the Misunderstanding of Modern History

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1768>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/01/20.]

In the back of my mind, I've been pondering a strange blind spot in mainstream modern historians and political commentators since reading Barbara Tuchman's *March of Folly* in May of 2013. It seems to me that she saw clearly the somewhat complex and fluid balance of forces between individuals and families or other tightly knit communities when she wrote the chapter about the Renaissance popes, but then turned to a narrative ignoring those sorts of family and class ties when discussing the American disaster in Vietnam. Were there no powerful families influencing events in the American follies in the 1960s and 1970s? Was David Halberstram wrong in *The Best and the Brightest* when he discussed a depressingly long list of New England blue-bloods who brought to bear the patronizing views of their class, attitudes covered with scraps of facts and phrases of reasoning and enshrined as truth in the halls of Harvard and Yale? Yet, it could be said that much of that odd mixture was imbibed with mother's milk in the prosperous and not-so prosperous households of those belonging to what was once called the Eastern Establishment. It was reinforced not just at Harvard and Yale (and a multitude of prep-schools before that) but also in the boardrooms of Wall Street and Boston law-firms and Wall Street investment firms.

In Chapter 408, *The Need for Abstractions in Moral Self-understanding*, I discussed an early display of this Puritan belief that reality had to conform

to their worldview during *King Phillip's War*—see [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/King\\_Phillips\\_War](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/King_Phillips_War).

During the war of the American government upon the Vietnamese peoples, were the profiteering oil-companies and engineering companies, armament-companies and aerospace companies, not involved with Neil Mallon and Prescott Bush (and his son, George H W) and other New England blue-bloods sent to form ties with the newly rising barbarians of Texas (and California and Florida and so on)? Were not the investment banks of Wall Street heavily in the business of financing profligate governments such as that of the United States as it fought the war against communists who probably wished they were as powerful as portrayed in the *New York Times* and against poverty—an absurdity almost beyond ridicule, and a failed absurdity in the end.

Many know these powerful families and classes and institutions exist and are willing to sacrifice the wealth and lives of common citizens to gain their goals, yet it remains hard to speak of such things as applying to American history because we are taught a strange history of a non-Darwinian people, one perhaps acceptable to the preachers of colonial Boston but strangely at odds with what we know of the histories of Chinese and Russian peoples, of ancient peoples of the Bible or those of Athens or Rome.

Extreme individualism, including that found in American herd-life, is a denial of some of the strongest of human characteristics—not all attractive—and would put the human race on the path to extinction for reasons given by the sociobiologist, E O Wilson, in countering Camus' claim that suicide is the act at the center of modern life:

Self-existence, or the suicide that terminates it, is not the central question of philosophy. They hypothalamus-limbic complex automatically denies such logical reduction by countering it with feelings of guilt and altruism. In this one way the philosopher's own emotional centers are wiser than his solipsist consciousness, "knowing" that in evolutionary time the individual organism counts for almost nothing. In a Darwinist sense, the organism does not live for itself. Its primary function is not even to reproduce other organisms; it reproduces genes, and it serves as their temporary carrier. [page 3 of *Sociobiology, The Abridged Edition* [151]]

From a slightly different but compatible viewpoint, the “central question of philosophy” is how to live moral individual lives and how to form morally well-ordered communities given the type of creatures we are and the type of world we inhabit. Our genes aren’t our slave-masters but they determine our basic characteristics. From a Christian viewpoint, the problem is how to form the Body of Christ from the available human material and not from some strange creature found in the imagination of utopian or dystopian thinkers of the left or the right. Extreme views of man as an individual (often combined with an advocacy of something like totalitarian governments) can be either utopian or dystopian in this sense. Whether seen as depraved sinners alone in front of an angry God or as creatures inclined to do good if not corrupted by traditional institutions, men are seen by too many modern thinkers as only accidentally attached to families or other human communities, only voluntarily attached to families or other human communities if the Puritanical or modern liberal reformers can do their work. Men are seen in those terms even when they are obviously different.

We know that individual men and their communities are the result of complex evolutionary processes which also produced wolves and the wolf-pack. That is, evolutionary processes produced specific forms of individual being and, in some species, also communal being. Evolutionary processes produced the parental loves which are the primal bonds of families of various sorts in at least the social mammals. It produced human families which grew into tribes and clans bound tightly in a hostile world so that those human animals outside the tribe or the clan were often seen as lesser sorts of human beings and sometimes as non-humans.

Yet, families and classes—true families arising from our deepest selves—have disappeared from most of the modern efforts to understand the modern world—the noble acts and crimes alike. Why? Are the oh-so scientific academics and commentators of the modern West afraid to deal with such blunt expositions of the importance of blood-ties as Wilson’s works on sociobiology or the book of *Genesis*? Are they blind or are they afraid to stray from the mainstream?

I think many modern thinkers in the fields of history and politics imagine, if only implicitly and unconsciously, that we’ve outgrown families and classes and other groupings with ties of blood or marriage. The sociobiologists, such as E O Wilson, are reminding our oh-so modern selves that we still are moved by the same primitive emotions or desires as those to be

found in particularly clear form in the early books of the Bible.

In the sometimes noble and sometimes criminal or exploitive acts of families and fraternal societies or religious groups or others, we are seeing a part of the maturing processes of the Body of Christ or sometimes a rebellion against those maturing processes.

# 501 Political Philosophies Are Bound to Be Bad When Creation is Poorly Understood

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1789>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/03/12.]

In a short essay recently published under the byline of the staff of *The American Conservative*, *Higher Culture, Better Politics* found at <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/higher-culture-better-politics/>, an argument is made which is in the right direction but steps into the water as the boat is pulling away from the dock:

When a movement neglects culture and philosophy, one can be sure it’s dying. High ideas, art, and literature seem remote from the concerns of political professionals and grassroots activists. But the movements that succeed—or that acquire power, at any rate—tend to be steeped in theory.

In Chapter 594, *What Can We Say About the Body of Christ?*, I wrote about Joseph Ratzinger’s claim that “that Christians of the West hadn’t properly maintained their home.” I went on to explain that “Western Civilization isn’t in trouble because of invasions by pagans or Satanic agents but rather because Western Christians were morally irresponsible in their duties towards their own civilization. Pagans and others didn’t invade the West. They wandered into vacated public spaces.” I went on to argue that the Christian Church Herself is an organ in the Body of Christ and not the entirety of that Body; She is the central organ—moral and spiritual and

liturgical guide from which the entire Body grew. The entire Body has the fullness of human life in it and, as such, looks more like a civilization and looks more attractive in that it promises a full human life in the world of the resurrected and not a sentence of eternity in a church choir. In fact, there is very little evidence in the Gospels that Jesus of Nazareth would have been interested in choir life everlasting as singer or conductor.

Western civilization is in a state of decay because of the moral irresponsibility of Christians over the previous two centuries or more. In my opinion, this moral irresponsibility developed into a schism between our worship of the God of Jesus Christ and our concerns, practical and theoretical, with the world created by that God, a world which is the physical universe of the scientists seen in its completeness as a morally purposeful story being told by God. As implied above, this schism shows up in the restriction of the Body of Christ to the Church and an attitude which ranges from condescension toward Creation to condemnation of Creation as if it were truly the kingdom of demonic forces. Christian teachings broadly understood to include the political teachings in Western (Christian) civilization are out of synch internally and more out of synch with the teachings of our current deformed and decaying civilization.

In Chapter 600, *The Promise and Comedy of Modernity*, I stated the basic problem in this way:

[T]he modern phase of the Christian comedy has become a farce, played out by those who strive to remain Christians by remaining true to traditional human encapsulations of “the book of nature, the book of sacred Scripture and the book of the liturgy” as Pope Benedict termed these forms of human knowledge of God’s Creation. These Christians live behind ghetto walls refusing to look at the huge amount of material our age has added to that “book of nature” and to our understanding of at least the history of “the book of sacred Scripture” and the history of the “book of liturgy.”

Somewhere in his many writings, Etienne Gilson said that, around 1800, Catholic intellectuals failed to deal properly with the questions raised by modernity and led the Church into an intellectual ghetto from which She has not emerged. They sinned greatly in doing so—their responsibility was to educate their students to surpass the weaknesses of their teachers, but

men will often fall into self-righteous defense of the ideas to which their minds were shaped and will fail to respond properly to a Creation which is not only dynamic but also constantly revealing itself in depth and breadth to a properly curious mankind.

On the 7th of June, 2008, Pope Benedict spoke to a gathering of scholars, where he said, “Modernity is not simply a historically-datable cultural phenomenon; in reality it requires a new focus, a more exact understanding of the nature of man.” I wrote not only a variety of essays published on my blog, *Acts of Being* [38], but also an entire book in response to this quote. The book is freely available for download: *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53].

Before I wrote about human being, I had done a lot of work on the basic nature of being, of spacetime and matter and the nature and facts of human history, of creative fictions and other narratives, which provided the foundation of my work to date on human being. I have done some reading of popular science works which appear on bestseller lists and some of those are by serious thinkers writing intelligently about the empirical knowledge of modern science and about what it might mean to human beings. I have also read less accessible, quite serious works by Darwin and Einstein and their successors as well as works by intelligent commentators on modern scientific work. I’ve read John Henry Newman’s comment in which he accepted the truth of Darwin’s work and very wrongly denied its importance to our understanding of Christian truths. I’ve read commentaries on science by the good historical and literary thinkers, Butterfield and Barzun and others. So far as non-scientists go, I was most impressed by a comment Flannery O’Connor made in one of her letters as published in the Library of America’s collection of her writings [33] (page 953):

To see Christ as God and man is probably no more difficult today than it has always been, even if today there seem to be more reasons to doubt. For you it may be a matter of not being able to accept what you call a suspension of the laws of the flesh and the physical, but for my part I think that when I know what the laws of the flesh and the physical really are, then I will know what God is. We know them as we see them, not as God sees them. For me it is the virgin birth, the Incarnation, the resurrection which are the true laws of the flesh and the physical. Death, decay, destruction are the suspension of those

laws. I am always astonished at the emphasis the Church puts on the body. It is not the soul she says that will rise but the body, glorified. I have always thought that purity was the most mysterious of the virtues, but it occurs to me that it would never have entered the human consciousness to conceive of purity if we were not to look forward to a resurrection of the body, which will be flesh and spirit united in peace, in the way they were in Christ. The resurrection of Christ seems the high point in the law of nature.

Miss O'Connor was mostly certainly not among the morally irresponsible majority of modern Christians. She was trying to re-understand Creation in terms of what men currently know and not by just putting a new coat of paint on a ramshackle structure. Unfortunately, she somewhat missed the target as I noted in Chapter 599, *Flannery O'Connor Was a Pretty Good Thomistic Philosopher*, but she came closer to the bulls-eye than any modern Christian thinker I'm aware of.

Good works of creative fiction, history, philosophy, literary analysis, Biblical studies, the Bible itself, have also played a role in my efforts to revive my mind. Such works as well as observations of living human beings and a lot of contemplation also play an important role. (I like to do my deepest, and often back-of-the-mind, thinking as I walk or run the sidewalks of my hometown to which I returned some 20 years ago.)

This is the point of this essay: political philosophy is a room in an upper floor of the structure of a complete Christian understanding of Creation, or any other reasonably complete understanding of this world and more. To speak of better political philosophy in an age of man when our ancestors discovered centuries ago that the Christian story no longer makes sense is to speak gibberish, it is to recommend remodeling a room on an upper floor of a decaying structure which could collapse at any time. In fact, to speak of culture as if there is much worth engaging with in the new productions is to speak gibberish. To speak of culture as if it is inherited antiques is to simply misunderstand matters.

I addressed this problem in Chapter 307, *Modern Ideologies as Misunderstandings of Human Communities* though limiting my comments to human being and the general lack of understanding, even among Christians who supposedly believe in the Body of Christ, that human communal being is real being. If it isn't real being, our hopes in salvation are in vain as both

Christians and Jews were warned by Jacob Neusner—see Chapter 282, *Do We Need Heart and Hands as Well as Mind to Understand Reality?* for my discussion of Neusner's views as well as some relevant ideas of Hans Reichenbach and E O Wilson.

At the end of Chapter 307, *Modern Ideologies as Misunderstandings of Human Communities*, I refer to some of my earliest blog writings where I discuss the debate between Einstein and Bohr over the nature of reality. Einstein is generally seen as the defender of common-sense. I discuss, very briefly, why this isn't so and why it is that Bohr's radical view of the nature of reality is similar to the understanding of the school of St John the Evangelist who taught that relationships (starting with love) are primary over substantial being and, in fact, bring substantial being into existence and continue to shape it.



# 502 We Need All Sorts of Mavericks in This Dynamic Creation

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1792>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/03/26.]

Judith Curry is Professor and Chair of the School of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences at the Georgia Institute of Technology. Curry's blog is well worth reading for reliable commentary on climate science and more general matters of science practice and of public policy in its relationship to science. One of her recent articles, *More scientific mavericks needed* found at <http://judithcurry.com/2014/03/23/more-scientific-mavericks-needed/>, is a short discussion of three articles or essays on the need for mavericks in science in the modern limited sense and also in economics. Professor Curry's article, begins with a quote from one of those articles, *We need more scientific mavericks* found at <http://www.theguardian.com/science/2014/mar/18/we-need-more-scientific-mavericks>:

Agencies claiming to support blue-skies research use peer review, of course, discouraging open-ended inquiries and serious challenges to prevailing orthodoxies. Mavericks once played an essential role in research. Indeed, their work defined the 20th century. We must relearn how to support them, and provide new options for an unforeseeable future, both social and economic.

Curry is right to endorse this view which is presented in that article as a consensus view of highly-regarded British scientists including some

Nobel laureates. She has written before about the need for dissenters to keep the scientific processes working properly, reasoning from the general principles of those processes. She herself is now considered by some to be a dissenter on the matter of human-caused and disaster-laden global warming because she has pointed out the need to understand the 16 years or so (1998-2013 and running) when the actual temperature increase in atmospheric temperature (or possibly flattening of that temperature) has been at or below the extreme low-end of the plausible increase patterns as the major climate models have forecast them.

God's Creation is dynamic in two ways:

1. It is dynamic in itself, and
2. It seems still more dynamic because of the various ways in which our knowledge of this dynamic Creation has grown and deepened and become more sophisticated—at a very rapid pace in recent centuries.

At some gut-level and often at a fully conscious and rational level, men have known of the first, the dynamic nature of reality itself, but the second source of dynamics has come into view only by an increase in historical experience. We can learn much from the writings of Aristotle and from the Bible but only when we understand their total context including the purposes of their authors. Something similar can be said about the writings of Einstein and Arrhenius and Chaitin.

In my writings, I've presented the second source of dynamic activity as the formation of the human mind which, updating Aquinas' claim a little, develops by various processes as the underlying brain shapes its neural connections and develops systems of neurons to better encapsulate the world around us, including not only the concrete realms of created being which we can sense and study directly but also the abstract realms of created being (think of the underlying abstract 'stuff' described by quantum mechanics or even pure mathematics).

It takes a flexible mind, one which can shape itself to empirical knowledge, to understand Creation by the best standards of any age. In fact, there are few with minds flexible enough to work across a variety of fields of knowledge and they don't seem much welcome in established institutions. See Chapter 405, *Ways of Thought in the Modern West*, based upon one of my essays from 2008, for a discussion of some insights which the historian

Carroll Quigley expressed in *The Evolution of Civilizations* [119] (reprinted by *Liberty Fund*—see <http://www.libertyfund.org>. In Quigley's view, instruments grow up in new civilizations to serve various needs, including pure and applied science in recent centuries. Over time, these instruments tend to rigidify into self-serving institutions which exclude those who can solve the serious problems which will rise eventually. There is now no reason, nor was there ever a reason, to believe that the physical sciences would be immune from this process, this rigidification into institutions which defend themselves rather than seeking truth or serving a greater cause or an entity such as a civilization or the Christian Church.

The problem is showing itself in science in the modern sense of physics and chemistry and biology and a few others, but it's been a major reason for civilizations or more local cultures collapsing when their problems were solvable. It affects all fields of human thought and action, theology and philosophy and literature and such areas as national security agencies. In the article *Why Dianne Feinstein Can't Control the CIA* found at <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/why-dianne-feinstein-cant-control-the-cia/>, Phillip Giraldi, himself a former CIA officer, tells us:

Government bureaucracies, like many private sector businesses, are initially created in response to a perceived need either to do something or provide a service. The Department of Defense in its current incarnation rose out of the developing Cold War in the post-Second World War environment, while the CIA was created to prevent a second Pearl Harbor. But as bureaucracies mature they become less and less connected to their founding principles as circumstances change and they fail to adapt. They then go into a self-defense mode that makes maintaining jobs, budgets, and political turf in Washington their top priority. This compulsion to protect equities is the reason we are currently hearing of alleged CIA spying on a largely disengaged Senate committee in an attempt to forestall any accountability for torture and rendition policies that many believe to be war crimes.

Mostly lost in translation is the fact that the Senate's Select Committee on Intelligence, like CIA, is also a stale bureaucracy, one largely inhabited by senators who have been in

place for many years. Committee staffers reflect their sense of entitlement, believing themselves untouchable as they bask in their celebrity since 9/11. In short, they too are prone to go into self-defense mode about what they have and have not done, making Sen. Dianne Feinstein no hero for opportunistically attacking the CIA for spying on her committee. Her attempts to shift the blame for now-discredited and abhorrent activities in which her committee was almost certainly complicit are obvious, though this in no way exonerates the Agency.

There is a very large-scale problem, especially at times in history when contradictions and stresses have built up because new knowledge of our world hasn't been properly integrated into a good and plausible—albeit ultimately time-bound and culture-bound—understanding of our world. The empirical knowledge gathered in recent centuries didn't fit into any traditional understandings of our world. Heroic efforts were made to put huge volumes of new wine into small and old wineskins. The containers tore apart and yet many in such fields as theology and philosophy still insist on the goodness of those wineskins. Great physicists, even Poincare, tried to deal with the discoveries and theories of Planck and Einstein in such a way but physics as a whole was strong enough and youthful enough to move forward. I don't see reason to believe that contemporary physics, or other fields of science, could deal so well with truly revolutionary understandings of our physical world.

And there is no unified understanding of our world, certainly not one which sets it in the context of a greater Creation—unless my understanding proves to be good enough to found a new Christian Civilization or revive the decrepit West.

Even the limited understandings of disciplined scientific thinkers seem like shards of glass and not like pieces of an intact window or a coherent mosaic. See my book on knowledge, *Four Kinds of Knowledge* [43], for my take on the nature of human knowledge, and the truer nature of knowledge which underlies it.

As matters stand, the institutions of Western Civilization have constructed various ghettos of thought and attitude and, as discussed above, there are signs that physicists and chemists and biologists are now doing the same—though those ghettos are not so well populated as those of theology and philosophy and literature. To mention national security issues again,

we can examine the past 20 years of American treachery toward a Russia struggling out of the mess the Bolsheviks had made and it's pretty reasonable to conjecture this has happened at least partly because so many have made careers out of opposing and hating Russians. (This is most certainly not an original speculation; some who work in the field, including some who have personal or national reasons to dislike Russia, put it forth as a definite factor in the way things are.)

In any case, many resources are controlled by ghettoized communities of knowledge and thought and creative art. Mavericks are on the outside, sometimes struggling to survive. We mavericks can console ourselves with the thought that we are living in reality while the ghetto-dwellers hold on to often magnificent but no longer valid understandings of reality from prior centuries, but we can also grow bitter in our poverty of income and resources. The time-scales in the prior sentence can be adjusted to describe the situations of maverick scientists in the maturing generation if no one manages to find a way to support them.

It's the way of the world.

We can conjecture, without too much abuse of just-so reasoning, that there are advantages to creatures conforming to established ways of thought and behavior during the relatively stable periods, good or bad, which dominate the timescape of this world. It's likely that the human race has evolved so that most men and women will try to minimize risk and energy expenditure. In any case, most human beings tend to settle into habits which can become so strong as to doom those creatures when surrounding conditions change.

I am not saying, nor is Professor Curry saying nor the British scientists, that it would be desirable or even possible for every scientist or every poet or every composer to be a maverick in the way of Einstein or Eliot or Stravinsky. We need a mixture of human types where all legitimate types respect each other, where all valid ways of being scientists or literary men or philosophers or government intelligence analysts are provided for. That is how evolution shaped us as a race, a mixture of risk-adverse and risk-seeking creatures, conforming and dissenting creatures. We should assume this is a good thing in this world and we should take care of all those who serve the survival and advancement of the human race.



# 503 The Moral Superiority of the Modern Military Over Modern Civilian Society

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1801>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/04/09.]

Military men, even the warriors or “rough boys”, hold a variety of opinions on political issues, including how to use the military. My readings in history and in the news and blogging sites of the Web have led me to believe their opinions tend to be better founded and better reasoned, in terms of basic moral instincts and reason, than those of any recent President of the United States and the vast majority of American public leaders in general—including cultural and religious leaders. The opinions of those military men who blog or write articles on the Internet or for paper publication (exclude those who move into highly-paid jobs in the military-industrial-political complex) are most certainly better founded than those of American citizens in general or those who teach in prestigious universities or advise American Presidents, but those military men tend to come from the intelligence operations or to have moved from combat roles into academic roles during their careers.

I think many of even the most clear-sighted of military men tend to put what might be called “national greatness” too high on the scale of values, especially in the United States which has a people who are not generally warriors and are also quite immature **as a people**. As Patton noted, Americans do make tough citizen-soldiers and we should be content with that and get on with our true callings in life. I think that Americans, no matter how well-educated, tend to ignore the importance of community and this might

be one reason so many convince themselves they are warriors or potential warriors—their lives are separated from communal critique and their dreams become blurred with reality, especially if reinforced by television and other forms of entertainment. Military professionals, especially those with intelligence or academic backgrounds, are far less likely to make this error because they have a truer community if one with a limited purpose from the viewpoint of a total human life. Certainly, military professionals assume the reality of military communities and the reality of their own selves as shown in the communal mirror.

True military men, and even the dedicated short-termers who are citizen-soldiers, enter into a real form of being which is most directly perceived in their loyalty to their unit. If they serve on the battlefield during wartime, it's a common claim they will fight for their comrades in that unit rather than for the greater communities of family and nation and all those in between. This makes sense because our foundational being remains flesh and blood no matter how many abstract loyalties we form and no matter how much a particular man or woman might come to understand the nature of those abstract loyalties. Apparently, even a wife and children are a little abstract on the battlefield when the bullets and missiles start flying. The guy lying out in a no-man's zone with a bad wound to a thigh is of more immediate concern and so is the guy a few feet away. When the command comes to move into the gunfire—will he hesitate or move out like another Audie Murphy? Often, according to combat veterans, courage is at the group level at that point.

I'm comfortable claiming that communal being in the American military is better formed than is nearly any other communal being in the United States. For reasons I can only partly intuit, the US military matured in this way far faster than other communities in this country still so young though I can put forward one likely reason. As I'll discuss in another context, military communities are different in having more limited but better defined moral natures.

At the same time that there is a far greater moral order in American military communities than in nearly any other American community, I'm under the impression that our political class has succeeded in partially corrupting the men in uniform, partly because the Department of Defense as a whole, including all the civilian bureaucrats, and the military-industrial complex as a greater whole, seem to be one of the most corrupt of major segments of the United States, public and private. When he was Comptroller

General of the United States (from about 1998 to 2005), David Walker had estimated there was a cumulative total approaching \$1 trillion dollars of money and supplies in the Department of Defense which couldn't be accounted for. I've read that the estimates for cumulative money missing in the US government as a whole now total to something like \$4 trillion. And now we're witnessing the spectacle of an increasing number of officers, including generals and admirals, going to jail for simple thievery or for crimes worse than that.

Yet, there remains something to the discipline necessary to military life and operations which is not just conducive to moral order but is actually at least a limited but substantial form of a higher moral order and which does reach a much higher level in men such as Robert E Lee and arguably a number of military leaders in the American Revolution—I write 'arguably' only because most of those men were citizen-soldiers. If we strip away our idealistic and self-righteous illusions about the nature of morality in the real world, we can add even two of the Indian-fighting generals, George Crook and Nelson Miles, to the list of those who fought hard but tried to treat enemies, at least when defeated, in a just and sometimes merciful manner. Ulysses Grant and John Pershing and George Patton and Matthew Ridgeway would also be on that list of men who fought hard and with great competence but within the the moral limits of war as they understood those limits. I'm no military historian and I'm certainly missing American warriors of great moral integrity from my list. I'll move on with that disclaimer.

Now we get to the heart of the matter. First of all, I'll once again refer to one of my pivotal essays included at Chapter 127, *Intelligence vs Intellect*, where I responded to two related insights of Jacques Barzun in his important book, *The House of Intellect* [7]. First, he pointed out:

We [in the United States] have in fact intelligence in plenty and we use it perhaps more widely than other nations, for we apply it with praiseworthy innocence to parts of life elsewhere ruled by custom or routine. [page 4]

At the bottom of that same page, he claimed:

Intellect is the capitalized and communal form of live intelligence; it is intelligence stored up and made into habits of

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

Institutions which rely on discipline, such as militaries, are heavier on intellect than individual intelligence. This isn't to say there aren't highly intelligent men and women in the military—there most certainly are such men and women. It is to say that a highly disciplined community will emphasize the communal mind or intellect. Judging by the books and essays on the Web written by retired, or sometimes active, military officers, I'd say the American military might well be better than the Catholic Church at bringing members' minds in line with the communal mind without crippling the individual minds. This is perhaps due to the extreme reaction against modern empirical knowledge by Catholic intellectuals in recent centuries, rooted in a mindset seen as early as the persecution of Galileo but showing itself in full bloom during the retreat from modern thought at the end of the Enlightenment, a period which gave us a lot of potential good—not yet well developed.

Because Christian thinkers and leaders have refused to properly respond to the Enlightenment (actually a complex of different enlightenments) which defined the Modern Age, the ordinary Christian has had to deal with a fragmented world on his own. He lives in a real world and then goes to church once a week or perhaps more often to hear of claims which seem increasingly dream-like, having less and less to do with any Creation this universe could be part of, less and less to do with any promises of salvation which make sense or are even attractive to flesh-and-blood human beings. See one of my relatively early essays included as Chapter 577, *The Only Sane Christian in the Modern World*, where I discussed our modern inability to say anything intelligent or even sensible about Heaven.

The ugly result of this fragmentation of perceived and conceived being is typically a fragmentation of the human being of Christians or else an effort to maintain integrity of human being by leaving Christianity or else dropping belief in the creedal claims of Christianity and then bracketing

Christian practices as simply something done out of habit or for the sake of celebrating the fun Holy Days such as Christmas and Easter.

The intellect of the Christian churches is in bad shape. Children are provided with an understanding of God and Creation which makes little sense in light of modern empirical knowledge. At the same time, the formation of individual intelligence in the more talented children is ignored. Christian children aren't provided with much to help them to deal with the forces of fragmentation and any later education they might seek about Christianity usually relies on books which, however loose and 'liberal, simply build upon that earlier indoctrination.

The intellect of the modern American military is limited in scope and is troubled but is in far better shape than that of the Christian churches or other communities in the United States—except for **some** scientific communities but those are made of the Americans who somehow make it through the educational system with enthusiasm intact and at least some self-discipline. Young men and women entering military service are indoctrinated more than educated, though often real education is offered to those who can benefit and wish to do so. It seems possible to make a good career in the American military without doing much to develop your individual intelligence, but you'll at least have to become part of a communal intelligence, or intellect, in decent shape though ragged at the edges. You'll think in ways learned by the hard experiences of the battlefield or the sustained campaign.

To a certain extent, education or training similar to that of the military can be justified to indoctrinate young Christians even at the expense of nurturing a deeper understanding—especially given our egalitarian refusal to differently educate those who might be able to develop more creative or more powerful minds which might find pleasure in dealing with such understandings. In fact, my experiences and what I notice in others leads me to conclude our modern educational systems, public and private, teach us to consider study and even the pleasurable reading of good literature to be a grind, something to be done only when you're trying to attain your diploma, your credentials for the real world. Even a pretense of learning largely stops at graduation, certainly any learning related to such matters as history or literature or the sciences. In healthier times, even some working men and women would read serious works in those fields, for sheer pleasure of using their minds. As our general educations teach us to hate reading even serious literature which was very popular in past generations, such as the novels

and essays of Mark Twain or the political writings of Thomas Jefferson, so do our Christian Sunday Schools and CCD classes teach us to avoid reading the Bible or other great works from various religious traditions.

I suspect the military indoctrination as well as its more profound sorts of education are more effective than Christian indoctrination and leave the minds of soldiers open to learning just because it teaches a way of life but not a commitment to an understanding of reality which is a poor encapsulation of that reality.

The military is in the job of understanding a more limited aspect of Creation: defending country and all it contains against those who have attacked us or preparing to defend country against potential attackers. (For the purpose of this part of the discussion, I'll ignore the misuse and perhaps corruption of the American military by the political class of the United States or—more generally—the military-industrial-political complex.)

At its best, military life is built around the principles so many honor in the breach:

- we must be willing to pay any price to do what is right and important;
- we must be willing to pay lesser prices for what is right and less important; and
- we must not willingly do positive evil though sometimes forced to act with incomplete knowledge or forced to act when there is a complex balance of good and evil revolving around our various options.

I'll ignore the problem that the last 'principle' is a catch-all which allows weasels to get to any point they wish—and their points will be accepted by a conveniently ignorant citizenry with manipulable minds—see Chapter 308, *Unreliable Memories, Minds Like Silly Putty*.

It is quite possible that military men will find themselves called to fight certain wars against dangerous enemies even if they know those wars came about, or came about in a more serious form, because of immoral or unwise decisions made by the civilian leaders of the government, American or otherwise. There are other, similar problems which military men might have to ignore in waging war against those who may not have truly been our enemies before we engaged them in battle. At a different level, combat officers, including the commanding officers in the field and their staff, are bound to beat that enemy for various reasons including the protection of

soldiers under their command even if they know we shouldn't be in that country, perhaps in the backyards of proud men who have to carry weapons because of violent men who would dominate others against their will.

Order is good, order which respects the basic moral instincts built into our genes and order which respects the best (not most self-righteous or self-serving or . . .) thoughts and feelings which come from our philosophers and theologians, our politicians (real ones) and business leaders, our social and cultural leaders including artists and musicians.

Much of this order is gone in the Modern West and never existed in a strong form in the United States, largely because generations of Christians have practiced a sort of ghetto-thought allied with a feel-good philosophy toward our emotions. The American military, and some other militaries have a better defined, and necessarily more limited, understanding of moral order, an understanding in the context of their roles as soldiers.

I would maintain that, even in the deeply corrupt United States, the military is still a community with a good percentage of men with true moral character and moral courage. You don't have to agree with them on all matters—even the non-interventionists in American military uniforms, or formerly in those uniforms, tend to be a bit more aggressive than I would recommend in international matters. Yet, some have looked at the damage we've wreaked throughout the world and inside the minds and hearts of young American men and women, as well as having looked at all those who have died or been crippled—American and otherwise. Some of those are at least considering a fairly strict position of “defend our own borders and don't get involved in faraway lands unless absolutely necessary to defend American lives or property.” (I think there are some adopting a stance which is more to the non-interventionist side than they would prefer because of their perception of that lack of moral order in the American political class and general citizenry—they don't trust us or our elected representatives to even bother to learn where a country is before bellowing to attack because those evil people, whoever or wherever they are, “hate us for our freedom”; maybe they'll love us when they understand we are descending toward a relative material poverty to match our moral and cognitive poverty.)

I would also maintain that we Christians, warriors or citizen-soldiers or pure civilians, can learn much from that more limited but firm moral code still honored by many individual American military men and, to a lesser extent, by many American military institutions—though often honored in the breach because of the corrupting influence of the American political

class or the military-industrial-political complex as a whole. I'll mention two lessons similar to principles held by the military. We should form children to the principal that they, and we, should always be living for the greater good of God and our family and our country and our other communities, including those of medical professionals or anthropologists; when necessary, we should be willing to die for God and our human communities. We should also recover a respect for habit-formation, not in a totally mindless way but in a firm and authoritative way.

# 504 Can We Be Willfully Criminal and Immoral While Retaining Moral Integrity?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1810>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/04/29.]

In the article, *The Cognitive Dissonance of Spying* found at <http://www.unz.com/article/the-cognitive-dissonance-of-spying/>, subtitled *It's Always Illegal and Often Immoral*, Philip Giraldi, who has served as an officer of the CIA and also of the DIA (military intelligence), tells us:

It is being reported that the attempt by Director of Central Intelligence John Brennan to steer the CIA away from paramilitary action and back towards conventional spying and analysis is not going well. Media coverage of the problem is depicting it as being partly driven by bureaucratic obstacles associated with budgeting and allocation of personnel, but the truth is that cultural change that has taken place over the past thirteen years is the real culprit and one must conclude that it will be even harder to shift than if it were simply a question of who gets the money and the promotions.

Giraldi then provides a short and interesting description of the process of recruiting foreign agents and the old-fashioned emotional ties between an intelligence officer and the agents he recruits, He has written of this before and of his own experiences of feeling true sorrow when something bad happens to one of the agents he recruited and managed, even if the

agent was a scoundrel who was purely and simply selling his country's secrets for money.

Giraldi goes on to speak of the changes in the CIA since 2001/11/9:

Then there arrived the drones. Killing machines pure and simple with everyone inside the process knowing that lots of civilians were paying the price for poor intelligence. And the world learned about renditions, targeted assassinations and torture, all endorsed at the highest levels of CIA, which is still attempting to justify what it did. To continue to work in such an environment required a complete suspension of conventional morality. The whole world became a gaggle of enemies clustered in a free fire zone. Spot, assess, develop, recruit? Become a friend. No time. No way.

So Brennan is confronted by a problem more pervasive than resource allocation in his effort to revive the old intelligence skills. No one any longer thinks the way they did pre-9/11. Apart from regular nervous assertions of "we are the good guys," there is not a whole lot of soul searching about what is happening and why and you either have to accept the reality or move on. Which makes it hard to go back to what was, as John Brennan is discovering.

This is a sad situation. The American 'skill' of committing the same evils as other powerful imperialistic peoples and then walking away, oblivious to our own evil and forgetting even the basic facts of what we had done, is the reason behind Solzhenitsyn's claim that we are a "uniquely evil people." Giraldi is different just because he can remember his actions as a CIA operative as being illegal, possibly immoral, and justified only if the Cold War was so serious a situation as the mainstream in the United States was preaching.

The problem is deeper and goes to the nature of a country which was a melting pot of individuals from various cultures and different understandings of reality from mostly the British Isles. There was no true community even during the excitement of fighting for and gaining independence from the English government. The United States had no communal moral character and still has none to brag about. Many of us are proud of being ignorant adolescents and the entire country is such: an ignorant adolescent

composed of individuals with active intelligence but possessing no communal intelligence, no intellect. (See Chapter 127, *Intelligence vs Intellect*.)

Though our evil was far less at the time, Tocqueville saw the same fluid memories in our national ancestors in the 1820s, the same ability to ignore the most obvious fact if it conflicted with the mainstream understanding. It has something to do with the horrible possibility that Adam Smith foresaw: that men in the commercialized, prosperous societies he was foreseeing might be genial with no real moral character, no moral courage. It also has something to do with our immaturity as a people, and we are a people—however ill-formed, however little intelligence we have as the American national community. That is to say, being a Christian true to Biblical and other historical traditions, I recognize the reality of human communal being which reaches its perfection and completeness in the true Body of Christ in the world of the resurrected.

I've written a number of times about the weak moral character and poor moral order to be found in Americans, as individuals and as a community. For example, see Chapter 495, *Quietly Charitable or Quietly Murderous But Always Quietly American*, Chapter 499, *Creating Our Own Realities*, and Chapter 641, *Enriching Our Moral World: Simple Is Digested Complexity*. Another important essay is one where I discuss the ways in which weak-minded modern men, most especially Americans, have allowed their understanding of reality to be controlled by those who show signs of being enemies of God: see Chapter 308, *Unreliable Memories, Minds Like Silly Putty*.

I was once criticized, lightly, by a man I respect—he said my (longer?) writings were repetitious. He made it light by noting it was a valid strategy for someone trying to teach something truly new, but there's more going on. I'm trying to bend language and human thoughts to better shape them to reality. I'm digging deeper into reality, a small distance at a time. I'm refining my efforts to better shape human thoughts and language to reality one phrase at a time, one unspeakable and unthinkable insight at a time.

I'm trying to properly expand my critique of the weak moral character and self-delusions of modern men of the West, men who have been labeled “genial without true moral character,” “hollow-chested,” or simply “nice in the way of Adolf Eichmann, the architect of the Holocaust logistics.” (Respectively, and not exact quotes: Adam Smith, C S Lewis, and Hannah Arendt.) But Girdi in his article, *The Cognitive Dissonance of Spying* found at <http://www.unz.com/article/>

the-cognitive-dissonance-of-spying/", as well as Pablo Escobar in the article, *Breaking American exceptionalism* found at <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/World/WOR-03-011013.html>, which I discussed in Chapter 495, *Quietly Charitable or Quietly Murderous But Always Quietly American*, have presented evidence and analyses that we have gone beyond willful ignorance and self-righteousness to a state that can be described as an actual celebration of crimes when committed by Americans against the others in order to advance some American goal whether seemingly well-defined or clearly vague—so to speak. Escobar quotes D H Lawrence's description of Deerslayer (the main character of a number of novels by James Fenimore Cooper):

A man who turns his back on white society. A man who keeps his moral integrity hard and intact. An isolate, almost selfless, stoic, enduring man, who lives by death, by killing, but who is pure white.

This is the very intrinsic - most American. He is at the core of all the other flux and fluff. And when this man breaks from his static isolation, and makes a new move, then look out, something will be happening.

Those Americans, formerly found in the imaginations of many including too many morally ill-formed young men, can now be found all around us. In his book, *On Killing*, Lt Col Dave Grossman (ret) wrote of the very small percentage of men who truly enjoy killing other human beings and the larger but still small percentage of those who can kill with detachment when they think it morally right. When the rest of us kill, we pay a price. Some in that largest group, those with strong body-based instincts against killing other members of the human race, have been war heroes but suffered decades of nightmares (lessening over time to be sure) in which they might see the face or at least form of the enemy soldier they killed.

Unfortunately, there seem to be many in the United States who are developing bad attitudes in response to all sorts of twisted words and images in the public speech of politicians and others, in entertainment products, and—as time goes on—in the reinforcing speech and acts of peers. Many are literally twisting themselves into sociopaths of one variety or another; with some it might be largely a show, but...

In the book I referenced above, *On Killing*, Grossman said the part of the My Lai massacre story which most disturbed him was the way in which some soldiers knew it was wrong and were trying to stop the cold-blooded murder of unarmed and innocent civilians until the blood-lust caught them and they joined in as well. Do you think there will be so much as hesitation on the part of those who have been worked, with their own cooperation, into the state of sociopathic attitudes? It won't matter how superficial the attitudes might be in some. The self-disgust will come later but **mostly** if those who are neither psychopathic nor capable of detachment when killing see the results of their particular actions. (Those capable of detachment will usually not succumb to those sorts of rages which overwhelm moral inhibitions—according to Grossman and also to Col Pat Lang, retired Green Beret and military intelligence officer.) There are stories suggesting some drone-operators are feeling remorse for their actions as they can see the person disintegrating as the missile hits and, even if they are willing to kill 'bad guys' however defined, as they occasionally see the stray child or other innocent or even a Good Samaritan get a piece of the murderous pseudo-justice intended for one of those 'bad guys'.

I have somewhat mixed feelings about the question of individual moral order in American history. We have our strengths in moral order, largely in the context of our domestic lives; we have little knowledge or experience of the sort which might prepare us for even the friendliest of meetings with those from radically different cultures or those who feel they have a legitimate gripe against the United States. We are soft and don't know how to respond properly under the stress of battle, as I noted above in the case of the massacre at My Lai. I strongly feel that we have been almost entirely unordered as a people, but we have the same instincts as others to act as a community. So it is that we usually behave well for practical reasons and also behave well toward our friends and relatives and those we recognize as neighbors but we are frighteningly willing to commit horrible crimes as a people, at least when we could get away with it. Free and unordered though we might be in some ways, we remain tied to each other so that we move up or down in moral order as members of various communities—a complex movement often involving churches or synagogues, neighborhoods or social clubs of seemingly decent and even gentle human beings, as well as involving national or military communities. Or peer-groups of young men trying to adjust to the blood-lust so often glorified in our political speech and in our movies and thriller novels; few young men are willing to be the advocates

of peace and justice or even hardheaded reason in a group cheering on the Hellfire missiles as they strike deep into the heart of a city so far away.

Philip Giraldi has written before of the horrible weaponry our corporations have developed, of men who tortured and later showed no moral regret no matter how horrible the torture, of public officials who misuse intelligence information or the powers they hold in trust to start wars of less than questionable legality and morality. At least one military intelligence officer not impressed by CIA personnel in general, Col Pat Lang (ret), holds Giraldi in high regard. I say this to emphasize the message he brings us from one who was inside, who has risked his life for his country, who has spoken boldly and bravely of crimes and self-serving acts on the parts of American politicians, intelligence officers, and military personnel. We should take his message seriously: spying is almost always a criminal operation, though arguably moral if we were trying to find out the Nazi plans for defending Europe against allied invasion. There are probably some lesser justifications for many types of spying, though I see little good as having come from non-military spying—it seems to me we would be better informed if we had a think-tank group of highly educated and eccentric men and women studying other countries or specific situations based mostly on publicly available information. Torturing and killing from the air without a hint of judicial process are evil. We have become a people capable of doing or at least accepting acts we once damned without qualification when done by Soviets or Red Chinese or North Koreans or others.

As a Christian, it frightens me that many ruthless and disordered men, at least in the military and apparently in the CIA, are practicing Christians, seemingly devout. Yet, they commit, without a quibble, acts which are gross violations of the Fifth Commandment, mortal sins, damning sins, even if you've gone down on your knees to accept Jesus as your Lord before leaving for combat in some country your friends and parents can't even locate on a map. "Mine eyes have seen the glory of butchering those who hate us for our freedom and our purity."

Even when spying and engaging in some other covert operations might be justifiable, we Americans take to glorifying James Bond with an unseemly relish which indicates to me that we had found a focus for our immoral desires that appealed even more than the frontier legends, from Deerslayer to the Earp brothers—men who could kill other human beings and walk away without suffering the psychiatric problems which tortured the men studied by Col Grossman (see his book *On Killing*.) As I said,

there are men who are well-ordered and capable of killing with detachment when they think it morally proper. Those aren't the ones we Americans desire to emulate nor is there any reason for such a desire—they are different from us and, probably, we have enough “rough boys” (a term used by Col Lang for himself and other born warriors) to protect the rest of us under ordinary circumstances and to form the core of an army fleshed out with citizen-soldiers when we need to fight a major war. Why long for warrior virtues rather than developing the virtues God gave you?

We admire not the rough boys because they kill only when they think it proper and keep themselves under control even when provoked greatly. We admire the ones who seek opportunities to kill, the ones who can make killing their lives, the ones with itchy trigger fingers. Nor do we honor those not made so they can kill with detachment, even under just conditions. I get the impression from Grossman's book, *On Killing*, as well as my own acquaintance with men who served in Korea or Vietnam or Iraq, that Americans are quite uncomfortable with those men who damaged their own insides so badly for the sake of their country or for the sake of the other men in their units. It's as if we think it shameful to feel guilty for having killed other human beings—morally or otherwise, to be incapable of killing at will, to be under partial control of a communal moral character of the sort we Americans have failed to develop very well, though it be built into us by Darwinian processes and is very strong in some.

We want to will as we would. We would be total masters of our own human selves. We are upset by, even ashamed of, the moral instincts which are part of something greater than our individual selves. We think it noble to be able to kill at random, or according to random needs and desires we generate in response to opportunities. We would choose not to kill only if doing so in some state we imagine to be absolute freedom. We think it degrading and enslaving to be bound by moral instincts or even by rules given by others.

We Americans, like all human beings, are products of evolutionary processes and we are, like it or not, creatures of moral traits rather than creatures of free-will who can ‘freely’ choose to kill or not, to steal or not, to conquer other countries or not. We nurture the moral qualities we possess or we become immoral wretches. What a sad state to be in: to be morally ordered creatures, however imperfect our order, and to be constantly nurturing our desires to trade in our moral characters for free-wills which would allow us to kill or steal or conquer other individuals or countries when we

would, doing all of this ruthlessly and with a grin, partying on the way—each arm around the slender waist of a pretty young thing, a daughter of another man.

Now, women are also joining in the fun and an inclusive essay would have to allow for whatever perverse dreams they have when joining the army to kill people or the CIA to engage in adventures where they kill ruthlessly while risking civilization's existence in order to save the world. Or something like that.

# 505 Can a Modern Individualist Understand Who Owns America?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1825>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/06/06.]

A short while back Ralph Nader published an article, *Who Owns America?* at <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/who-owns-america/>, which begins:

There was a time in the Depression of the 1930s when conservative thought sprang from the dire concrete reality of that terrible era, not from abstractions.

They did not use the word “conservative” very often, preferring to call themselves “decentralists” or “agrarians.” Eclectic in background, they were columnists, poets, historians, literary figures, economists, theologians, and civic advocates. In 1936, Herbert Agar, a prominent author, foreign correspondent, and columnist for the Louisville Courier-Journal and Alan [sic—Allen] Tate, poet and social commentator, brought a selection of their writings together in a now nearly forgotten book: *Who Owns America? A New Declaration of Independence*.

They believed, in simple terms, that the monopoly capitalists owned America. This analysis could be, and often should be, expanded to a more complete answer. In September of 2013, I read an article, *These Are The Ten "People" Who Run The World (For The Last 20 Years)* at <http://www.zerohedge.com/news/2013-09-27/these-are-ten-people-who-run-world>, about the ten dominant corpo-

rations in the world. In Chapter 492, *Who Are the American Elites and Are They Conspirators?*, I wrote as part of my response to this article:

Let me turn to a historian of a recent generation, Carroll Quigley. In *Tragedy and Hope*<sup>q</sup>—available in larger libraries and also on the Internet as a pdf-file for free download, Quigley engaged in history verging on journalism. In the early sections, dealing with the period which happens to have been the time in which the American Empire was expanding outside of North America—the decades around 1900, Quigley claimed there to be three groups of elite power-holders, the bankers and the politicians and the monopolistic capitalists. In terms of the American turn to empire, three good examples are JP Morgan, William Howard Taft, and John D Rockefeller. (By ‘bankers’, Quigley meant not the mortgage officers at old-fashioned local banks; he meant investment or merchant bankers and the closely allied central bankers. And note that Rockefeller’s heirs were bankers, the result of a transition he began by moving from Cleveland to New York City where he began to control his largely industrial empire through banks.)

I don’t think Quigley’s scheme works for the world after 1950 or so and I think the power-holder groups were under transformative stresses for a couple decades or so before the breakdown. Yet, it is the only analysis of this sort I find fully convincing. . .

What did Tate and the other Agrarians or decentralists think of the idea of government coming to our rescue by regulating the corporations and bringing them under control? Nader tells us:

Nor did they believe that a federal government with sufficient political authority to modestly tame the plutocracy and what they called “monopoly capitalism” could work because its struggle would end either in surrender or with the replacing of one set of autocrats with another. As Shapiro wrote in the foreword, “while the plutocrats wanted to shift control over property to themselves, the Marxists wanted to shift this control to government bureaucrats. Liberty would be sacrificed in either case. Only the restoration of the widespread ownership of property,

Tate said, could ‘create a decent society in terms of American history.’”

Although the decentralists were dismissed by their critics as being impractical, as fighting against the inevitable wave of ever-larger industrial and financial companies empowered by modern technology, their views have a remarkable contemporary resonance given today’s globalized gigantism, absentee control, and intricate corporate statism, which are undermining both economies and workers.

I think we can see the issue more clearly if we define it as did Quigley, realizing that few—if any—are the times in history when one group of power-holders was in absolute control. In my essay I referenced and quoted from above, I expressed doubt that we have any good understanding of the current power-elite comparable to Quigley’s proposal that the American power-elites fell (from some time in the late 1800s to about 1930) into the three groups: investment bankers, monopoly capitalists, and politicians. Yet, there must be some way of cutting across these ways of exploiting others to find the ties that bind all the investment bankers and monopoly capitalists and politicians who summered together at Newport back in the good ol’ days. There are more dimensions to this problem than we account for with our modern theories of economics and politics and society in general; more than we can account for with our the theories of human nature underlying so many theories and practical studies in the departments of our academic institutions. Hold this thought in suspense for a few paragraphs.

Those groups, investment bankers and monopoly capitalists and politicians, remain powerful but now there is some serious confusion caused partly by the underground, ‘top-secret’, nature of some of the power-elite families, a nature which allowed them to move into the OSS/CIA and into various groups that carried out criminal conspiracies on a regular basis, as a ‘normal’ means of exercising power rather than as a readily-deployed but extraordinary means. Even J P Morgan who conspired so successfully to create the Federal Reserve Bank system generally worked by more normal means of bribes and intimidation. (For those who always doubt the existence of criminal conspiracies on the part of powerful figures in the United States—see the article posted at the website of the Federal Reserve Bank, *A Return to Jekyll Island: The Origins, History, and Future of the Federal Reserve* at [http://www.frbatlanta.org/news/conferences/10jekyll\\_](http://www.frbatlanta.org/news/conferences/10jekyll_)

history2.cfm and remember this article is posted by one of the organizations created by a Morgan-selected group which gathered, secretly after being transported from New York City in a sealed train-car with blackened windows, to write legislation and propose central banks which would restructure the American economy. The article is right though that the meeting was only part of the process but fails to note that some historians think Morgan deliberately aggravated the panic and near-collapse of the American economy in 1907 at least partly because of the increasing influence of local and regional banks. I think it likely that Morgan and the other founders of the Federal Reserve Bank system were helping his fellow Americans the way that George W Bush helped the peoples of Iraq.)

Some of the agencies of the modern world might serve the groups of power-elites and some might have ascended to some sort of gathering of, say, 'deep-state' criminals embedded inside the most 'respectable' of modern governments. There are, of course, the military-industrial complex and the national security complex. Both of those complexes overlap each other greatly and also overlap the complexes run by investment bankers, monopoly capitalists, and politicians. But how do they really operate and what do the overlaps mean? And—which are servant agencies and which are actually gatherings of powerful men who have a role in calling the shots? I don't know and we don't seem to have a Quigley to propose a plausible structure to the exercise of power in the modern world.

In Chapter 500, *Radical Individualism and the Misunderstanding of Modern History*, I had claimed there to be a blindness of sorts on the part of modern historians and I specifically discussed Barbara Tuchman's *March of Folly* as a clear example. In the chapter on a string of Renaissance popes, some morally irresponsible in their duties as popes and some downright morally degenerate, she clearly noted the way in which family duties and family ties overrode their duties and ties to the Catholic Church. The intelligent or generally competent men were as busy as the nitwits in securing or increasing family wealth and power while the problems festered which led to Luther's revolt and the damaging of the unity of Christian Europe. In the earlier chapter on Vietnam, all was presented in terms of institutional and individual failures. Blood-ties and their proxies had disappeared and the freestanding individuals were organizing themselves into groups of the sort studied in courses in the business school and political science department. A large book devoted to the American problems in Vietnam, *The Best and the Brightest* by David Halberstram didn't have this problem; Halberstram

saw clearly that the mistakes we made in Vietnam and in other regions of the world at the time were due to the beliefs and behaviors and self-images of the power-elite partially describable as blue-bloods and the technocrats recruited into the worldview of that power-elite. But even Halberstram didn't "follow the money" as the modern simplification would have it. He noted class biases but not class profit-seeking.

On the whole, mainstream histories and mainstream news-media seem to assume that we defeated Karl Marx by causing the disappearance of classes and families and religious communities as he knew them and replacing those communities by metrosexual and multicultural clubs of various sorts, some to do charitable work and some to organize trips to the baseball games and some to sing hymns. And meanwhile, there are others who are building highways to take us to the malls and office complexes, military bases in central Asia to protect us, government buildings to provide good working environments for the politicians we elect from small lists—also provided by those kind and largely invisible men and women—as well as the various professional murderers and instigators of revolution and those who educate our children and provide us with health-care and so on. We have a full-blown welfare, warfare state with some profiting and many accepting, but with increasing doubts, the claim that the United States is a country of patriotic, freestanding individuals. Send your sons, and now daughters (the horror increases), to fight wars in all those oil-rich countries where the evil inhabitants hate us for our freedoms. Public policy is made by those processes described in your freshman political science course rather than the conspiratorial way of past centuries or those benighted countries such as Iran and Russia and China. Gangsters are perhaps intermingled with politicians and industrialists and bankers in Turkey but never the United States or other advanced countries where people know how to dress and talk like real human beings.

In Chapter 488, *We're All Barbarian Children on This Bus*, also written in response to Tuchman's *The March of Folly*, I discussed some of the foundational ideas and facts which argue rather strongly against understandings of human nature, and human history, in terms of freestanding individuals who only form communities by voluntary contract.

There are two major errors of omission in the mainstream view of human nature. The mainstream view forgets:

- Human nature has both individual and communal 'components'.

- We are tied to family lines by emotions and feelings at the deepest levels of our bodies, thoughts and acts as well but not quite as obviously.

These two factors overlap. Our first communities, the primary part of our communal natures, come from our ties to family lines, though we can be fooled, for good and bad, into treating some as being more or less related to us than they really are. We can, in fact, use our minds to ‘fool’ ourselves by way of proxy relationships and, thus, form ever more complex and larger communities, culminating in that most complete and perfect of all human communities—the Body of Christ.

For more discussion and a proposed framework for understanding our individual and communal human beings, download my book: *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53].

So...Who owns America? Easy. The rich people, some of whom are parts of multi-generational streams of power and wealth, families and classes, and some of whom are flashes in the pan. Few there are among historians and amateur seekers of historical answers who consider families when they analyze the major events of modern times, not even those who understand the importance of families in past ages. We know how important family was for the ‘true’ Caesars (actually Julius Caesar was a member of the gens or family Julia, Augustus Caesar and his descendants were members of the plebeian family of Octavii though Augustus was adopted by Julius Caesar, his maternal great-uncle, into the gens Julia), for the Merovingian and Carolingian royal families, the family (loosely defined) of Mohamed and other Islamic ruling families, the large number of Chinese dynastic families, the de Medicis, the Rothschilds of Europe and the Sasoons of Asia, the descendants of Napoleon, the Morgans and other banking and robber baron families from before World War II, and others. Some of these families destroyed themselves; some great warrior families seem to have carried a brutal form of bipolar disease leading to homicidal rages, sometimes directed against their own families. Genes carry dangerous traits from one generation to the next as well as neutral or advantageous traits, but even self-destructive families might hold wealth and exercise power for a number of years.

We should expand our understanding from families to classes which are formed by acknowledgment of even distant blood-relationship or by proxy relationships which come from living together intensely, perhaps starting

early at private resident schools. By such means, sibling-like friendships and loyalties are forged as well as possible marriages to the sibling of a close friend. Then we can conjecture the United States is owned by families in a way not so different from the situation a century ago described in *Empire* and the succeeding novels in Gore Vidal's American Empire series—the earlier volumes partially describe how we got to that point. In any case, there were the Morgans and the Rockefellers and the Paynes and the Whitneys—the latter two families being perhaps the most powerful because of their intermarriages into other great families. Common folk, such as the children of John Hay, would marry into those great families—some of which families were well-known because of flamboyant individuals and some were quiet and hardly known to be so powerful and wealthy. I would suggest the blood-ties and proxy blood-ties to have been more important than the tools of corporations or central-banks. Tools can be invented, but human nature is what it is, for the founders of secretive dynasties or the founders of open Christian communities.

The rich who hold on to their wealth and power over generations are different from the rest of us because they don't believe the crap common American folk do about this freestanding individual business. John D Rockefeller may have seemed to play that part of a rugged individualist but he was a rugged dynasty-founder and not a man who placed any 'idealistic' interests ahead of those of his children nor did he raise his sons and daughters to be different in that regard. John D Rockefeller would have shaken his head over those many middle-class parents who brag openly about planning to spend all their money before they die because their children are doing well enough. Americans of Jewish or Chinese descent seem to act differently—somehow the disease of individual selfishness and biologically implausible denial of blood-ties infects mostly Americans of European Christian descent. This is the disease we must fight because it makes us ready and willing victims of those centralized powers which, once in place, are to be rightly feared. It also makes it impossible for us to form stable and greater communities which build upon our biological natures rather than building self-destructive communities of the modern 'liberal' sort which deny our biological natures or even fight against them.

You cannot build good communities as if human beings were bloodless sorts of creatures who submit themselves to roles imagined by those sorts of abstract thinkers who would impose nice, neat schemas which look so good in the organization charts which can be formatted on nearly any computer

or many smart-phones, nor can you properly understand human communities now or in past generations by assuming human beings to be what they clearly are not. Whether used for analysis or to reshape existing human communities, the tools of modern management sciences are inadequate and distorting. And so it is that our minds are deformed. After all, tools shape the thoughts of their users to some extent and can greatly shape the thoughts of weak or poorly developed minds and this is one major reason for the likely impending collapse of the great families of the United States and Europe—they've come to depend upon tools which deform human nature and sap the strength and energy of the West. Likely it is that some members of secretive dynasties actually do believe in the myths of freestanding individuals and maybe even share the bloodthirsty jingoism nearly as common among American youth as the cynicism so well-founded but so destructively dispiriting. Likely it also is that some of those semi-underground families are struggling to protect their children from these factually and morally wrong ideas so well-accepted in our days.

How do we get to an understanding which can help us to build a better country? After mostly talking about concrete matters, such as blood-ties, I'll now claim we need good-quality abstract thought (see Chapter 408, *The Need for Abstractions in Moral Self-understanding*). Good abstract thought isn't drawn from some Neo-Platonic realm by acts of mental magic; good abstract thought draws first upon reality and then can be subjected to various processes which produce understandings of a wide variety of phenomena and entities in this concrete world of things. Good abstract thought, whether it deals with possible relationships between entities of a human type or with the far more abstract relationships between formal and mathematically describable entities (group theory and the like), can then be applied to understandings of history or of nuclear particles, as appropriate. I suspect there to be a very high layer of abstract thought where relationships of the objects physicists study and the entities historians study will be the same but I know we are a long ways from being able to comfortably and sanely produce a description of such a layer of abstract thought. To impose improper and inadequate categories upon our efforts to understand human history and human communal relationships—including those of economics and politics—is to guarantee at best a shallow understanding which falls apart with the slightest change of circumstances. It is to deal with images from a hall of distorted mirrors as if they were accurate images of the flesh-and-blood human beings walking through that hall.

We need first to accept reality, to describe human beings as they are and then to try to understand the sorts of communities they have formed and can form. This doesn't mean I deny that human political communities have their own natures nor that I deny that human beings are changed by their relationships to various sorts of human communities as they develop to ever greater levels of richness and complexity. Quite the contrary, we are creatures of complex minds and complex feelings and complex behaviors and those are formed by processes of acts-of-being, of shaping, which are the result of back-and-forth movements between abstract relationships and the concrete entities and relationships they create or shape. In our proper understanding of this formation of human beings, we encapsulate in our minds the reality of movements and changes in created being. I do deny that 'groups' of human beings which reproduce successfully will act as if they are radical individuals in a capitalist-democracy or a Marxist society or any other society shaped to wrongful understandings of human nature. We remain killer apes when we gather to try to form secure societies and we remain sex-crazed when we try to bring those societies to a state of moral order. See Chapter 643, *Repeat After Me: The Church Has Accepted Evolution and Our Ancestors Were Sex-Crazed, Killer Apes*, which begins with:

I distort for the sake of modern men who have trouble focusing upon reality. Apes are our cousins, not our ancestors; the terms used for the common ancestors of men and apes seem to change every few years or so. And those ancestors were only killers part of the time, perhaps less often than modern Americans would desire for themselves—see Chapter 495, *Quietly Charitable or Quietly Murderous But Always Quietly American*. The sex-crazed business is perhaps less of an exaggeration for us and for our ancestors.

We should try to nurture societies proper to our natures in the way that good parents help to nurture a child according to its own talents and inclinations so that he becomes a healthy adult and not a twisted creature superficially corresponding to some false dreams of the not-so-good parents.

We remain creatures who have certain traits even while subjected to civilizing processes just because those are the traits which allow for survival and reproduction in this world so well-described by Darwin and his successors.

We carry these traits because they allowed our ancestors to survive and reproduce successfully and these traits include some which lead us to accept, even to strongly desire, the bonds and dependencies of complex human social life. It is that total human creature—individual and communal—who forms polities and economies, who is recorded in the pages of history. And he is a creature who can be deformed in the short-term so that these desires are turned to the advantage of the Nazi Party or the Comintern or an imperialistic free-market, but as someone once said (I think Eric Voegelin): the problem with human material is that it refuses to be treated as material. In most cases and at least eventually. Those groups of human beings who subject themselves to the demands of abstract forms of human polity or economy or religion not true to empirical reality will disappear. In terms used by some: their genes will disappear from the human gene pool—an oversimplification and seen as such by those who realize the gene pools are defined in terms of family-lines and successful family-lines can include individuals who act in biologically implausible ways.

Put that total human creature into a society with political systems and economic systems, educational systems and even church ‘systems’ (the horror of it all), which are the result of willful misunderstandings of human nature or idealistic efforts to impose dreams upon mankind and you’ll have a society and a population doomed to collapse and perhaps disappearance. In terms of a civilization once reaching out toward the farthest regions of Earth: you’ll have a dysfunctional West in which the core populations are so demoralized as to be unconcerned with reproducing and building up families and concrete communities and greatly concerned with various fads and passing fancies of a quickly unsatisfying sort.

In the long run, the West has doomed itself by adoption of the centralized forms of organization spotlighted by Tate and his associates and by Nader. We can’t even understand our own selves at the most basic and concrete levels because we’ve been trained to view ourselves as freestanding individuals and our most important communities as voluntary associations culminating in the Hobbesian centralized state which allegedly makes possible a large-scale community of freestanding individuals while protecting them from each other.

We forget our human communal natures as readily as we forget our ties to our kin and to those we have come to accept as if kin, both of these characteristics being regulated by specific and now identified brain structures and hormonal flows. If we are to have expanded ideas and feelings and

habits of brotherhood, we have to expand from our true flesh-and-blood selves but not by forming some ideally imagined communities pretending we're something other than sex-crazed, killer apes—again, see Chapter 643, *Repeat After Me: The Church Has Accepted Evolution and Our Ancestors Were Sex-Crazed, Killer Apes*. We must enrich and complexify our individual and communal natures, especially in those aspects we label as 'moral', but we also can't forget the basic structures of our brain and the complex behaviors which lead us to strong ties with kin and to generally form human communities.

The West is collapsing, largely because of the corruption of the tremendously powerful United States; we Americans, other than the private organizations of the dynastic families and the communities of some family-centered ethnic groups, have tried to organize our various political and economic communities in ways that make no sense given the biological creature called man. We Americans never accepted the reality of a class forming of wealthy and powerful families and we in the middle-class and working-class taught ourselves that we are individuals forming voluntary associations such as that of the entire nation of the United States viewed as a political community of freestanding individuals born under some sort of strong duty to this community which is bound by voluntary ties despite the fact we are tied in at birth and. . . Don't ask, just be a freestanding American individual ready to die at the command of the government which keeps secret it's actions and justifications for those actions, a government poorly understood by way of the false abstractions of modern political science and economics.

The wealthy and powerful families serve their own needs and we also serve them in strange ways because we convince ourselves that there are no elites who profit from wars or from the construction of, say, the Federal Reserve Banking system. Meanwhile, most Americans are busily acting the part of freestanding, selfish individuals and we dissolve our families and our other "little platoons" as we pursue our selfish goals. (For the meaning of "little platoons", see the quote from *Edmund Burke* at <http://www.bartleby.com/24/3/4.html>.)

The end result of Americans seeking to be what men can never be is a nation of deformed human beings, deformed in our individual and communal natures. We Americans are a mixed population of submissive sheep and exploitive wolves in shepherd's clothing. This general situation is far more important than the fact that the exploiters use certain specific forms of economic organization (corporations or central banks) or political orga-

nization (the political machines controlled by two national committees of men and women but imagined to be describable as ‘democracy’). We can’t just fight corporations or banks or the national committees of the Republican and Democratic parties—we play into their hand when we accept their ‘game’ as real. We have to start working toward better ways of forming communities and we need to start by paying greater respect to and nurturing our concrete communities of families and neighborhoods and churches or synagogues. I think this was what Tate and the agrarians had in mind based upon their understanding of their own concrete communities in the South.

# 506 Deep States and the Modern American Citizen

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1831>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/06/17.]

The issue of ‘deep states’ had drawn the attention of at least some mainstream journalists for an instant or so around February of 2014 because of a very interesting article by Mike Lofgren, a former Senate staffer; I’ll get to that article in a short while. The attention seems to have been a flash in the pan though, if deep states truly exist and if the United States has become one, it’s arguably the most important of public issues, politics and economics and even culture to a surprising extent. A deep state is a thoroughly corrupt state sure to be dangerously exploitive of its own citizenry and, if that deep state is a superpower, of many in other lands.

Since I tend to be interested in the true nature of human beings, individual and communal and in the story God is telling—the story which is this world, I don’t always respond to journalistic fads in the way of the shallow journalists or the bulk of blog commentators. Thus it is that a still inadequate stewing time of a few months has returned me to a subject of great importance in the modern world—criminal conspiracies carried out by members or servants of the power-elites, which criminal conspiracies are made possible by standing-gangs within governments or in close alliance with governments. It’s not the spectacular crimes, as such, which interest me but rather the importance of the types of men who engage in criminal conspiracies when they are holding positions of public responsibility or are part of the general power-elite; those servants, often feudalistic in their personal loyalty, are also willing to put that loyalty above any duties to God or country or their personal families. (E Howard Hunt, CIA operative deeply

involved in conspiracies against Castro, Watergate burglar, possibly—by his own macabre deathbed confession—a participant in the ‘project’ to murder JFK, and successful writer of thriller novels, is one of those and I’ll be discussing his odd life in Chapter 507, *The Soft Power of Corrupted Culture*, which follows.)

We modern Americans have denied that we have a power-elite or ruling class of any sort and this has made it impossible to keep that power-elite under control. This is of great importance in our time. Criminal conspiracies have often been an important tool for those who exercise power to their own interests. Political enemies, in one’s own country or in other countries, can be murdered if they refuse to do as one gangster or another expects them to do. Careers of honest men can be destroyed in various ways. Men or women who’ve made one or many mistakes in the past can be blackmailed into doing the wishes of one or more gangs inside what I’ll call the ‘power-elite’, the ruling class.

Criminal conspiracies need be no more exotic than the mafia involvement in labor unions and in certain industries that allowed the laundering of criminal profits—restaurants and trash-collecting were said to have been popular in past decades. The mafia was also said to have been involved with certain political powers, as seems to have been true in the case of Jimmy Hoffa. There are also Japanese gangsters said to control some labor markets and some industries; there are some journalists claiming Japanese gangsters are deeply involved in what seems to be a very corrupt Japanese nuclear-power industry which also seems incompetent in a very non-Japanese way. Crimes are crimes and criminals are criminals and power-elites of even the most publicly respectable sorts have engaged in professional murder and drug-smuggling and human trafficking. We know this is true in other countries and in other centuries; why would we think that the power-elites have suddenly developed consciences limiting what they will do in the interests of their individual selves, of their families, of their close associates, and occasionally of the entire class of the power-elite? Besides the Mafia in Sicily and mainland Italy and the US and the Japanese gangs, we can also think of the now-weakened Colombian drug-cartels, the now-strengthened Mexican drug-cartels, the Turkish organized crime syndicates which are very much in the loop in politics and business in that country, the Russian mafia—especially those driven out of Russia by Putin and said to be very close to the Israeli political class. China, India. Wherever there is wealth or power to be grabbed or large numbers of human beings to be exploited, there

will be gangsters, perhaps young men just controlling the drug-dealers and prostitutes on individual blocks in an inner-city and perhaps even young men engaging in profitable crime to finance a future revolution. Perhaps young men setting up guns-smuggling operations for the sheer excitement of it all.

I'll anticipate a later part of this essay by saying that the drug-smuggling by the CIA was motivated initially by the perceived need to fight communist insurgents around the world even if the money (maybe for the CIA operatives but certainly for their regional allies) were to come from illegal drugs. The divertable cash-flows from drug-smuggling, arms-smuggling, currency-smuggling, and perhaps professional murder operations, are immense for most purposes.

There is another complication to the issue of power-elites, one which was initially peculiar to the United States at its founding. John Adams saw that the United States was structured to assume that each generation of men was starting out fresh and as a mass of equals and knew this couldn't work—he claimed in his correspondence with Thomas Jefferson that wealthy and powerful men would find ways to get around the various restrictions and attitudes so that they could pass on the wealth and power to their sons. In the opinion of Adams, we needed some sort of public recognition, and imposed code of public honor, to bind men of wealth and power and the sons who would inherit that great wealth. He was right and, in my opinion, the general situation in the United States has encouraged the development of an underground serving the power-elite and, at least in the 1800s through the Cold War, largely run by adventurous sons from the power-elite families, with some families serving the greater families and some families entering the ranks of the power-elite. (And, as Smedley Butler told us, the US Marines were openly used as a sort of labor negotiating team by Wall St investors in Latin America. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smedley\\_Butler](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smedley_Butler) for the background on the only man to win more than one Medal of Honor and for a link to his freely available book, *War is a Racket*.) In fact, some of the wealthy and powerful families have been surprisingly unknown by the standards of aristocrats in most societies, certainly in the honor-hungry societies of Europe. In his American Empire series of novels, Gore Vidal, a good historian as well as something of an insider to the power-elite (he seems to have despised most of them), mentions the Paynes and Whitneys as having been perhaps the most powerful of families in the early decades of the 20th

century because of intermarriages with a number of power-elite families.

True to the American experience, the class of the power-elite and the sub-class of their servants has been remarkably dynamic with such great families as the Rockefellers and Fords joining the ranks of blue-bloods. More recently, Prescott Bush became a 'patriarch', a founder of a servant family entering the ranks of the power-elite, by marrying a daughter of the wealthy and powerful financial genius George Herbert Walker. Bush, along with his blue-blood friend Neil Mallon, helped to integrate the newly rich families of the Texas oil industry into what was no longer just the 'Eastern Establishment'. Mallon was interesting in that he had broken with Northeast blue-blood tradition of going into investment banking, financially oriented law-firms, the clergy of (mostly) the Congregationalist Church or the Episcopal Church, or sometimes academia or the adventurous life which too often led into the slave-trade or opium-smuggling in Asia. He entered the corporate life, eventually becoming President of Dresser Industries, an oil industry manufacturing and service company which became the core of Halliburton. Someone or a group of someones, perhaps led by Prescott Bush, brought the newly rich oilmen and water barons of California into the class of the power-elite. A reliable history of these events hasn't really been written and the crude summary I just gave is very tentative but quite plausible—something of the sort happened. In any case, I'm not interested in the details nor in accuracy at the level of academic historians—I'm interested in the patterns which tell us about the evolution and development of human communities and especially in regards to that ultimate human community: the Body of Christ. I'm also interested personally and on behalf of those I care about because I think something went wrong and the US, indeed the West as a whole, is being destroyed in ways that aren't even to the advantage of the main power-elite families. They've lost control and all the brutal forces they thought to control have been unleashed in the form of stupid wars and the use of despicable forms of torture and, generally, crimes being committed seemingly for the sake of the immediate profit and not for some focused goal, whether that goal is seemingly good or evil. Politicians drive their countries into bankruptcy and bankers steal money which will be worthless before long.

Perhaps the best business in a decade or two will be guillotine manufacturing.

We in the modern world have an irrational idea, usually implicit, that family ties are no longer important but when we need some cuddling af-

ter a failed romance; we think to inhabit a world structured according to the ideal rationality of modern, Techno-Enlightenment theories, some of which—particularly in politics—are descended from truly ancient ideas. In fact, this ideal rationality, even when heavily moderated by a recognition of empirical knowledge as was the case when the Fathers founded the United States, is opposed to reality and cannot, in the end, be reconciled with the reality of human nature or of the reality of our context as described by historians and physical scientists and novelists.

In Chapter 505, *Can a Modern Individualist Understand Who Owns America?*, I wrote about the modern (usually implicit) denial that blood-ties are strong to the point of often being the dominant human relationship in political and economical and even ecclesiastical realms. (Sometimes, the relationships are proxy relationships formed to consciously or unconsciously mimic the formation of ties between siblings by, perhaps, sending children to resident schools with children from other families of the right sort.) We falsely see politics and economics in terms of organizations which individuals voluntarily join, perhaps only as a result of invitation. In fact, human nature hasn't changed so much from those dark centuries when de Medicis used the Papacy or any other tools (including murder or criminal warfare) to gain or protect family wealth and power. When wealthy, powerful men are fighting for "what belongs to them and their children" (especially the oldest son but sometimes nephews, as was true of some popes observant of their vowed celibacy), they don't just fight within the law or within the range of crimes acceptable to squeamish middle-class Americans. Kings have murdered powerful enemies and stolen all their property, perhaps killing all the close relatives of the original victims to cement the transfer of wealth. Popes have done much the same, though perhaps not nearly so often as some might imagine. Republics and monarchies and oligarchies alike have waged bloody, criminal wars to steal the wealth of another people or to enslave them but usually all participated in the sins and crimes while the few collected the profits. Part of Queen Victoria's royal income came from the opium-smuggling profits of the East India Company of which she was the largest stockholder.

Brotherhoods of various sorts, shared financial interests, shared religious beliefs, and all the other human ties can provide the glue for secretive human societies, but blood-ties or class-ties of blood and marital and brotherhood relationships almost certainly will remain the most central and usually the strongest human ties in secretive human societies and other human com-

munities. Strong blood-ties make it easier to maintain power and wealth over the generations, even to the point of most family members not using inheritance laws to break non-legal primogeniture and entailment arrangements. The many offer up their children to secure power and wealth for the children of the few, though there are periods, such the years 1800-1970 or so in the United States, when there are substantial benefits for even the least in a region or multiple regions. That is, in fact, how good societies are built—by customs and habits which allow much to the wealthy and powerful but protect the common folk.

I'm not so pessimistic as many of my writings might indicate, including this essay. I don't think history to be merely a record of crimes and of exploitation of the poor and the powerless, but crimes and exploitation are with us always in this mortal realm and might even become dominant factors in the best of communities if the common men don't keep watch and aren't prepared to stand up for the rights of their children and grandchildren.

Crimes we've had even in the best days of the American Republic, though our public-school textbooks tell fairy-tales of a morally well-ordered, freedom loving American citizenry. As a side-comment: I can't understand how Americans can claim to be Christians who consider the Bible to be a source of truth and then accept the view of the United States as being a better country than the Bible would indicate to be possible, the American people to be a morally superior people to any in the Bible or foretold by the prophets or Jesus Christ Himself.

Admittedly, there is a strain of American thought, very strong right now in our public schools and all colleges, which brutally depicts the crimes (and sins by at least implications) of the Southern slaveholders, but it's pretty well established that the North tried slavery and it didn't work up north except for household slaves and in some small-scale crafts shops. Moreover, as I have noted a few times in past writings, New Englanders from the Colonial period were selling native Americans as slaves throughout the world; Americans including some from prestigious families were smuggling opium into China in the late 1700s and the first half or so of the 1800s and a good number were working the slave trade on the West Coast of Africa throughout the 1700s and 1800s. The latter fact is one of the reasons Lincoln didn't want to punish the South unduly after the War Between the States. So far as I can tell, this blue-blood (and more generally, Northeastern American) entry into profitable lives of crime and sin was first motivated by a desire

for adventure on the part of those not equipped, emotionally or mentally or physically (restlessness), for the mundane life as a farmer or storekeeper or even that of investment banker or Wall St lawyer. But, whatever the original motivation, the profits flowed back to a prosperous region largely lacking in the sort of liquid wealth needed to fuel the sort of development that the Northeast and the Midwest would see from about 1800 into the 1900s.

Some of the mansions in Boston and New Haven and New York and Philadelphia were built with profits from the slave-trade or the Asian drug-trade. In fact, John Jacob Astor bought a strip of land heading north from the physically small village of Manhattan and developed that strip into Fifth Avenue; Astor's money to that point had come partly from legal trading with the Indians of upper New York state and partly from selling them whiskey and guns even while they were at war with the white settlers and then those profits were increased greatly in the opium smuggling business in Asia. Criminal profits flowed also into the investment pools used to build railroads and mines and manufacturing corporations throughout the United States, though the power-elite families predominately deployed and controlled their wealth and power through investment banking and Wall St law-firms. We can exaggerate the meaning of all of this if we think that all blue-blood families or other families of distinction owned seats on a major stock exchange or held a partnership in a major Wall St or Boston law-firm, if we think all the wealth of the Eastern Establishment came from criminal activities or high-powered investment or legal careers; there were many who had quite ordinary occupations or were distinguished authors or scholars or missionaries, though David Halberstram tried to teach us in *The Best and the Brightest* that some of those blue-bloods with moral integrity did as much damage to the United States as any of their criminal cousins. My point is that these criminal activities, however marginal at times and however important at other times, show a Mafia-like loyalty to one's own family, gang, and class that turns outsiders into some sort of class of subhumans to be exploited. That was also true, in Halberstram's book, of those crews of privileged Harvard professors become advisors to John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson and who brought us the wonders of Vietnam and nearly those of nuclear war.

I'll soon be noting the work of a respected and honored historian who paints the situation in very dark terms—the power-elite of the United States operates at times in ways not all different from those of a Latin American

drug-cartel, at least in the way of a drug-cartel being able to draw upon the resources of Wall St and the American government. First, I'll turn to a man who speaks harsh truths, but has a view a bit different from and perhaps more 'moderate' than mine. In February of 2014, Bill Moyers published an article, *Essay: Anatomy of the Deep State* at <http://billmoyers.com/2014/02/21/anatomy-of-the-deep-state/>, which was written by Mike Lofgren, "a former congressional staff member who served on both the House and Senate budget committees," an insider of at least the American political system.

What is the 'deep state'? Lofgren provides a definition in a footnote which I'll quote in its entirety:

The term "Deep State" was coined in Turkey and is said to be a system composed of high-level elements within the intelligence services, military, security, judiciary and organized crime. In British author John le Carr's latest novel, *A Delicate Truth*, a character describes the Deep State as "...the ever-expanding circle of non-governmental insiders from banking, industry and commerce who were cleared for highly classified information denied to large swathes of Whitehall and Westminster." I use the term to mean a hybrid association of elements of government and parts of top-level finance and industry that is effectively able to govern the United States without reference to the consent of the governed as expressed through the formal political process.

Lofgren's view is sufficient to puncture illusions of the average American who believes he can go about his roles as a fan of the Chargers and the Rolling Stones and also as a town and church volunteer while trusting those slightly crooked but most all-right politicians to govern the country in the best interests of all, though no one could possibly define 'all' and most especially not in the demographically dynamic and culturally chaotic United States. We are a country and a people made for moral disorder, and this is undoubtedly one of the factors contributing to the development of a criminal underground which operates as part of the power-elite and isn't just a marginal bunch of gravely-voiced Sicilians and flamboyantly dressed African-Americans from the inner-city. In fact, as I'll note later, there is good reason to believe that even those street criminals don't have to launder

money through the cash-registers of restaurants nowadays—they have their own special contacts at the best, or at least largest, of American banks.

In any case, I would suspect the Turkish definition to be more accurate in all modern states—organized crime in the sense of arms-smugglers, drug-smugglers, and professional murderers are embedded in the modern state and are sometimes receiving paychecks from the CIA or US AID or the private foundations and ‘charities’ which consciously or unconsciously work to destroy foreign cultures or political entities to some presumed (and usually imaginary) benefit of the American government. Moreover, my admittedly sparse knowledge of such matters as drug-smuggling and arms-trafficking lead me to doubt if Boeing and other major arms-merchants could possibly be free from the taint of not only arms-smuggling but also drug-smuggling and currency-smuggling. Similar comments could be made about a multitude of financial services companies and manufacturers even outside of the weapons industry. We live in a truly corrupt age, though some are inclined to see clearly only when sexual crimes or street crimes are involved.

One reason for considering the possibility that true gangsters are integral parts of the deep state, in its political and economic realms, is the reported dependence of the American economy on the liquidity supplied through the bank deposits of Mexican drug-cartels (said by some to have saved the US from a far worse collapse in 2008). In fact, Lofgren notes the importance of cash-flows to the deep state: “If there is anything the Deep State requires it is silent, uninterrupted cash flow and the confidence that things will go on as they have in the past.” Lofgren is speaking mostly of cash-flows from Wall St but even that is sometimes quite tainted beyond even their possession of vast amounts of free money from the Federal Reserve Bank and other government handouts paid for by the American taxpayer.

In an article, *Global banks are the financial services wing of the drug cartels* at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jul/21/drug-cartels-banks-hsbc-money-laundering>, which must be rather depressing to those holding ‘mainstream’ views about the modern world, we can read about the involvement of the British bank HSBC and the American bank Wachovia (now part of Wells-Fargo) in laundering money for drug-cartels. The HSBC executives lined up to apologize to the US Senate for crimes far worse than those which put street dealers in prison for years, even decades. “Wachovia was fined \$50m and made to surrender \$110m in proven drug profits, but was shown to have inadequately monitored a staggering \$376bn through the casa de cambio [‘a currency exchange house

operated in Mexico on behalf of the largest criminal syndicate in the world and one of the most savage'] over four years, of which \$10bn was in cash." We also learn: "No one from Wachovia went to jail." The same was true of HSBC.

I'll just list three more stories on the subject and let the reader follow up:

- *Money Laundering and The Drug Trade: The Role of the Banks* at <http://globalresearch.ca/money-laundering-and-the-drug-trade-the-role-of-the-banks/5334205>,
- *Wells Fargo: Your Neighborhood Mega-Money Laundering, Drug War Profiteering, Prison-Industry Enlarging Bank* at <http://www.alternet.org/economy/whats-wrong-wells-fargo>, and
- *How A Major U.S. Bank Laundered Billions In Mexican Drug Money* at <http://www.businessinsider.com/how-wachovia-laundered-billions-in-mexican-drug-money-2011-4>.

There are lots of strange, individual stories originally mostly from mainstream journalists about the various crimes related to the Iran-Contra conspiracy, ties between the CIA, Oliver North, the Saudi Arabian royal family, the Bin Laden family, Bill Clinton, the Bushes, and various smugglers and professional murderers. One bank involved in financing the Iran-Contra smuggling, Bank of Credit and Commerce International (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bank\\_of\\_Credit\\_and\\_Commerce\\_International](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bank_of_Credit_and_Commerce_International)), "handled money for Saddam Hussein, Manuel Noriega, Hussain Mohammad Ershad and Samuel Doe. Other account holders included Medellin Cartel and Abu Nidal." "The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency held numerous accounts at BCCI, according to William von Raab, former U.S. Commissioner of Customs. Oliver North also used and held multiple accounts at BCCI. These bank accounts were used for a variety of illegal covert operations, including transfers of money and weapons related to the Iran-Contra scandal, according to Time Magazine. The CIA also worked with BCCI in arming and financing the Afghan mujahideen during the Afghan War against the Soviet Union, using BCCI to launder proceeds from trafficking heroin grown in the Pakistan-Afghanistan borderlands, boosting the flow of narcotics to European and U.S. markets."

Even the venerable Clark Clifford (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clark\\_Clifford](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clark_Clifford)) was indicted for involvement with BCCI. [See the original Wikipedia article about BCCI for the footnotes referencing original sources.]

The US Customs was allowed to infiltrate BCCI and take it down *after* the Soviet Union fell and this gangster bank was no longer needed for fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan.

Even if casual research is done and even if you only accept what is said in original sources from the mainstream press, you will soon see that drug-cartels come and go (and might disappear in Columbia to grow anew in Mexico) as do arms-smugglers and other gangsters as most think of the term but the corrupt Western banks and the Western national security agencies, especially the CIA, have been constant presences in these large-scale, international criminal enterprises since at least the beginning of the Cold War.

There is an academic who can tell us how this came to be: Alfred W McCoy, the JRW Smail Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin and a specialist in Southeast Asia. The first paragraph of his bio sketch, <http://history.wisc.edu/people/faculty/mccoy.htm>, reads:

After earning a Ph.D. in Southeast Asian history at Yale, my writing on this region has focused on two topics—Philippine political history and global opium trafficking. My first book, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia* (New York, 1972), sparked controversy when the CIA tried to block publication. But after three English editions and translation into nine foreign languages, this study is now regarded as the “classic” work on the global drug traffic.

Imagine that. A book about, though not only about, CIA heroin manufacturing and smuggling is “regarded as the ‘classic’ work on the global drug traffic.” Perhaps Lofgren should become a bit more skeptical about the power-elites of the modern world, including the ones in the United States? (We should be careful about using ‘power-elite’ in the singular unless we specifically recognize that it is a class made up of different groups often doing battle against each other, united only when their ‘right’ to exploit the naive and the weak is endangered. Otherwise it is best to use plural forms, recognizing the conflicts inside the class of ‘power-elite’, for

example the conflict some, including me, see between the powerful, established families and some of the servants grown powerful—especially those in the national-security industries or the oil or weapons industries.)

The last paragraph of Professor McCoy's bio sketch reads:

My current work explores the role of the “covert netherworld”—an invisible social interstice inhabited by criminal syndicates and secret services—in shaping the politics of modern states and their world order. My first publication from this project, exploring the domestic dimension of this covert realm, is titled *Beer of Broadway Fame: The Piel Family, Their Brewery, and a Changing America*, and will be published in 2015.

We live in a world different from and not so much different from the morally corrupt political and ecclesiastical world of the Renaissance, in Italy and a few other regions of Europe. We live in a world with a “covert netherworld”, with “an invisible social interstice inhabited by criminal syndicates and secret services.” Those who inhabit or travel through this interstice shape “the politics of modern states and their world order.”

Nasty stuff and often American nasty stuff—though there is a common sewer underlying the modern world which includes regions perhaps even nastier than the American sewers.

Was it horrible what happened to American cities beginning in the 1950s, when heroin and other illegal drugs piled on top of other factors leading to social and moral decay? Yes, but the timing and other facts point to the likelihood that much of that heroin came from operations originally started by the CIA and perhaps turned over to their allies such as two divisions of the Nationalist Chinese Army driven into Burma and turning to drug-manufacturing and drug-smuggling to finance an ongoing war against communism. Why would good American boys, likely even noble to the point of having been varsity football or baseball players, have started heroin production and smuggling operations? McCoy was told by a highly regarded OSS (predecessor of the CIA) officer that, during the years after WWII, the US Congress wanted the newly-formed CIA to engage in an extensive covert worldwide war against communism but wasn't willing to pay the full costs. The CIA started a variety of businesses, some largely

legitimate, to finance some of their operations or to help their allies finance their operations.

Lofgren seems to hold a softer view than I hold. He claims in his article, *Essay: Anatomy of the Deep State* at <http://billmoyers.com/2014/02/21/anatomy-of-the-deep-state/>:

My analysis of this phenomenon is not an exposé of a secret, conspiratorial cabal; the state within a state is hiding mostly in plain sight, and its operators mainly act in the light of day. Nor can this other government be accurately termed an “establishment.” All complex societies have an establishment, a social network committed to its own enrichment and perpetuation. In terms of its scope, financial resources and sheer global reach, the American hybrid state, the Deep State, is in a class by itself. That said, it is neither omniscient nor invincible. The institution is not so much sinister (although it has highly sinister aspects) as it is relentlessly well entrenched. Far from being invincible, its failures, such as those in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, are routine enough that it is only the Deep State’s protectiveness towards its higher-ranking personnel that allows them to escape the consequences of their frequent ineptitude.

I certainly know the American deep state isn’t omniscient or invincible. In fact, in recent decades it seems to have screwed up and destroyed American wealth and power more than it has added to American wealth and power. The question I raise is: how integral is that sewer (the “highly sinister aspects” as Lofgren has it) to the overall operations of the American state, underground and above ground? That is a question that can be answered only by an analysis of the structure of the power-elite class I’m certainly not qualified to make, and I’ll never be so qualified because my ultimate interests are in a more general understanding of human being allowing for both the revealed truths of Christianity and modern empirical knowledge. This business about power-elites and deep states is just a small part of that empirical knowledge.

There’s a spectrum of possibilities and I think Lofgren isn’t so far from where I sit, and McCoy and others, that is, not so far as I thought when I first read this article. I think the criminal underground of the American deep state is really integral to the entire system and it can’t

be cleaned up at this point without taking down many American institutions and bringing chaos into our political and economic systems. (For those who prefer audio, see *CIA complicity in the global drug trade* at <http://www.radio4all.net/index.php/program/54741&75267> for a discussion between McCoy and Peter Dale Scott who speaks of some interesting connections between CIA drug operations and the wars in Vietnam and Afghanistan. I don't recall he drew a strong conclusion, but it seems a possible case of the tail, CIA drug operations, wagging the dog of American war. The US Marines were once used to shoot Latin American peasants demanding better pay, why would it not be possible the entire US military was used to protect drug-cartels?)

Lofgren is right that it's not a cabal; there is no wizard behind the screen but rather gangsters battling it out in the sewers and emerging to murder and smuggle drugs or weapons, for their own needs or those of the above ground bankers and politicians and corporate bosses who have some control over some of the criminals. There may even be, or have been, some who lived in both worlds, underground and above ground.

The important concept is that of power-elite, a class intertwined not only with powerful investment operations, Wall St law-firms, the political parties, corporations and especially in the arms-manufacturing and oil industries, and money-center banks, but also intertwined with criminal organizations which serve the powerful and wealthy and with criminal organizations which are independent profit-centers. Any cabals are parts of smaller and tighter entities inside the deep state, or the class of power-elite, sometimes really families or extended families and sometimes temporary groups such as those which came together to try to overthrow Castro. I've dealt with some of these these issues in various chapters of this book, including:

- Chapter 420, *What is a Conspiracy?*,
- Chapter 430, *Are Conspiracies Self-organizing?*,
- Chapter 440, *I Have a Problem with Many Conspiracy Theorists*,
- Chapter 445, *Are Serious Historians Conspiracy Nuts?*,
- Chapter 486, *Conspiracies Confirmed!?*,
- Chapter 492, *Who Are the American Elites and Are They Conspirators?*, and

- Chapter 496, *Conspiratorial Gangsters Are the Leaders Americans Want and Deserve.*

My general view on conspiracies and deep states and the like is that they are very similar to the good forms of organizations which Adam Smith saw developing by way of the useful myth of the Invisible Hand. Behind the myth is the cooperative nature of a social animal of great complexity. It's of greater interest (at least to me) and of greater importance to deal with the underlying human being which can lead to various sorts of human communities organized by conscious and unconscious means; some of those communities might be good and some evil and many of mixed character. Human beings of some substantial moral order, such as the Christians of Scotland and England in the second half of the 18th century, will work by those conscious and unconscious means to build communities of moral order. Human beings of defective moral order, such as the barbarian children of the United States, will work by those conscious and unconscious means to build communities of moral disorder or, at best, a defective moral order working to the benefit of the few.



## 507 The Soft Power of Corrupted Culture

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1838>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/06/26.]

In Chapter 506, *Deep States and the Modern American Citizen*, I addressed the ways in which members and gangs of members of the ruling class of the modern world, and many other ages of man, use crimes—even brutal and murderous crimes—as tools to gain control over other human beings or human communities.

In the United States, soft power, mostly the shaping of minds and attitudes along with some substantial sharing of wealth (perhaps now being reversed to some extent), has kept the ordinary citizens of past generations quiet, maybe unconsciously distracted by circuses and maybe consciously compliant with a sometimes criminal ruling class, while the power-holders committed various sorts of crimes in the political or economic realms. More recently, morally corrupt cultural products, such as James Bond books and movies and *Rambo* and *Star Wars* with its perversely adolescent depiction of good and evil, have gotten the masses off their seats at times, lining them up along the streets to cheer the troops going to or returning from another war against those who hate us for our freedoms including apparently hundreds of thousands of hateful children.

Soft power has been remarkably effective in turning the American mind into something like silly putty—see Chapter 308, *Unreliable Memories, Minds Like Silly Putty*. Several of the most prominent aspects of American life have been spotlighted as factors contributing to this problem of the dumbing down of Americans. There is the hectic pace of life even when we're neither having fun nor accomplishing much of anything. There is the

related problem of constant communication and other sorts of electronic distractions. There are cars and lawns we care for as if fairways at the country club. There is a confusion of excessive information that some deal with by adopting unreasonable simplifications—such as the one about those Iranians and Iraqis and Syrians not being able to think as rationally as we Americans do.

All of this contributes to the major problem: we don't fill our heads with good stuff. We don't realize we shape our minds in response to what we perceive in physical terms (including our own bodily activities) and what we conceive in mental terms (including imagination). We think to watch *Rambo*, avoid the *Bible*, and somehow go to our deathbeds suited to life in Heaven.

We should put our energies into putting the good stuff into our heads and into our hearts and into our hands and feet. We should have thoughts which are drawn from those God revealed in the Bible and the thoughts He manifested in this world and its things and relationships and in all the abstractions from which this world was shaped. We should fill our heads with the stories of great men, good men, strong men, by reading serious, narrative histories and biographies or good historical novels or by recalling and retelling the story of our grandfather the fireman who entered burning buildings to save lives or our grandmother who went with a church group for part of each summer to work as a nurse's assistant in a burnt-out coal district in West Virginia.

In Chapter 506, *Deep States and the Modern American Citizen*, I wrote something about E Howard Hunt, noting that he was a "CIA operative deeply involved in conspiracies against Castro, Watergate burglar, possibly—by his own macabre deathbed confession—a participant in the 'project' to murder JFK, and successful writer of thriller novels." I was planning on writing in response to an essay posted on the Internet about a "shallow state", but wasn't impressed with that essay on a more careful reading. My thoughts and words turned instead to cultural soft power and how it helps to reinforce the deep-state. Rather than just sidelining the ordinary citizen with bread and circuses, soft cultural power has been used to recruit the ordinary citizen to the various programs, often criminal, of the ruling class, or classes, of the United States. The cultural angle is, in fact, more interesting, especially with the fascination of Americans over the previous 50 years with that elegant criminal and exploiter of young women, James Bond. And his ilk.

So, what about E Howard Hunt, most famous for being a seemingly incompetent burglar in the Watergate mess? It's certainly interesting that Hunt was a prolific and, so far as I can tell, financially successful writer of spy novels. Even my smalltown library, missing all works of some major literary figures, has three of his novels on the shelves. At [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E.\\_Howard\\_Hunt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E._Howard_Hunt), we can read this about Hunt the novelist:

Hunt was a prolific author, primarily of spy novels. During and after the war, he wrote several novels under his own name—*East of Farewell* (1942), *Limit of Darkness* (1944), *Stranger in Town* (1947), *Bimini Run* (1949), and *The Violent Ones* (1950)—and, more famously, several spy and hardboiled novels under an array of pseudonyms, including Robert Dietrich, Gordon Davis and David St. John. Hunt won a Guggenheim Fellowship for his writing in 1946. [See article referenced above for footnotes.]

My very general impression is that the article, in its entirety, is very questionable based upon reading the works of serious, non-mainstream journalists such as Russ Baker who puts up some serious investigative research at the website *Who What Why*—<http://whowhatwhy.com/>. I've written of Baker's work in Chapter 445, *Are Serious Historians Conspiracy Nuts?*, and in Chapter 492, *Who Are the American Elites and Are They Conspirators?*. Baker has also published a readily available book about the dynasty founded by Prescott Bush, father of a president and grandfather of another president: *Family of Secrets*. Hunt's path through life at least veered near the path of George H W Bush and maybe that of Prescott Bush as well. Hunt also seems to have been involved in at least that one project (overthrowing Castro) near and dear to the hearts of Allen Dulles and his business partner George Herbert Walker, Jr (uncle to George H W Bush.)

Hunt seems an interesting case of a man who provided part of the cultural foundations for the positive attitudes modern Americans have toward spies, assassins, and other criminals as well as having himself been a spy and involved in assassination conspiracies against Castro. Hunt wrote about the life and then lived it and continued to write about the life. Something of the sort can be said of Ian Fleming, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ian\\_Fleming](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ian_Fleming) for biographical information, and

of David John Moore Cornwell who wrote under the pen name of John le Carré, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_le\\_Carre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_le_Carre)" for biographical information. A host of others have written about life in the intelligence or covert operations communities with less direct experience or perhaps none at all.

The sorts of books we read, and the sorts of movies we watch, have little to do with reality. Those books and movies of the thriller genres do have a lot to do with the actions of the leaders of the United States since the beginning of the Cold War and a lot to do with the American failures to deal with realities on the ground as opposed to inside of our heads—inside our heads, we're still on top of some world if not the one created by God. We have strayed from God's reality, trying to build a world with an excess of covert actions and a deficit of diplomatic or other peaceful actions. By default, we bribe officials in other governments and steal secrets through them or by other means. By default, we destroy entire countries which don't bow to our every American whim—even when those countries are, in some clear sense, rising in social order and in prosperity and are at least moving toward the sorts of values Americans claim to hold dear.

We Americans know that goodness is to be defended and maybe even spread into evil regions by use of the same criminal methods and attitudes which were advocated by Nazis and Bolsheviks and Maoists. The Bolsheviks and Maoists (many anyway) targeted some true badness, such as ignorance and poverty. They used rifles and bombs and concentration camps where education and modern farming techniques and modern medicine would have been more appropriate. Those evil Bolsheviks and evil Maoists. If only they had been good enough to spread democracy and fight evil by the methods used by the United States in Vietnam and Afghanistan and Iraq and Somalia and Libya.

Whatever is true of the American elite, so wealthy and so powerful, the ordinary American has been convinced the negative wisdom of the Stalinists and Maoists is the appropriate way to defend our country and the values we claim to hold, but we have a strange blindness that leads us to think that what we did to Iraq was morally good and not at all similar to what the Maoists did to Tibet. In fact, we adopted many of the methods of Hitler and Stalin and Mao; in our efforts to defeat them, we became their disciples. (I believe it was C S Lewis who first expressed this insight but I don't have a reference.)

But maybe I have it wrong. Maybe Lenin and Trotsky and Stalin and

Mao and his followers learned from our grandparents the brutal and amoral ways described by Winston Churchill in a quote I provided in Chapter 433, *The Final Frontier of Our Modern Moral Journey*:

All the horrors of all the ages were brought together, and not only armies but whole populations were thrust into the midst of them. . . Neither peoples nor rulers drew the line at any deed which they thought would help them to win. Germany, having let Hell loose, kept well in the van of terror; but she was followed step by step by the desperate and ultimately avenging nations she had assailed. Every outrage against humanity or international law was repaid by reprisals – often of a greater scale and of longer duration. No truce or parley mitigated the strife of the armies. The wounded died between the lines: the dead mouldered in the soil. Merchant ships and neutral ships and hospital ships were sunk on the seas and all on board left to their fate or killed as they swam. Every effort was made to starve whole nations into submission without regard to age or sex. Cities and monuments were smashed by artillery. Bombs from the air were cast down indiscriminately. Poison gas in many forms stifled or seared their bodies. Liquid fire was projected upon their bodies. Men fell from the air in flames, or were smothered, often slowly, in the dark recesses of the sea. The fighting strength of armies was limited only by the manhood of their countries. Europe and large parts of Asia and Africa became one vast battlefield on which after years of struggle not armies but nations broke and ran. When all was over, Torture and Cannibalism were the only two expedients that the civilized, scientific, Christian States had been able to deny themselves, and they were of doubtful utility.

We Americans have added (often poorly) targeted murder by way of drones or special forces. We Americans have used, at least intermittently, torture which for all its “doubtful utility” seems to be a way for the righteous to inflict pain upon those evil creatures who hate us for our freedoms and for our goodness and probably for our golf courses.

To a large extent, this has been made possible by the crap we absorb from our trashy books and trashy movies and trashy songs. Disorder is us,

it is in us, and we love it. So long as we feel good about ourselves, we must be doing what is right.

A Medieval theological joke:

Who will be saved?

Anyone who can enjoy Heaven.

We American Christians spurn the Bible and good poetry and we read books and watch movies about ‘heroic’ criminals of the elegant James Bond sort or the rather crude Rambo sort. We gather in front of the television to cheer as the missiles and bombs hit a heavily populated city, such as Baghdad.

Why would anyone think they would be happy in Heaven if they enjoy watching or even imagining the killing of any human being, no matter if he is an enemy? Why would they be happy in Heaven if they prefer *Rambo* to the *Gospel of St John*? Why would anyone who claims to be a Christian prefer the professional murderer and exploiter of young women, James Bond, to George Washington, that man who was a sinner but one who struggled his entire life to behave according to a strict code of public honor. I have to ask: was it just coincidence that the James Bond era corresponds to a period of a very public denigration of George Washington? We honor a fictional character who was a coldblooded and hardhearted criminal and then spit upon the Father of our country.

In *Washington: The Indispensable Man*, the shorter biography by James Thomas Flexner, we can learn that Washington looked at the dead and horribly injured men being brought off the battlefields of the American Revolution and concluded that even just war isn’t glorious and is to be avoided unless absolutely necessary—though to be fought to the last ounce if necessary. He also showed in his refusal to allow reprisals against civilian populations who aided the British or the Royalists that he thought the best way to win hearts and pull together a country (or a world by extrapolation) is to treat human beings decently and maybe even better than they deserve from our viewpoint.

Perhaps we should spend more time with the Bible and with respectful biographies of men like George Washington and less time watching James Bond movies or—Lord, have mercy—Rambo movies.

# 508 Crowds Are Morally Disordered Communities

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1857>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/07/29.]

Richard Sale has written an intelligent essay upon the diseased state of the public mind of Americans: *The Menace of the Crowd* at [http://turcopolier.typepad.com/sic\\_semper\\_tyrannis/2014/07/the-menace-of-the-crowd-.html](http://turcopolier.typepad.com/sic_semper_tyrannis/2014/07/the-menace-of-the-crowd-.html). Wikipedia has a stub article about Sale at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard\\_Sale\\_\(journalist\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Sale_(journalist)).

Sale is looking for the more general truths behind the morally irresponsible attitudes of Americans toward Russia and its leader Vladimir Putin, those attitudes being stirred up into a nasty froth most recently after the civilian airliner MH-17 was shot down from the skies over a war-zone in eastern Ukraine. We know little though the American government has made accusations against Russia and Putin without supplying evidence. We have to remember that this is the same government which lied on important matters in Syria, that is, lied in a criminal manner. Both the President and his Secretary of State, as well as some junior members of this administration, have also shot off their mouths or acted in an irresponsible and juvenile manner on numerous occasions on important matters and when dealing with adults from countries which were once willing to be friendly toward us.

This moral irresponsibility and immaturity on the part of American leaders wouldn't be possible if the American people were themselves morally responsible and mature. If we were better people, we would have better leaders or would call bad leaders to account if we made mistakes in the voting booths. What gives? Sale tells us:

So what you see happening today is the transformation of individual convictions that become overwhelming in force because they are repeated endlessly by those in authority. The cautious restrictions of what once was called, “Iron objectivity” had been discarded as too ineffectual and cumbersome. Few in the media have the intellectual or moral strength to resist what is told them by their leaders. The collectivities have the habit of drowning anything that is private and not collective.

To put it differently, the first causality of a crowd is the loss of its reason, the loss of its ability to weigh and estimate events. One of their greatest fears of a crowd, of people who think in unison, is to be seen as being moderate and sensible. It used to be that moral contagion acted slowly, moving cautiously, but now thanks to social media, the public’s worst instincts are not only let loose, they are praised and glorified.

So a crowd, as Sale uses the term, is what some call a mob and that is a gathering of individual human beings who may possess at least modest levels of individual intelligence but, as a group or a ‘crowd’, they have a very low quality of intellect—communal mind (see Chapter 127, *Intelligence vs. Intellect*.) The mob-thoughts or crowd-thoughts are hardly rational and often lead to harm to the members of the crowd itself as well as to its intended victims.

A human community can take the form of a marauding band of sports fans or a lynch mob or a mass of those with minds like silly putty (see Chapter 308, *Unreliable Memories, Minds Like Silly Putty*. Sale refers to the silly-putty crowd. A truer community can be seen in a company of Green Berets or the history faculty of a small liberal-arts college or a society of medical specialists or a collective of pottery craftsmen or a church community or the workforce of a small machine shop or any of a variety of human beings who gather into a community in an adult manner for a legitimate reason, even if only to play cribbage once a week. These better sorts of community have a part of the greater intellect which is the true core of a civilization and, thus, a share in the ultimate, complete and perfect, intellect which is that of the Body of Christ. I’m early in the process of developing adequate ways to discuss matters such as this: why is it that sometimes human communities, even temporary gatherings, develop in a healthy and morally well-ordered form and sometimes they become lynch

mobs. In the past, such matters were just discussed as if being a “way of the world,” but I’m trying to follow through on the modern program recommended by Pope Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger):

Modernity is not simply a historically-datable cultural phenomenon; in reality it requires a new focus, a more exact understanding of the nature of man.

[Pope Benedict XVI, in a speech given on 2008/06/07 to participants in the sixth European Symposium of University Professors, which was held in Rome from 2008/06/04 to 2008/06/07 on the theme: “Broadening the Horizons of Reason. Prospects for Philosophy”.]

The American people don’t have much of an intellect at all, not the intellect or communal mind of any civilization which could be labeled ‘Christian’ nor even one much like that of a virtuous pagan civilization. We are, as a people, primitive and morally unordered; we pretend to be freestanding individuals even as evolutionary biologists and neurobiologists have joined historians, sociologists, and the better sort of Christian philosophers and theologians in seeing that men are bound in communal life. I prefer to avoid half-hearted words and just claim we human beings have both individual and communal being—as do probably most animals but certainly all social animals. (This expansion in the definition of created being should be plausible in light of the expansion of being by modern scientists to include relationships; some of the Old Testament authors and St John the Evangelist were there first—see Chapter 156, *A Christian View of Einstein and Bohr’s Debate on the Meaning of Reality*, and Chapter 157, *Quantum Mechanics and Moral Formation*.)

My view of human being is richer and more complex than the view Sale seems to assume. My view allows better ways to state the problems we face and far better ways to analyze and understand those problems. I’m going to push hard on an expansion of our understanding of created being, so that we begin to acknowledge that relationships are primary over stuff and that there is both individual and communal human being. I’ve developed this worldview in numerous books described in Part I, *Overview*, and in numerous weblog essays included in this book. Ultimately, our social beings, forming and participating in all our social groupings in this mortal realm, reach their completeness and perfection when we become truly Christ, that

is, when each of the human beings saved by Christ becomes the Body of Christ while remaining his or her individual self. This is analogous to God Himself: three Persons who remain fully three individual Persons while also being fully one God.

Therefore, I think Sale's comments are valid but he uses a set of words and concepts which leave him writing as if a crowd is inherently bad rather than a disordered, or at least poorly ordered, form of something good—a true community. I would suggest we can better understand the underlying problems caused by defective or immature human communities when we recognize the reality of communal human being as well as individual human being. As we recognize a street thug as a stunted and deformed human being, a pietistic peasant as an immature Christian, a schizophrenic as a human being with a damaged mind, we can see a crowd as human communal being which is defective or incomplete or immature in some significant sense.

# 509 Mathematical Models of Human History: Are They Plausible?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1864>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/08/11.]

I'm not an unqualified supporter of quantitative modeling in the social sciences, most certainly do I have my doubts about modeling in history. It's a dangerous business and the results have been spotty at best. Yet, it could work for some sorts of analyses and doing it in a disciplined way would allow rejection or modification of the model. We can read about a seemingly successful application of quantitative modeling technique as applied to the spread of large-scale societies, proto-states and states, in Europe and Asia and Africa. That successful application is discussed in an article by a geneticist, Razib Khan, who blogs at Ron Unz's website, *The Unz Review: An Alternative Media Selection* and subtitled *A Collection of Interesting, Important, and Controversial Perspectives Largely Excluded from the American Mainstream Media*.

Khan's article, *Modeling World History in Math Is Possible* at <http://www.unz.com/gnxp/modeling-world-history-in-math-is-possible/>, is a commentary upon an article summarizing results of a research project: see *War, space, and the evolution of Old World complex societies* at <http://www.pnas.org/content/early/2013/09/20/1308825110>".

Khan displays six graphs in his article which he says show "the major result: a model with only a few simple parameters was incredibly good at fitting the genuine growth and evolution of complex societies over 3,000 years." (Actually, both Khan's article and that by Peter Turchin and the

other researchers make it clear they are interested in the spread of sophisticated military technology and centralized political systems of the sort we would call ‘states’.)

This model of an important part of human history is essentially a model covering external environments, such as proximity to the types of grasslands which nurture nomadic and semi-nomadic horsemen who have developed much of the military technology and fighting methods of Eurasia and northern Africa and have forced the development of other military technologies and fighting methods.

The model was used to predict “the historical distribution of large-scale societies in Afroeurasia during 1,500 BCE-1,500 CE” and to also develop maps “indicating the frequency and distribution of large-scale societies.” The authors were interested in such matters because of their concern with the large size which can support rational bureaucracies and sophisticated educational systems. Again, the model produced the right results based upon the assumptions about the importance of nomadic horsemen from the great grassland regions in initiating the movement toward advanced military technology and large societies with centralized political, bureaucratic systems. Apparently, their model was successful in regions such as south China and Europe which were not directly contiguous to such grasslands because the model allowed for the diffusion of military technology into, say, most of Europe from the Near Eastern and northern African regions which were contiguous to such regions and were sometimes conquered and were sometimes able to adopt the horsemen’s military technology or perhaps to develop their own superior military technology which allowed, along with the political controls which are part of what we know as ‘states’, successful defense against the horsemen such as the Mongols and Turkmen and Berber peoples.

Neither the authors nor Khan are making a claim that human history is deterministic in a simpleminded way. They are simply claiming that such models can allow a more exact understanding and an objective way of testing claims about human history. (In another article, *Human History Is Both Contingent and Inevitable* at <http://www.unz.com/gnxp/human-history-is-both-contingent-and-inevitable/>, Khan argues for a far more sophisticated view in which the world is contingent in some ways and fully determined in other ways. Still other articles on his blog take up similar issues.)

I endorse the development of well-formed quantitative models, though I

feel they will only be useful, and only avoid misleading the naive, for very well-formed ideas which can be tested and clearly rejected or modified or accepted. The problem, and it's related to the more general form of the problem the researchers dealt with, is that no one has the sort of overview available in gravitational theory (the theory of general relativity) or other fields of physics where very successful quantitative models are made possible by criteria the models should meet. Without a greater understanding, it can be dangerous to rely too heavily on models because they produce 'accurate' answers to specific questions or to questions under particular conditions. I've read a couple introductory works on mathematical modeling and found the practitioners who develop models over a variety of domains to be more skeptical than would be true of other mathematicians or scientists. Models which are built by rigorous application of physical laws should work but those which are built upon empirical results often break when different facts are considered or when the future simply proves different from the past or present.

Yet, the model of the growth of large-scale societies under consideration seems to deal well with the initialization of one very important process: the formation of centralized states with sophisticated military technology.

But, again, we have to be wary of answers to questions about human history which merely preserve the known phenomena. We moderns tend to misunderstand the history of human science and human thought and to think there was some reason the ancient and Medieval thinkers could have realized it was 'wrong' to place the Earth at the center of the Cosmos as they knew it. (There were speculative developments of alternative models but no clear arguments why they might be superior.) The models of the Cosmos overthrown by Kepler and Galileo and Newton were quite successful, especially the mathematically rigorous model originally developed by the Macedonian-Egyptian mathematician Ptolemy. Those pre-Galilean models preserved the known phenomena and, in fact, were quite successful in predicting the movements of planets and could have been extended, in principle, to planetary moons and comets and the like at the cost of greater complexity. Ultimately, modern physics overthrew Ptolemaic models of the relative movements of the Sun and planets because it had far greater power than was necessary to merely provide a more economical model of the Solar system. Modern physics, beginning in a systematic way with Newton's dynamics, has proven itself to be both a qualitative and quantitative understanding of certain very important aspects of concrete being. It was not any

gains in model accuracy of planetary movements that forced the adoption of Newtonian dynamics but rather the fact that Newton's physics worked as well with cannon balls as it did with predicting the movements of the moon.

This was the modern re-adoption and rational modification of the ancient program of understanding all that exists by a single system of thought.

Arguably, and I tend to think this way, physics as we know it is—or can, in principle, be corrected and expanded to be—a complete understanding of aspects of concrete being, including at least the quantitative aspects. That doesn't mean physics is a 'complete' understanding of concrete or thing-like being, nor will any human science be a complete understanding of any specific realm of concrete being. In fact, the abstract being from which thing-like being was shaped is still here with us and continues to interact with the more abstract sorts of being from which it was shaped. This concrete realm of concrete being is not yet complete and is being made richer and more complex even by the very acts of human exploration of Creation and by all other relationships which continue to bring concrete being into existence and to shape it.

Let me end with a few comments about what I think will be involved in providing a wider understanding for human nature as part of a greater Creation; such a wider understanding will give us not magical answers to every question about human history or human moral problems but rather a general context in which our human being is set as well as ways of properly phrasing our questions and properly developing our proposed answers.

I think we have to keep in mind that there are deterministic forms of relationships and contingent forms of relationships. There is a different balance of such relationships, and differing relationships in their details, for each of: individual human being, communal human being, and external environments. In addition, human being both individual and communal have a peculiar and very important type of contingency—that which is part of moral freedom.

I discussed the quest to gain a "more exact understanding" of man in a book I published in 2013, *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53], which is available for free downloading. The title is from Pope Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger):

Modernity is not simply a historically-datable cultural phenomenon; in reality it requires a new focus, a more exact under-

standing of the nature of man. [Pope Benedict XVI, in a speech given on 2008/06/07 to participants in the sixth European Symposium of University Professors, which was held in Rome from 2008/06/04 to 2008/06/07 on the theme: “Broadening the Horizons of Reason. Prospects for Philosophy”.]

I would recommend a review or first-time reading of Chapter 144, *Adopting Mathematical Reasoning in Non-quantitative Fields of Thought*.



# 510 A Different Model of the Growth of Centralized States in History

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1867>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/08/18.]

Stephanie Pappas wrote an article, , *Origins of Hierarchy: How Egyptian Pharaohs Rose to Power* at <http://www.livescience.com/47284-how-stone-age-despots-evolved.html>, summarizing some results of work done by Simon Powers, “a postdoctoral researcher in ecology and evolution at the University of Lausanne in Switzerland.” Powers is working on the initial concentration of power in a despotic hierarchy and will next be moving on to try to deal with the next stage in which a large-scale state arises, but the results of his initial work point to the possibility of producing a different understanding from that found in the article discussed in the prior Chapter 509, *Mathematical Models of Human History: Are They Plausible?*, by Razib.

Pappas’ article about Powers’ work points to the possibility that:

[V]oluntary leadership arises when leaders give enough benefits to their followers at the outset, Powers said. If leaders give their people an advantage in producing food, the people will follow them, he added.

Moreover:

[L]eadership turns to despotism when two factors arise. The first is the growth of population density and size, which follows

naturally from an organized, agricultural society.

“It basically becomes hard for individuals to stop following the leader,” Powers said. “As the density of the population grows, there is less free land available.”

If we consider this analysis and the analysis I discussed in Chapter 509, *Mathematical Models of Human History: Are They Plausible?*, we are getting into some potential useful confusion. Powers is developing an explanation based upon internal factors (advantages coming from strong leaders and then maybe the difficulties of escaping control by those leaders) while Turchin and colleagues were concerned with external factors (starting with the conquest by or reaction against nomadic horsemen of the grasslands of central Asia).

There are going to be no clean, sharply defined answers to the questions of human community-formation or, more in line with my worldview, questions of the creation and shaping of human communal being. This means there will be no answers corresponding to, say, the thermodynamics of gas in a piston which can compress or relax. There likely will be many quantitative models which will help us deal with specific aspects of human social or political or economic behavior but those will work only if they are part of a more general framework of what might be labeled qualitative models, though subject to the disciplined analyses to be found in certain fields of mathematics—see Chapter 509, *Mathematical Models of Human History: Are They Plausible?*. For some very general discussion in light of quotations from some highly regarded mathematicians, see Chapter 144, *Adopting Mathematical Reasoning in Non-quantitative Fields of Thought*.

I’m reluctant to speculate too much on what might eventually work to produce a deeper and more exact understanding of human nature both individual and communal but I have a very vague image on the edge of my mind of a single entity which is like a manifold—that is subject to well-defined analyses in each ‘small region’, ‘locally’, where the proper analyses might be quantitative or qualitative. An odd chimera indeed, but that is what we seem to be—as individual human beings or as communal human beings.

And we must remember that we are human beings, entities which are unified and coherent and complete—no matter how imperfectly so. Our knowledge of our own being should be knowledge of such an entity and not

just a handwaving explanation which points toward a quantitative model here and a qualitative explanation there.



# 511 American Soldiers Who Enjoy Killing

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1909>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/11/24.]

William R Polk has an impressive resume, summed up in the short bio published with his articles at *Consortiumnews.com* at <http://consortiumnews.com/>:

William R. Polk was a member of the Policy Planning Council, responsible for North Africa, the Middle East and West Asia, for four years under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. He was a member of the three-men Crisis Management Committee during the Cuban Missile Crisis. During those years he wrote two proposed peace treaties for the American government and negotiated one major ceasefire between Israel and Egypt. Later he was Professor of History at the University of Chicago, founding director of the Middle Eastern Studies Center and President of the Adlai Stevenson Institute of International Affairs. He is the author of some 17 books on world affairs, including *The United States and the Arab World*; *The Elusive Peace, the Middle East in the Twentieth Century*; *Understanding Iraq*; *Understanding Iran*; *Violent Politics: A History of Insurgency and Terrorism*; *Neighbors and Strangers: The Fundamentals of Foreign Affairs* and numerous articles in *Foreign Affairs*, *The Atlantic*, *Harpers*, *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* and *Le Monde Diplomatique*. He has lectured at many universities and at the Council on Foreign Relations, Chatham House, Sciences Po, the Soviet Academy of Sciences and has appeared frequently on NPR, the

BBC, CBS and other networks. His most recent books, both available on Amazon, are *Humpty Dumpty: The Fate of Regime Change* and *Blind Man's Buff*, a Novel.

A serious man, indeed. Polk is a highly-respected historian who falls into that small category of mainstream thinkers who can be highly critical of those in the mainstream, business leaders and cultural leaders as well as political leaders and intelligence or foreign service personnel. He writes in speaks in polite but straightforward terms about the incompetence and irresponsibility of the leaders of the West in a recent essay: *Standing in an Adversary's Shoes* at <http://consortiumnews.com/2014/11/10/standing-in-an-adversarys-shoes/>. This essay ends with these short and powerful paragraphs:

So it is not surprising that today we are moving away from coherent, well-reasoned and effective strategy and indulging in scattered, short-sighted and unsuccessful tactics. We jump from one crisis to the next with little thought on how we keep repeating our mistakes.

There is truth in the old saying that when one is in a hole, his first step ought to be to stop digging. We need to pause and take our bearings. We need to do this for our sakes as much as for "theirs."

I end on a very personal demonstration of a proof for what I have written: when many years ago I was first visiting such Asian and African lands as Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, both Sudans, Libya and Algeria, I was welcomed – as an American – with open arms. Today, I would be in danger of being shot.

Remember, many of those American responses to crises, often created by our leaders or allies, resulted in devastated countries with piles of bodies, hospitals and schools in rubble, and poisoned soils resulting in high rates of birth defects. If our leaders, and most of our citizens, fail to see that we Americans wreak death and general havoc wherever we go in recent decades, then it is ignorance and blindness which is a form of evil.

I'll leave it to the reader to explore Polk's essay and maybe find other works by Polk on the Internet, in an accessible library, or in a bookstore. For now, I'm going to respond to one of his specific comments:

The Special Forces or Green Beret soldier apparently, in the words I have heard them say, positively delight in their power to inflict pain and death. What is the long-term effect of such experiences on our own society and culture? Surely, they cannot be beneficial.

Back in April of this year of 2014, I published an essay included in this book as Chapter 503, *The Moral Superiority of the Modern Military Over Modern Civilian Society*, where I claimed “that communal being in the American military is better formed than is nearly any other communal being in the United States.” It could be said that this is a low standard and it has to be said that military communal being isn’t independent from the greater communal being of the societies or nations or empires in which those military men and military units serve. See Chapter 495, *Quietly Charitable or Quietly Murderous But Always Quietly American*, for a discussion of American moral character in light of the trigger-happy self-righteousness which shows in both our preferred entertainment and our foreign policy adventures.

Some have spoken differently, based upon experience that might not be fully relevant to current American conditions, cultural and military. W. Patrick Lang, who is “a commentator on the Middle East, a retired US Army officer [Colonel] and private intelligence analyst, and an author[,]” has spoken of an earlier generation of Green Berets as being men who could kill when they had to but were inclined to try and understand those in other cultures and to treat them with respect. Another retired Green Beret who blogs on Lang’s site under the user-name of “The Twisted Genius” refers to himself as a hard-hearted empath. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W.\\_Patrick\\_Lang](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W._Patrick_Lang) for a short biography of Colonel Lang and go to his blog at <http://turcopolier.typepad.com/>, a ‘clubhouse’ frequented by others with experience in the military or in intelligence services, civilian as well as military.

Let’s consider such men, able to kill with detachment of their feelings—in a manner of speaking, but under the overall control of . . . What?

Under my way of understanding, men have both individual and communal nature. We human beings are images of the one God who is three Persons; we human beings are each individuals but will be saved as one perfect man (in St Paul’s terms) and yet will remain our individual selves. I also have a more complex view of that one perfect man, the Body of

Christ, than can be derived directly from St Paul's letters. We are imperfect versions in this world of what we can be if we are resurrected to share Christ's life. We do not live as individual, freestanding creatures even in this world as is the dominant belief in the modern world, especially in the United States. We are members of a variety of communities and share being in each of those communities with all the other members. This is all quite consistent with modern understandings of man from genetics and from evolutionary biology, especially sociobiology. See Chapter 281, *Social and Biological: Being Honest About the Basics of Human Nature* for some background.

Americans, even in the Colonial period, have shown a streak of self-righteousness which borders on, or crosses into, moral insanity. I discussed this with respect to a brutal war waged on New England Amerinds in Chapter 408, *The Need for Abstractions in Moral Self-understanding*. Note that men capable of moral detachment might well be more capable of this sort of higher moral reasoning than the most of us—particularly if they are raised in a morally well-ordered society.

I'm going to assume those Green Berets discussed by Polk were from a younger generation than Colonel Lang or The Twisted Genius, though my discussion linked to in the above paragraph covers Americans from earlier generations. Parents and other adults in recent decades thought it proper to sit children in front of violent cartoons and then *Rambo* and *The Terminator* and a lot of movies and TV shows about drug gangsters and undercover cops shooting up Miami or Los Angeles. A few decades ago, I remember reading about less elegant gangsters in New Haven who held their gun battles in the hallways of the projects. The walls and doors weren't built to stop bullets and a few children and other innocent people stopped those bullets instead.

These youngsters, even some just a few years younger than me—I was in the last Vietnam era draft in 1973, also grew up with war-mongering governments and news media who had learned not to televise images of frightened young girls running down the road trying to escape the napalm burning into their backs. They grew up watching Baghdad being destroyed by terrible air assaults and it all seemed so clean and so righteous. And they grew up hearing about American Exceptionalism. They grew up seeing gangsters glorified on television and George Washington debunked at school.

In short, anyone born after 1965 or so grew up in an age of serious moral disorder which had even penetrated to the small towns and farmlands by way of television and the movies. Even most of those who were guided

by wise parents and clergymen and neighbors still grew up in an age of malformed moral nature in their larger-scale communities, including the malformed moral nature of the American state and its citizens as a body. We are a morally disordered people and even our seemingly good individuals have a share of that disorder. It takes a positive effort and a willingness to be ‘un-American’ to retain a clear vision, a willingness to just leave when it’s not possible to correct errors. There are some who will listen if you try to tell them it’s the United States and its vassals who are causing the trouble in Ukraine and are among the ultimate sources of trouble in the Near East and Middle East. There are some who simply stare at them if you try to argue that Putin might well be a bastard, but he’s the sort of bastard that good Christian men sometimes have to be to protect their country.

I’ll repeat the quotation from Polk’s essay:

The Special Forces or Green Beret soldier apparently, in the words I have heard them say, positively delight in their power to inflict pain and death. What is the long-term effect of such experiences on our own society and culture? Surely, they cannot be beneficial.

What I said is, “They went there with disordered communal moral natures and often with disordered individual moral natures.” And I could add, “Polk is right that their experiences further damage their moral natures, individual and communal. Even the ones who partly or largely pull out of it do so by way of dealing with horrible memories of the evil they found themselves able and willing to do—if only willing during the period of blood-lust or fear.”



# 512 Traditional Morality is Dead, Long Live Traditional Morality: A World of Evolution and Development

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1922>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/12/10.]

I was inspired and frustrated by a discussion by Claes G Ryn of the traditional Western views of human moral nature: see *The Moral Path to Peace* at <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/the-moral-path-to-peace/>. I was inspired by such statements as: “In the end, only moral character, supported by general culture, can fortify the self in man that wants openness to argument and respect for others.” I was frustrated by still another effort to counter the wrongheaded teachings which have arisen and spread in the modern world by way of arguing against those wrongheaded teachings (Ryn concentrates upon Rousseau) instead of making the far more important effort to deal with the knowledge gained by modern men as they explored empirical reality; the failure to take on a task not so different from that of Augustine of Hippo: to build a new understanding of God’s Creation by dealing with knowledge both wondrous and dangerous.

In upcoming essays, I’ll deal a little more with some specifics of what is good and what is lacking in the efforts of serious and learned conservative thinkers such as Claes Ryn. In this essay, I’ll deal with some foundational matters about Creation as it can be understood in light of modern empirical knowledge. In particular, I’ll be dealing with some general aspects of

man, individual and communal, as results of evolutionary and development processes rather than as properties of some Man who came to be at one time with a stable and well-determined nature. I'll be dealing with men as creatures whose substance and characteristics and aspects arise from relationships rather than creature born with well-formed substance and characteristics and aspects and which then enter into relationships. I don't know enough of intellectual history to understand how it might have happened, but modern conservatives have an understanding of being not so much different from that which underlies the false teaching of libertarians that we are freestanding creatures who enter into relationships on a voluntary, or even 'contractual', basis. Unlike libertarians, those who label themselves 'conservatives' choose to acknowledge the goodness and propriety of communal relationships but haven't learned or won't learn to speak in terms of men having both individual and communal human nature.

Modern conservatives tend to avoid certain problems by assuming that men are born with well-determined moral and other social characteristics but somehow those characteristics allow the same man to be a villager in a tribal society or a citizen of a great civilization such as the one we're destroying in the West. Man is seen as an all-purpose social creature, having appeared on the earth in a final state, whereas the evidence is growing that man has actually been evolving and developing rapidly over the past 50,000 years or so, evolving and developing so that he has the brain regions proper to develop minds capable of the abstract reasoning processes needed to live in a modern university community which is part of the United States, itself a somewhat reluctant part of Western, Christian Civilization. That this Civilization has at least one foot in the grave doesn't matter in one sense—it lives in the minds of those such as Ryn who wish to keep alive what is good from the traditions and those such as I who wish that but also wish to rebuild Christian Civilization, the Body of Christ in this mortal realm, so that it corresponds more faithfully to God's Creation as we can now understand it. And I contend that Civilization is fundamentally a great understanding of man and Creation, an understanding provisional in this mortal realm, but one which seems to have included some important core truths from its beginning thousands of years ago and seems to be adding more core truths as well as refining those we inherited.

The traditions of Western Civilization were magnificent. With a simplistic—but largely true—view, we can see Western Civilization as a grand synthesis of Jerusalem and Athens/Rome. There is also much truth

in the related simplification by which we see Western Civilization as beginning with Augustine of Hippo, Pope Gregory the Great, and Benedict of Nursia and developing as Europe was invaded by barbarian peoples from mostly Indo-European stock—peoples closely related to the Latins and others already in Europe. Those Goths and Franks and Gaels and Britons joined the Latins and other Italians, the various peoples of the Middle East and the Near East—including North Africa, in an initially chaotic and always unplanned effort to make something of Hammurabi and Moses, Plato and Archimedes, Augustus Caesar and Virgil, as brought into the Christian cosmology constructed by Augustine of Hippo and many others. It is this effort I'm encouraging, an effort mounted with barbarian energies, to make the tradition as new as Augustine did.

Western Civilization looms larger if one accepts the view of Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) that Western Civilization was the house built for the Church by generations of Christians.

It looms still larger with my major extrapolation of that view: Christian Civilization, encompassing many cultures and a huge number of individuals, is the true Body of Christ with the Church being the central organ of the Body. Western Civilization is that Body in its most advanced stage to date.

The Body of Christ as I envision, in light of modern empirical knowledge—history as well as sociobiology, literature as well physics—is a bit different from Western Civilization as understood by Joseph Ratzinger; that Body of Christ as I envision it is a living dynamic being rather than structures built by individual dynamic beings and that Body develops in response to environments of contingent circumstances and random, or factual, events. As such, that Body is more than a bit different from Western Civilization as understood by modern academicians in general—even those of Christian beliefs; that Body of Christ as I envision it is headed by Jesus Christ and Christian Civilization, most recently of the West but perhaps not for long, is the mortal manifestation of the true Body which exists in a completed and perfected form in the world of the resurrected.

Remember always that individual human being is also evolving and developing as well as communal human being.

Empirical knowledge, in the sense of structures built from facts, can't get us to anything like my understanding of Creation, nor to the lesser cosmologies which have been the foundations of Western Civilization as well as the cosmologies of the Semitic and Greek and Roman civilizations, and others, from which Western Civilization has descended. On top of that sort

of factual empirical knowledge, scientific and practical, we need speculative knowledge—often metaphysical reasoning disciplined by and abstracted from the best of mathematical reasoning in any given age.

Yet, we Christians are still not done, for all of this empirical knowledge and speculative knowledge has yet to be disciplined to the truths revealed to Moses and Isaiah and by Jesus Christ, true God born as the man Jesus of Nazareth.

This structure of human knowledge is developed in more detail in my freely downloadable book, *Four Kinds of Knowledge* [43].

Let me move on to discuss a matter of some sensitivity. Western Civilization has been starved to a state approaching death. As matters stand, Western Civilization is not likely to survive as the dominant part of Christian Civilization—if it survives at all. Yet, there is a certain magnificence to the frightening old boy. After all, he trekked through the Sinai with Moses, sailed the Mediterranean with Odysseus, watched Christ die alongside the Virgin Mother and St John the Apostle and not many others; he rode alongside the literate and noble St Alfred in the war to drive Vikings from England, traveled through Hell and Purgatory and Heaven with Dante and Virgil, and fought alongside Galileo to re-establish a respect for God's Creation in light of what might be called a neo-Augustinian theology and reading of the Bible.

Grand old boy that Western Civilization, but he was never for real but rather a human understanding of the real Body of Christ as he develops in the story being told by God, a telling and a story in which men participate in such a way as to help shape that Body and, thus, their own future lives as shared with the Son of God in the world of the resurrected. The real Body of Christ, as he is in this mortal realm contains a lot more than Western Civilization, a lot more than the Christian churches and realms traditionally in union of some sort with Rome. And that Body is certainly a bit different than would appear to mortal eyes.

We can't predict the future development of the Body of Christ with any confidence because it is a living entity, having its own communal being apart from the individual human being which exists inside the Body in a multitude. (This communal being isn't really apart from individual human being but the converse is also true.) As is true of any living creature, it will grow and develop and even evolve in response to the contingencies it encounters; those contingencies include at least the events of the physical world. The individual human beings in this Body of Christ will also be

growing and developing and, as a species, evolving. This is a view which can't be handled by currently existing ways of understanding man as an individual or as community. New forms of thought are needed and I claim that at least a beginning in thinking afresh can be drawn from abstractions of modern knowledge of created being in its material form—including that form of knowledge we call mathematics.

We've traveled into realms where sophisticated thought is needed. Despite what determinists might think, 'randomness' (or unpredictable facts emerging) occurs at the interfaces where two or more systems interact even if those systems are fully deterministic in their internal events. The current environments of man, social and also 'natural', are made of some very complex systems indeed and there are very complex, 'fact-ridden', interactions at the interfaces of these systems.

Human being has changed and is currently changing rapidly. Geneticists and paleoanthropologists say that anatomically modern man came into existence more than 100,000 years ago, but cognitively and socially modern man seems to have come into existence more recently in processes starting during some period during the past 40,000-60,000 years—we see more complex societies and technology developing slowly by the standards of a man's life but showing clearly by 10,000 years ago or so. [Take the exact years with a small grain of salt; they might well change but a shift of decades of millenia wouldn't affect my arguments.]

What happened? Why was it that there were human beings 100,000 years ago little different from us in matters such as bone structure and perhaps soft flesh but not forming complex human communities nor even developing more sophisticated tools than those of primitive hominids from a million years ago or more?

There are some emerging answers, and good reason to believe these will cause deep problems in modern societies increasingly committed to the proposition that there are no significant differences between the races or the smaller ethnic groups. Those anatomically modern human beings seem to have reached their final brain development at the beginning of adolescence—this because the genes for brain development during adolescence can be traced back to the populations which left Africa 40,000-60,000 years ago though some of those development genes flowed back into Africa and some might prove to have developed independently in Africa. In my terms—to which some scientists might object, abstract reasoning tends to develop during adolescence and those earlier creatures (say 100,000 years

ago) which looked so much like us were practical-minded creatures able to handle small-group life and primitive technology but not capable of understanding even high school physics nor capable of reading a complex novel. They couldn't develop, probably couldn't have dealt with, the complexities of the relationships we think so natural—social, political, economic, and so forth.

Much happened after the human brain began to develop regions adapted for, or adaptable for, abstract reasoning. Human beings had lived for hundreds of thousands of years in relatively small groups, extended families to a large extent but not exclusively; so far as I understand matters, those groups were semi-nomadic and lived by both hunting and foraging. By 10,000 years ago or so, they seem to have formed larger communities which mostly made their living by agriculture including animal husbandry and supplemented by manufacturing of tools for internal use and perhaps external trading.

Over the next six or seven thousand years, progress continued and probably accelerated so that larger-scale manufacturing and truly dense communities developed, first in the Middle and Near East and then elsewhere. These people achieved high levels of accomplishment in such areas as architecture and organization of complex endeavors such as building and operating large-scale irrigation systems.

As I've noted in prior writings, we see signs that of truly abstract reasoning, and not just high levels of practical reasoning working its way out through trial and error, by the sixth century or so before the birth of Jesus Christ. This is the age of the Pre-Socratic philosophers, the later prophets of Israel and likely those who put the more ancient works of the Bible in more or less final form, and the founders of Hinduism.

I would contend that history, that of human thought as well as that of politics and that of technology, gives us no reason to think these processes of evolution and development have slowed down; in fact, it's likely that human sociobiological evolution has accelerated. History speaks of the increased and increasing rate of interesting events and we can all see the ongoing emergence of more complex relationships and tools in our various communities right up to the global level.

To look into matters more deeply or to try to see the world more clearly leads to dangers to our personal selves and our communal selves.

That is where I'll pick up in the next essay in this series.

# 513 Traditional Morality is Dead, Long Live Traditional Morality: The Dangers of Understanding God's Acts-of-being

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1927>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/12/15.]

I'm writing this essay to set up my responses to Claes Ryn's essay describing how the moral teachings and traditions of the West could re-establish some sort of peace in our world: *The Moral Path to Peace* at <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/the-moral-path-to-peace/>.

I'm planning for now to finish the set-up in this essay, following up on what I wrote in the first essay, Chapter 512, *Traditional Morality is Dead, Long Live Traditional Morality: A World of Evolution and Development*. The theme of that first essay is what the title claims and I'm now going to try to discuss, very briefly, the difficult situation of those of us who believe we need a good understanding of the past and a deep respect for the knowledge and the wisdom of the past to guide us into the future.

We do live in a world of evolutionary and developmental processes. We human animals came to exist, as a species, by way of Darwinian evolution (understood in the modern sense to include Darwin's solid achievements plus much he guessed at and much he didn't even guess at), and, as individuals, by way of developmental processes. We are changed and become differently shaped, in emotional and cognitive and neuromuscular ways, by our responses to what lies inside and outside of us; this truth was taught by

St Thomas Aquinas and rediscovered by modern neuroscientists as discussed in the book *How Brains Make Up Their Minds* [35] by the neuroscientist and philosopher Walter J Freeman. A factual truth gained by honest observation and hard thought by a Dominican friar in the 13th century has withstood the test of time and scientific research.

There are other truths which are trickier to evaluate in light of new knowledge of the processes and structures and entities of Creation which is, after all, a manifestation of specific thoughts of God. It's a little surprising to me, but only a little surprising, that viruses and bacteria and even fungi can manipulate us, changing some fundamental aspects of our feelings and our thinking processes—see Chapter 316, *The Demonology of Sexual Behaviors and Preferences*. It adds a certain richness to modern understanding of what was once seen as demonic possession. Does it change at all our understanding that homosexuality and cross-sex behavior is disordered? It certainly should make us more tolerant of those who don't meet traditional standards, but I've found that, at least in recent years, even clergymen and orthodox Christians who hold traditional views on sexuality are tolerant of those whose behaviors or desires are condemned by the Bible. I don't think we've yet found the right balance between tolerance and charitable 'condemnation', and the very fact I had to use scare quotes on the word 'condemnation' tells its own story. It's also perhaps the case that some have an intuition for that balancing point but have trouble expressing it in words and actions and prayers in this historical context.

So, I think it fair to say that new knowledge that, for example, there is a fungal infection which seems to turn women into obligatory Lesbians by way of even one experience, doesn't force us to change our views on the moral rules of sexual behavior. But it does complicate the story of the human race and should make the self-righteous stop and wonder. If you believe, as I do, that this world is a work of God and then discover there are infections which can make you slower on some cognitive tasks, infections which can make you friendlier and more prone to serious schizophrenia, and others which can change your sexual desires, then we have to ponder the simpler understandings of good and evil and even of God's relationships to us.

So there are ways in which modern empirical knowledge can be quite disturbing. It greatly damages our established understandings of the world and more—or rather, it forces those who see the world as composed of well-defined regions of light and dark to see something different from that, or

forces them to blind themselves. All of Creation can be disturbing when we start to learn things which force us to confront the inadequacy of our existing understandings. Modern mathematicians have found that the old truths hold but the full truth is much greater and includes ways of thought, corresponding well to our physical world in many ways, which don't obey Euclidean geometry. Infinity has proven to be a multi-headed beast rather than one unapproachable 'point'. Randomness is an irreducible fact rather than a matter of magical chance.

The human race has been through changes so deep or extensive, or both, as to destroy the plausibility of the teachings of conservatives (in the true and not Trotskyite/Neocon sense) and traditionalists of other sorts. Augustine was forced to develop a historical viewpoint in which Christianity was separated from its historical environment of the Roman Empire; Rome was seen as yet another ephemeral work of men. In a more restricted domain of politics (and somewhat of economics), Edmund Burke was forced to both defend the political traditions of the British peoples and to reformulate them: the political situation of those British peoples was changing dramatically and the truths gained by hard experience could be saved only by transforming them. Something similar could be said of John Henry Newman's transformed understanding of Christian thought as something which did change with the times. I make more general claims than Newman, considering changes in our knowledge of Creation or any part or aspect of Creation or, more radically, with the realization that we have seen emergence of new forms of created being. These latter events would be most likely to occur with human communal being though we now know that human individual being is changing rapidly, down to mundane physical matters encoded in simple and easily readable ways in our genes. In fact, anthropologists and geneticists claim we human beings are changing more rapidly than ever before.

It is most certainly true that none of this new empirical knowledge, nor even the new forms of human communal being, argue that the "old truths" are no longer such, but they do argue that we need new ways to live according to even the most absolute and lasting of truths, new ways to understand human nature and this world and even the nature of salvation, and new ways to understand our failures and our sins. Over the past few years, I've been working on a project to better describe and discuss the Body of Christ, each of the saved remains an individual and yet is fully the perfect and complete man which is Christ; I'm trying to derive appropriate

concepts and words by abstracting from the (largely qualitative) forms of geometry used in the General Theory of Relativity but also in some fields such as the design of machinery.

This is disturbing, though also exciting in that it points to the need for creative thinkers and doers and even feelers and the corresponding possibilities to reach the greatness of Augustine of Hippo, Francis of Assisi, and others who responded—if reluctantly at times—to great change by producing new thought or behavior or institutions to meet the needs of human beings. They used their inherited tradition, added to it, and passed on an enriched and complexified tradition to us.

We need to face up to modern empirical knowledge and stop claiming that it has no effect whatsoever on moral or political or cultural issues. We need to admit the strangeness and dangers in the knowledge that bacterial or viral infections can change the functioning of our brains or other parts of our metabolisms or the realization, at least on my part, that none of the existing ideas on how governments and other centralized institutions can be formed work very well in our huge and hugely complex societies. The Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount remain as absolute truths but the political philosophies of Aristotle and the political forms in the American Constitution seem quite inadequate to our truly new world, not yet a brave world because we men of the West in particular haven't shown the courage to deal honestly with God's Creation. I begin to see a large number of contingently true ways of thought which no longer correspond to our particular contingencies in the 21st century.

As a final comment: I most strongly propose we should study even thought and behavior and institutions inadequate to our needs but once adequate to some group of human beings. There is much political and moral wisdom even in the parts of the Old Testament which advocate a sort of tribal localism (see 1 Samuel) and probably more wisdom of a political nature in the writings of Aristotle and Plato and Augustine and Dante and so on.

# 514 The Long War of the American Ruling Class Against All That Exists

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1930>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/12/17.]

That Brazilian globetrotter, Pepe Escobar, has summarized the New Cold War in a recent article, *The new European “arc of instability”* at [http://www.opednews.com/articles/2/The-new-European-arc-of-i-by-Pepe-Escobar-Chaos\\_Debt\\_European-Union\\_Gold-141213-163.html](http://www.opednews.com/articles/2/The-new-European-arc-of-i-by-Pepe-Escobar-Chaos_Debt_European-Union_Gold-141213-163.html). In that article, he published a paragraph from an email he received from the Saker, a former military intelligence analyst who lives outside his homeland of Russia but defends her strongly and intelligently in his comments on the Internet. Saker tells us:

Putin is telling both the West and the Russian people that there is a long war in progress and that the Russian people have to morally be prepared to accept sacrifices for the survival of Russia. This is one more step in the ‘coming-out’ of what I call the ‘Eurasian Sovereignists’ in which the US [has] now openly declared as a Russophobic (Russia-hating and Russia-fearing) enemy, and the Europeans as a powerless colony. Military power is not directly a factor in this, the internal power balance between the pro-Western ‘Atlantic Integrationists’ and the ‘Eurasian Sovereignists’ is.

(You can find more writings of the Saker by going to his blog-site, *The*

*Vineyard of the Saker* at <http://vineyardsaker.blogspot.com/> or the news aggregation site *Russia Insider* at <http://russia-insider.com/en.>)

Escobar's entire discussion, including the inset discussion by the Saker, is interesting and extremely important but I'm going to deal with this specific idea of a "long war" and in a terrible insight into the moral degeneracy of the American ruling class but a degeneracy being endorsed by even those Americans who live local lives of moral integrity: the United States is waging a demonic war against all that exists to the extent it won't bow to the American ruling class. Captain Ahab, he of utilitarian competence and moral insanity, is the normal American, as Melville feared back in the 1850s. (The results of recent American adventures in Asia and Africa and even in Detroit and Ferguson raise questions as to our competence in 2014, but that merely turns a moral tragedy into a greater farce.)

As I see matters, the American ruling class is waging a long war against nearly every entity and region on the face of the earth. I don't exclude the American people or peoples or individual citizens nor do I exclude the various regions and cities of the United States. So far as I can tell, the American ruling class is comfortable only with gangster and bankster behavior, enforcing their desires upon others. I almost think they would be disappointed if everyone on earth were suddenly to obey Washington or Wall St. A great period of boredom would set in. There would be no reason for ambitious young Americans to go to Harvard or Stanford to learn how to play with the world as if it were a risk board and its men, women, and children were plastic pieces.

This moral sickness on the part of Americans, foreseen by the likes of Melville and Hawthorne in the 1850s and others since, is what doomed the peace dividend when the Soviet Union fell: we Americans, along with some of our allies in Europe and other regions, had built up bloated militaries and national security agencies which had no way to justify their existence unless they continued waging war upon... anyone and everyone. From the beginning there were Dr Strangeloves and bomb-crazy generals and politicians combining ignorance with an egocentric understanding of the world. Nearly all American leaders, including those religious leaders betraying God and flocks, came to enjoy this idea that we Americans know how human beings should live. All Americans are ever horrified to discover some peoples hate us for our DisneyWorlds and our McDonalds and our military bases in their backyards. Those who fear such a morally trashy culture and nation for the sake of their own children are as jingoistic as those who treat wars against

largely defenseless countries as another spectator sport—see Chapter 465, *Dumber Every Day, With Beer in Hand and War on TV*.

In a fit of paranoia, we Americans fell in behind our profiteering leaders to threaten war against the entire world and to actually wage it upon various countries, including two countries, Iraq and Libya, which were suffering under brutal leadership but were also advancing in many ways toward a stable and prosperous situation. And, all the time, our leaders were using some American citizens to wage war upon the entirety of the American citizenry.

I've covered much of this ground before and have little to add. I prefer to get back to my goal of developing ways of thought which can help us, or our descendants, to better shape our multitude of overlapping communities, including those of a political and military nature. Above, I gave some links to relevant essays I've written. In Chapter 506, *Deep States and the Modern American Citizen* for one of my efforts to make larger-scale sense of this bad situation. That chapter points to some of my other efforts to deal with conspiracies in the sense of deep-states or predatory classes. (A little warning: I prefer to speak in terms of classes or institutions and to reserve the word 'conspiracy' for specific criminal projects.)

In Chapter 408, *The Need for Abstractions in Moral Self-understanding*, I discuss the moral insanity which was already well-developed in the New Englanders of the 17th century as they waged war against native Americans, even those who had become Christians, because they hadn't become English middle-class Christians of the Puritan sort. In Chapter 495, *Quietly Charitable or Quietly Murderous But Always Quietly American*, I discuss American moral character in a more recent setting.



# 515 Traditional Morality is Dead, Long Live Traditional Morality: Reformulating Traditional Morality

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1934>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/12/24.]

This chapter is the third and last of a series. The earlier two were Chapter 512, *Traditional Morality is Dead, Long Live Traditional Morality: A World of Evolution and Development* and Chapter 513, *Traditional Morality is Dead, Long Live Traditional Morality: The Dangers of Understanding God's Acts-of-being*.

Now I will write about the greater meaning of this line of thought.

I'm writing in response to Claes Ryn's essay describing how the moral teachings and traditions of the West could re-establish some sort of peace in our world: *The Moral Path to Peace* at <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/the-moral-path-to-peace/>. Some who traveled part of their intellectual journey as I did might ask, "How can you criticize an essay summarizing a clearly articulated and morally well-ordered knowledge of reality, a speculative wisdom with which you claim to largely agree?" I criticize in the same spirit in which I criticize even that Founding Father of the West, St Augustine of Hippo. He was human and made some mistakes but still more importantly: he was a man of the 4th and 5th centuries and we've learned much more than was known to the entirety of the human race in 400AD. Unfortunately, modern conservatives have learned little from modern empirical knowledge (except

perhaps in history and sociology and literature) and have actually helped to enforce the Enlightenment separation of knowledge into inherently separate realms and, thus, fragmenting Creation itself.

But what did he do in his effort to save something of Roman Civilization and all of Christianity as he knew it? At the time of Augustine, the best of pagan thinkers were claiming the fall of Rome and the collapse into barbarism was due to Christian influences which weakened the Roman character. Rather than trying to restore all that had been lost, Augustine met the challenge with courage and honesty. He presented the world with a Christian understanding of history as a linear series of passing entities and events and periods in which the Roman Empire itself was only one of those passing entities. In doing this, he preserved the Christian faith for the West and also preserved much of what was good in Roman and Greek culture in a way that disciplined those noble pagan cultures to future Christian purposes. Christ became the Lord of History and Augustus Caesar was pushed into the background; Virgil eventually served the Christian poet Dante.

In terms of our knowledge and understanding of Creation, the task for Christian thinkers in the modern world is similar but still broader and deeper than that of Augustine of Hippo. Christian understandings of Creation have been devastated, left in ruins, not so much by willful vandalism, though there was some of that, as by true advances in human knowledge in those realms of Creation we can directly explore (biology, physics, history, Biblical exegesis, etc.) and human knowledge of realms of Creation in which we must speculate (metaphysics, mathematics, logic, etc.). As Etienne Gilson claimed: Catholic intellectuals (I'd say all Christian intellectuals) have failed since 1800 to answer the questions raised in the modern world. As Joseph Ratzinger put it: modern Christians have been morally irresponsible in not properly caring for Christian civilization. I have my own ways of discussing this problem and the reader should know beforehand that I speculate that the Church Herself is the primary and central organ of the Body of Christ which is, in this mortal realm and in its ultimate form in Heaven, a completed and perfect human community which is a civilization containing a Church at worship but also much else which is validly human. I also believe the problems started before 1800, showing at least in the persecution of Galileo.

Men, individuals and also the entire species—however defined, are creatures, empirical inhabitants of a world of concrete being though not only concrete being. Still, we as a species have an evolutionary history which is

a bit disturbing in some ways; murder and deceit and thievery are part of human behavior as are self-sacrifice and those random, little acts of charity which smooth our way in a sometime harsh world. We as individuals are sinners, as well as sometimes saints and often potential saints. But there are important details in any answer to such questions as: Why do we murder and steal and break trust in various ways? Is it because we inherited some sort of spiritual blemish due to a fall from grace by the ancestral couple Adam and Eve? Evolutionary theorists and geneticists tell us our last common male ancestor and last common female ancestress probably lived thousands and maybe tens of thousands of years apart. Is it because we're descended from creatures who survived and reproduced with some success in a world with some nasty aspects? We can see our moral and spiritual failings and our corresponding strengths as the result of some complex mixture of traits and instincts and desires rather than as the result of a battle between a little angel and a little demon.

This entire line of thought I've been pursuing has raised questions as to the legitimacy of 'schemas' of understanding as used by Plato and Aristotle and Kant. Can the moral states of men be best, or even competently, understood in terms of virtues or any other such well-defined categories of moral traits? What I've said above would imply a rather strong, "No."

This matters greatly in politics for various reasons, some having to do with observable and measurable differences in ethnic groups which have great implications for political and social and cultural issues. For me, those differences point also to a more complex Body of Christ than has been conjectured before.

In fact, it would seem doubtful there is a homogeneous or uniform 'man' to be described in terms of the tradition. Plato was speaking mostly of Greeks and not so much of Chinese or Africans; something similar can be said of Locke and Kant and most other philosophers who were part of what might simplistically called the schematic tradition. There is actually so much commonality and also so much clear thought of their situations that the best of these philosophers can play a role in understanding a world, indeed an entire Creation, though that world and that Creation must be seen in terms largely alien to most of the great philosophers, from Athens to the modern-day Cambridges.

Man not only has changed over time but man is also really the multitude of men whose characteristics vary over sometimes wide spectrums. There are some ethnic groups where shame holds (at least some Asiatics)

and some where guilt holds (at least Northwestern Europeans). Some behave well when they know their kinsmen, at least, are observing and some struggle to behave well when isolated in the jungle. The first can more easily form great and stable communities and the second tend to such activities as aggressive exploration of the earth's surface. We've seen some of the dangers of the first realized in the extreme conventionalism of China when the Confucian bureaucracy controlled that land in the name of the emperors. We're seeing some of the dangers of the second being realized in the moral and social disintegration of the liberal West. Since we know of no peoples perfectly balanced between individualistic and communal tendencies, we need to accept the historical fact—even if matters could have been different—that we need to work toward the formation of the Body of Christ and the formation of ourselves as members of that Body by way of a messy process involving a spectrum of possibilities in which extremes are sometimes dominant.

See the writings of Peter Frost at <http://www.unz.com/pfrost/> for an accessible entry into the anthropological and genetic work which has been done on these fields. These analyses indicate rather strongly that there are no absolute standards for organizing human communities because human nature, while a coherent concept pointing to a true sort of being, isn't so uniform, isn't so homogeneous, isn't amenable to manipulation by either the warm fuzzy feelings of modern liberals nor by the harder-edged feelings of the followers of Burke nor Kirk nor Locke nor Jefferson nor—most certainly—those of the followers of von Mises. To anticipate a little, Ryn points to the importance of differences in cultures and local traditions but recommends a path for moral reform in the modern world which would be most plausible for those of northwestern European descent. And that probably won't work even for those particular peoples because the West is currently dominated by a self-righteous American nation.

I consider myself to be, without qualification, a defender of Western, Christian Civilization, but I seem, with strong qualifications, to be turning away from much of post-Augustinian ways of thought. First I'll note what would be obvious to any of my steady readers: I do think the citizens of the West have no intention to take up their moral responsibilities to their descendants and to God; as a consequence, I think the Body of Christ will be moving to the great Eurasian civilization whose economic aspects are being consciously shaped by the Chinese, the Russians, and others. This is sad for Americans, but it's the Body of Christ which is of primary importance

and the United States and its citizens are of no greater importance than any other particular nation and people and it is the American people and their leaders who have chosen to turn away from their responsibilities and their debts to pursue delusions of absolute power.

Ryn writes as if he considers Christian morality as binding upon himself and also quotes Jesus: "Take the log out of your own eye first, and then you will be able to see and take the speck out of your brother's eye." And he goes on to speak with great wisdom and a tolerance of, perhaps even a liking or love for, the great variety to be found in men and their various communities:

The notion of universality that I associate with cosmopolitan humanism contains no implication that persons, peoples, and civilizations should conform to a single model of life or that universality can be imposed by means of political engineering. It may be helpful to contrast genuine universality with a type of universalism that today is particularly common and influential in the United States. I am referring to an ideologically intense variant of the Enlightenment mindset that assumes a single political system is desirable and even mandatory for all societies and should be everywhere installed, through military means if necessary. I have called this ideology the new Jacobinism. The French Jacobins summarized their putatively universal principles in the slogan "freedom, equality, and brotherhood." They saw France as the redeemer of nations. The new Jacobins speak of "freedom" and "democracy," and they have anointed the United States.

It is important to understand how radically that form of universalism departs from the older Western tradition in which there is an unsettled balance of the individual, or personal, and the communal in human nature.

The goal is noble, the method for reaching or even understanding the goal is defective. This becomes more clear in later lines in Ryn's essay:

According to the classical and Christian traditions, moral virtue is indistinguishable from personal character. It is first of all a form of self-rule. It means subduing and ordering the

passions. Jacobin virtue, by contrast, is primarily and directly political. It is a sense of moral superiority, of being a benefactor of mankind.

Though recognizing differences in “model[s] of life” and opposing ways of thought which assume “a single political system is desirable and even mandatory for all societies and should be everywhere installed, through military means if necessary,” Ryn advocates an individualistic approach to morality, “moral virtue is indistinguishable from personal character”. To be sure, he points to a true problem in the limited and deformed understanding the Jacobins had of what I call human communal nature. The problem with modern men is not an excessive longing for community; some modern thinkers hold a bad understanding of community in which all which is human is in the political sphere and some reject true community in favor of voluntary or even contractual relationships. As Ryn says, “Jacobin virtue. . . is primarily and directly political.” Our bloated estimation of what is possible by way of politics is a true problem but that indicates not that we should return to “personal character” as the only reality of human moral nature but rather that we should form proper communities in which our individual and communal natures can be properly formed and nurtured.

We men are, in fact, so tied in to communities in our moral and intellectual aspects as to make it difficult, at times, to think how we retain our individuality. I began to develop more clearly my ideas on this issue in Chapter , *Intelligence vs. Intellect* where I was responding to Jacques Barzun’s discussion in *The House of Intellect* [7]. I started my line of thought by responding to Barzun’s understanding of intellect which he stated simply:

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

As part of my response, I claimed that there is a human communal mind and, more generally, human being is both individual and communal. For real and not just a matter of speaking ‘as-if’.

In Chapter 282, *Do We Need Heart and Hands as Well as Mind to Understand Reality?*, I continued to develop my understanding of human being, individual and communal. These ideas are presented in their currently most mature form in *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53].

We do remain individuals while also being fully our communities—both are true in this world only in some sort of extrapolation as confessors and psychiatrists and novelists can tell us. Though there are always the exceptions which prove, that is—test, the rule, personal character and community character move together. This doesn’t mean that all men in the future American states in 1776 were at the same level—the Founding Fathers were not uniformly moral giants but all did display at least the virtue of courage in difficult circumstances. (Though some weren’t particularly brave in the way of serving in the Continental Army but they all risked the hangman’s noose.) What it does mean is that the Founding Fathers, including a disproportionate number who were relative moral giants, were unusual; the American people never chose to even try to emulate men of (real or idealized) public honor and our current mess, as well as earlier messes, are the results of not just objective historical events but also of the lack of American moral character capable of dealing with serious problems or with great wealth and power. This isn’t a weakness which can be overcome by a sudden reform of personal character on the part of millions of individuals. It is a problem which can only be solved by a multi-generational effort on the part of individuals and communities alike, an effort to raise both personal and communal moral character, inch by inch, with the personal sometimes moving ahead and the communal at other times. Such an effort would interfere with our trips to DisneyWorld or our concern for the NFL playoff situation or the latest wonderful television show about shallow, unlikable, and morally disordered human creatures.

We Christians believe we are images of God, He who is Father and Son and Holy Spirit in one God. Each of the three Persons remains a true individual while each being fully God. I’ve developed a modern Christian understanding of Creation by taking the Western theologies and philosophies and empirical sciences seriously. Under this understanding, I claim that those who will be saved and share God’s life will remain fully themselves while being fully the true and perfect man, the Body of Christ, or

even—Christ.

Ryn, and most conservatives who may be Christians or have at least an appreciation for the Christian foundations of the West, know this. And they can't take the bull by the horns. Ryn speaks of a "cosmopolitan humanism" which is a gathering of peoples and not a mob of uniform carbon-based entities. But it also isn't anything like the Body of Christ which is an image of God in His unity as its members are images of the divine person who is the Son of God. With an imperfectly Christian understanding of community, Ryn then speaks of moral virtue as if each of us stands free from the communities to which we belong, though those communities remain important in some sense subsumed under the term 'cosmopolitan humanism'.

No.

The West was and is merely a fraud if it isn't the product of a 1500 year long period in the life of the Body of Christ, a period in which that Body was being formed by evolutionary and developmental processes from a large number of human beings in their individual being as well as their being as members of overlapping human communities formed of families and ethnic genetic-lines, religious communities and vocational or professional communities, neighbors and fellow-citizens of more or less coherent nations or other political entities.

We are bound to these communities of individuals and communities. We are shaped by them. We are them and they are us. We are Christ and He is us.

I think the Body of Christ to be a complex entity indeed in which each individual member is also a member of many of the communities which function as organs.

The Christian Church is the central organ, but not the entirety of the Body. The reasoning toward this claim is found in my various writings including the freely downloadable book referenced above: *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53].

I welcome the idea that other groups, certainly Jews, will also become part and parts of this complete and perfect human community which is also Christ, the Son of God. That is to say, I think the idea is plausible and worthy of exploration.

Yet, each person in each community has to live and speak in specific terms if we are to diagnose and heal our civilization and such a healing—to a Christian—is a return to the path which can be traveled by men of goodwill and which leads to salvation; God is, of course, free to put some on

other paths where they have no direct access to human means of salvation. There is also the optimistic idea that men of weak good-will and even some rebels might well travel with the pilgrim Body of Christ even into the world of the resurrected. Do we retain a pagan view of being or do we adopt the view proclaimed by St John the Evangelist and rediscovered by 'radical' thinkers in quantum mechanics? (See two early chapters for the meaning of this statement: Chapter 156, *A Christian's View of Einstein and Bohr's debate on the meaning of reality*, and Chapter 157, *Quantum Mechanics and Moral Formation*.)

Civilization is what shapes us, what lives inside our minds and souls. Civilization is a narrative which tells us what it all means, including our lives individual and communal. Civilization, and not just the Christian Church, is the Body of Christ in its mortal, pilgrim form. A proper Christian civilization would be the best possible earthly school to prepare us for Heaven. And, finally, the Body of Christ in the world of the resurrected will be much like a completed and perfected civilization.

We Christians or Jews or Moslems or other believers in a personal God Who is concerned with this world are bound to very explicitly put God in the center of our thoughts and our communities and our civilizations. Since we Christians believe not just in a Creator but in a Creator who became man, immanent in His own Creation, then we particularly are bound to pay attention to empirical reality, including all of the abstract forms of knowledge derived from that reality. We must shape our understanding of human nature using the best of modern empirical knowledge, however disconcerting at times.



# 516 The Struggle Between the Individual and the Community in the Body of Christ

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1956>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/01/20.]

A large number of Americans, leading good lives in most ways, believe the United States is and always was a champion of justice and charity towards all nations when we really believe that the only good life is one ordered to the individualistic tendencies so attractive to those descended from the residents of northwestern Europeans. These tendencies were sharpened into truly dangerous weapons, used to sunder the individual from his communities, by a host of thinkers from Hobbes through Voltaire through Mill, father and son, through the classical liberals of the late 1800s and on to various barbarians home-grown in the hothouses of the modern West, no longer describable as Christian and not unified nor coherent nor complete enough to even be described as a civilization.

Oddly enough, the basic principles of the radical individualists were set in concrete as the evidence started coming in that they were wrong. In particular, the work of evolutionary theorists and historians and anthropologists and geneticists has tended to a rich and complex, and as-yet partially ordered, view of man not so much different in outline from that found in the Bible and in the great literary works of the ancient and Medieval and modern world. Men of the West, especially the Anglo-American regions, tend strongly to think, in a peculiar fit of self-righteous bigotry, that our ways of living are appropriate for and desired by all human beings when our ways are in a state of disorder as individuals, once the source of the creativity and

energy of the West, have been set loose from their communities and have run amok, having broken the ties to Western tradition which once nurtured that creativity and that energy and guided them toward good goals.

I've stated the problem in terms more or less forged by traditionalist critics of the modern West, but much of my work, in nonfiction writings and novels, is aimed at showing our situation is far more dire and the problems go even more deeply into our individual selves and our communities.

There is a conflict which is part of the evolution and development of human being, individual and communal, which is obvious in the 20th and 21st century in a particular and concrete manifestation. The West in recent centuries has been dominated by Northwestern Europeans who are now known to be strongly individualistic due likely to co-evolution of their genes and culture. A long history, including the response to Mao's policies, would indicate the Chinese have traits leading to the opposite problem of communal human being threatening to swallow the individual human being.

Those who know a little of modern geometry and topology can think of it in the terms I'm trying to develop into an appropriately rich and complex model, quantitative and qualitative, of human nature and maybe of all concrete created being. I'll present imagery in terms of a vague and necessarily simplistic model in two dimensions—the surface of a sphere with a bit of raggedness going into the third dimension.

Individual human beings can be seen as sheets—think of us as more or less flexible pieces of sheet metal. We are to be found on the surface of a sphere and making contact with other sheets in ways good or bad or mixed. We have to think of the surface of globe as truly being formed as the individuals form. We also have to bear in mind that this is one level of community and also one level of individual as he could develop in his primary communities of family and other local communities. We also have to bear in mind that we might sometimes have to imagine the globe's surface as being too small for the individuals and more local communities trying to find space and sometimes too large so that we can visualize isolated individuals or communities. Keep these complications in mind but I'll speak mostly as if we're dealing with simple and fully-defined individuals (being tangent to the globe's surface at a point which 'locates' the individuals) and just one layer of community. [The stuff about 'tangent' is very sloppy language and needs to be refined by use of some sort of qualitative limit process which are similar in some sense to the epsilon-delta limits of calculus. Some of this language has been developed in modern physics where 'small-enough'

regions of spacetime do have separable space and time and follow the dynamics of Newtonian physics. These small-enough regions are tangent to surfaces like that of a hypersphere but attach to that hypersphere in a way defined by the business of small-enough. In physics, the hypersphere of interest usually has spacetime rather than space and time and follows the dynamics of Einstein's general theory of relativity.]

In terms of this physical image, groups of human beings which are excessively individualistic make bad contact with others in their community and with their community or even nearly no contact in the extreme case of some mental or emotional disorders. Groups of human beings which are excessively communal make contact too easily in a way that produces smooth boundaries and uncertainty as to the start and stop of the individual.

There are two major groups of tasks for those who feel a calling to help the Body of Christ to better form in this mortal realm or for those who simply wonder, "What the hell is this guy up to?" First, philosophers and scientists and creative writers and others must develop this sort of a model (or maybe different but with similar potential descriptive power) so that we can understand what we human beings are and what our possibilities really are—as we can currently see them. I think I provided a solid introduction, though no explicit model, in my freely downloadable book: *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53]. The second group of tasks is the practical task of working towards some goals in various communities and with various degrees of certainty and pure hope. Experimentation would seem to be much in need in the upcoming generations and that experimentation might proceed along with or even ahead of efforts to understand and describe.

In these terms, excessively individualistic groups of human beings, seem to be bad in a clear way but excessively communal groups of human beings seem not so bad in any clear way. I'm sure I've been biased in my discussions because I come from one of those excessively individualistic peoples and I'm trying to work my way to an understanding which might produce a better balancing, one equivalent in many ways to views found in the Bible and in the works of some great thinkers, certainly the Jewish sages so deservedly beloved by Jacob Neusner who saw, in particular, the disciplined emotions of men as being the binding forces of human communities—see Chapter 282, *Do We Need Heart and Hands as Well as Mind to Understand Reality?*. Several of Neusner's books can be found in the bibliography to this book.

Strong individuals, who remain separate selves even as they become fully

their communities, are needed as a Christian would assume from Trinitarian theology where Father and Son and Holy Spirit remain fully their individual selves even as they are fully God. These sorts of statements communicate some important core truth but they are too simple even for the reality of human being, individual and communal; certainly too simple for the large and complex human communities which have emerged in recent centuries. Yet, they are a starting point for the beginning of an effort to understand human being more exactly and more accurately, in appropriately rich and complex terms. To a Christian, the Body of Christ in its perfected and completed form must have an exact and accurate self-understanding and human beings, Christian human beings and perhaps others, who will have a future as part of the Body of Christ when it fully shares the life of God must play their role in all of this by proper development of powerful individual and communal minds, hearts, and hands which will lead to that self-understanding.

I'll also suggest that the major cause of the often violent turmoil in human communities of our age is caused by this particular imbalance. I can see the possibility of moving forward, of realizing an overarching community—a civilization or prefiguration of the Body of Christ—on the great Eurasian landmass, reaching from China and her sphere of direct influence through Central Asia and Russia and perhaps other parts of Eastern Europe and perhaps even ending at the British Isles. Other regions of the world may participate to various degrees, perhaps even the United States once it is taken down a few notches and the juvenile leaders of the various political and economic and cultural and religious communities are replaced by adult leaders who are willing to take on the Augean stables of a promising country sunk into moral and cultural rot. But, a people gets the leaders it deserves and the American people will have to develop some true moral character before they could get any leaders with true moral character.

# 517 Islam, Violence, Repressive Governments, and All That.

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1973>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/02/11.]

In the article, *The Return of Fear* at <http://www.unz.com/pfrost/the-return-of-fear/>, Peter Frost, an anthropologist, gives a few facts which don't argue fully against the current belief among Americans and Europeans that Muslim men are prone to violence and fanaticism; those facts do tell us of the ethnic basis for this inclination. Indonesians—88% Muslim—have low rates of violent crime, as do other east Asians. It's also been known since at least the writings of the Ibn Khaldun (the great Islamic historian and philosopher of the 14th century; see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ibn\\_Khaldun](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ibn_Khaldun)) that some of the ethnic groups which took up Islam are inclined to violence and fanaticism. Frost quotes Khaldun as claiming Arabs are a savage nation often making a living by looting—the early books of the Bible tell us the same thing.

Evolution is for real; genes are also for real. The inclination of a lot of modern human beings is to think those parts of life on earth are just so interesting when they tell us why the dinosaurs either disappeared or flew away, how giraffes got their long necks and zebras their stripes. We haven't learned to think in terms of modern biological science when it comes to human beings, nor do many appreciate the ongoing effects of evolution and genes when it comes to human beings. Even readers of the *Dune* novels by Frank Herbert (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank\\_Herbert](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_Herbert)) novels don't seem to appreciate the ways in which a desert environment can select for a violent form of human personality which is radically individualistic but also inclined to accept the harsh discipline of warrior bands or

even conquering armies.

So, it seems to me to be wrong to assume it's Islam which causes the inclinations of Arabs—Khaldun also mentioned Berbers and other North African nations as being inclined to violence and fanaticism. It seems more likely that the Arabs and similar peoples have retained the traits of the desert nomadic ancestors. The 'early adapters' of Islam, including the founder, could be seen as regressing to an earlier form of Hebraic monotheism. That earlier form of Hebraic monotheism is more suited to a people who are yet desert nomads—at least in their inherited inclinations and aspirations. Such a religion would collaborate with a desert environment to both nurture aggressive tendencies and also reward aggressive men, desert warriors, with greater reproductive opportunities. Such societies will also tend to provide better reproductive opportunities for women who are submissive to these violent men, even strongly supportive of violent sons and husbands and brothers. Over time, as violent inclinations are reinforced in men, the women are likely to become more deeply, more 'genetically' submissive.

It would not be wise for a people with more peaceful inclinations to invite large numbers of a more violent people to settle in their midst. The peaceful people might become the victims even if in a great majority.

A violent people isn't necessarily an evil people and they, women as well as men, might well think Western men to be womanish and Western women to be mannish. And a peaceful people can be evil. Trivial truths. The more important truth is that a people with men of violent inclinations will need strong, centralized governments to allow the building of larger-scale and more prosperous societies; otherwise, the men of violent inclinations would cause massive disruptions and distrust. Without a strong ruler, such men are much better at looting than they are at even administering a conquered people.

To exaggerate, but not by much: it takes a Genghis Khan to rule a nation (or multiples nations) of desert nomads. We of the West do not wish to live under the type of repressive government which is needed to bring peace when there are many men in the population with inclinations to violence and fanaticism. Nor do we wish to live in a society with chaos and violence on the streets. So why do we open up our countries to immigration by those who don't have inclinations compatible with ours and with the sorts of societies we wish to build and to live in? Why do we send our armies overseas to destroy the sorts of repressive governments which have brought

order and prosperity to these countries with men inclined to violence and fanaticism?



# 518 Is the United States a Parasite Feeding on the Rest of Humanity?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1978>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/02/17.]

Albert Jay Nock wrote of a friend of his who had spent some years in the United States and was returning to Europe. This friend spoke of his admiration of many American characteristics, but said he was disturbed on realizing that Americans are the first people in history to pass directly from barbarism to decadence without ever passing through a state of civilization. Nock and his friends didn't see the real danger in this sad state of affairs—as the wealthiest and most energetic frontier region of the West, the United States had a chance to take on the role of leader of the West, the role of nurturing and, in fact, rebuilding the West which was already showing the wear and tear of dealing with the Industrial Revolution followed by the less promising conversion of parts of the economy to financial, bank-based capitalism and the parallel conversion of the productive parts of the economy to a sort of monopoly capitalism allied with government regulators. But that wasn't all. Economic problems, usually opportunities missed or misused, were not the entirety of the reason for that wear and tear on the West. Not by a long shot. Christian leaders, ecclesiastical and cultural and intellectual, had failed to produce a new understanding of Creation which reconciled modern empirical knowledge with Christian beliefs. Leaders and shapers of opinion and great practitioners in the fields of literature and science and philosophy and history and so on achieved, at best, partial success dealing with the problems and opportunities of the Enlightenment

era and the succeeding centuries; their success was limited partly by the cowardly and faithless failures of Christians who loudly claimed to be brave and strong in their faith, but failed to face up to the new knowledge of the world and more as being knowledge of some of God's thoughts manifested as created being.

As the Catholic and Lutheran and Anglican and Calvinist churches had become corrupted in their own ways, they had turned inward, no longer in fruitful conflict with non-Christian peoples; Christian thought and customs began to soften and to simplify in various ways. When we Christians had engaged other peoples in fruitful and mostly peaceful ways, their very existence as well as their specific beliefs and intellectual or cultural traditions, even their personalities and ways of life, had been a spur to Christian understanding of a greater part of God's Creation, a part which wasn't and isn't us. They spurred us on in ways somewhat similar to a thorn in the flesh but should have been experienced as similar to the frustrations of trying to explain difficult thoughts and feelings to a good friend over a mug of beer or a glass of port.

The ancient Fathers of the Church developed the theologies we falsely think to be transparently true to human vision and they developed them in conflict and in fruitful collaboration with both pagan thinkers and with those who were seen, truly or falsely, as having strayed from Christian truth. For example, Augustine of Hippo developed a Christian understanding of history (largely still plausible and fruitful) in respectful conflict with both the traditional pagan idea of history as being cyclical and also in respectful conflict with the ideas of post-Constantinian pagan thinkers who had argued that Rome had decayed and was collapsing because of Christianity.

Many of the problems of the modern West come from those successes of Christian thinkers from ancient times and the Medieval centuries and, to a lesser extent, the early centuries of the so-called Modern Age. To the heirs of those earlier Christians, all of Creation seemed transparent to examination by Christian leaders, ecclesiastical or intellectual, and the Protestant Reformation didn't even shake this confidence that God's Creation was understood fully and was subject to imprisonment to the pages of textbooks—the conflicts between Catholics and others concerned other matters of apparently greater importance than the understanding of God's acts as Creator, matters such as control and ownership of various assets including entire countries.

Meanwhile, as the story goes and it's mostly true to reality, Galileo and

his successors headed out to explore those parts of Creation which were subject to exploration by their limited tools. Galileo was himself a follower of the Catholic tradition of respect for empirical reality, a tradition given us by Augustine and Jerome, Anselm and Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, and so on. Over time, as Popes and bishops and Catholic professors, and their Lutheran and Anglican and Calvinist counterparts, stuck to politics and financial matters, an implicit truce came into being: theology and much of philosophy and parts of history would separate from physics and mathematics and biology and other parts of history and of philosophy. If any conflicts arose, everybody would refuse to engage in fruitful encounters; all parties would instead wave their hands spasmodically and sing in unison: "There are no conflicts between religion and science." That is, all would agree to an unfruitful misunderstanding of Creation and of human knowledge. This agreement was extended to Jewish ideas and the ideas of other peoples; we extended to them the charity of respecting their ideas by ignoring them and saying, "There is no conflict between the ideas of men of good will, no matter the ideas." We even extended to them the further charity of thinking it possible they could be like us, think like us, feel like us, at least in the most important areas of human life, such as finance and politics.

It's most obvious in the Catholic Church—partly because it's more intact than most Christian churches in 2015, but all Christians accepted in public the fragmentation of knowledge of God's Creation in such a way as to imply strongly a fragmentation of the created being of which we have knowledge. Inside our own classrooms or sacred spaces, we talk and act as if the binding power of our small stock of Christian revelations applies to the entirety of our particular tradition of understanding the world, of writing greeting-card poetry and making elevator music as well as engaging in philosophical speculation or explorations of history which are far more shallow than what I saw in my childhood in old-fashioned Bugs Bunny and Mr Peabody cartoons. Knowledge became unified in a horrible and wrongful way: Christians forgot that all knowledge concerns God's direct revelations or those of His revelations which are His effects in the world as some Medieval thinkers put it in partial understanding of the greater truth of God's absolute power over all created being. Knowledge became unified in the mind of the knower, priest or professor, rather than being unified as a mostly communal image or mostly communal encapsulation of created being, one subject to change as we come to know more about God's effects

in Creation, or His acts-of-being as I prefer.

Americans are an extreme example of moral and intellectual and cultural disorder. We act as if believing that “I absorbed all I ever need to know from the fluids in my mother’s womb.” Not only are Americans not civilized, but we have increasingly set ourselves, as a country and as individuals, apart from and above the rest of Western Civilization and, indeed, all of humanity. If once we Americans were the pioneers on an important frontier region of the West, we are now an aggressive occupier, claiming Europe as our own. We need Europe for the deeper culture we can’t provide through our pep-rally religions nor through our utilitarian science nor, most certainly, through our mass-marketed literature and cinema and music. It’s not only Europe that we claim. The entire globe seems to be a bauble for us to play with, as if we were the god-like star-child from *2001: A Space Odyssey*. We have done our best to occupy much of the earth, at least in the sense of having soldiers stationed at about a thousand bases in dozens of countries. We need the entire world for the wealth which can support our way of life, including our grotesquely oversized military, and we can no longer generate enough wealth to even keep our large middle-class consuming strongly. Perhaps we feel an even stronger desire to control the entire earth and all its peoples to justify our sense of being the point of it all, both the end-product of biological evolution and the highest of all divine goals. More simply and more in line with the degraded ways of American thought in 2015: We Americans are the ones who got it right. Whatever “it” is.

I’m going to momentarily step to the side to point to John Hawk’s commentary on some recent work in experimental and speculative evolutionary science: *Notable: Coevolution drives biological complexity* at <http://johnhawks.net/weblog/topics/theory/population-genetics/coevolution-complexity-zaman-2015.html>. Professor Hawks tells us: “One of the most interesting parts of the paper involved removing the parasite from the population, after which the host complexity began to decrease. It’s similar to classic selection experiments, in which the selection condition is removed or reversed partway through.”

It seems to me that one way to look at the global situation in 2015 is: the United States has become a parasite preying upon the culture of Europe and upon the wealth of nearly all countries. In addition, we look for human energy and developed intelligence in immigrants from other countries, largely because American culture sucks the souls and minds and moral characters

out of our youth—even those who are good at learning from textbooks and can spit back the heavily schematized and lifeless knowledge on classroom tests and even those who can do quite well in making money on Wall St or in the laboratories and workshops of our high-tech electronic and medical industries.

We Americans need blood to keep going, rich blood of a sort we no longer have, not even in our children born with high spirits and serious talents, not after they've been raised on television and cellphones and adult-supervised games. We have allowed our own blood to be sucked out by an exploitive ruling class and we are allowing the blood of our children to be sucked out. We need fresh, rich blood and we have to go overseas to get it or, when it comes to sports, we have to go into the inner-cities or even to such places as the Dominican Republic.

We Americans need to gain natural resources cheaply because that is how we became wealthy; we have not yet learned how to work intelligently as opposed to hitting the lottery, whether the lottery run by the government or the one which is run by the contingent forces which put pools of black gold below some acres and not below others.

We invade. We, being incompetent as conquerors and looters, devastate countries and destroy infrastructure and kill large numbers of innocents. We destroy \$10 billion in assets for every \$1 billion we manage to steal. We who were once the best-liked of individuals and sometimes even the most highly admired of nations have become hated and feared. We're not feared because we fight or rule effectively. We're feared because our leaders are morally perverse juveniles with lots of firepower and we, the American people, join them in their moral perversion. We aren't the Macedonians or the Romans or the Franks or the Normans; we are Moe as Bismarck, Larry as Napoleon, and Curly as Patton.

And, so it is, that I come to my conclusion by a path long and twisted in many ways: the United States and Americans as individuals have become the thorn in the flesh of the pilgrim Body of Christ, that is, we have become the parasite or opponent or accuser who works for God in the negative way 2 Corinthians 12:6–9. We Americans, in our narcissism and selfishness, have taken on the role of the opponent that many peoples are uniting against. We are enemies of the pilgrim Body of Christ, enemies of Creation, enemies of God to the extent that the Body of Christ, Creation, and God don't serve American desires. We would rule all in our hubris, would subjugate God Himself to our schemes and plans.

And we Americans had the chance to take on the noble role of leader of Christian Civilization, of the Body of Christ. We could have put a part of our once promising, if immature, individual and communal selves into the Body of Christ, could have shaped it in an interplay between God's purposes and our personal desires and talents, as once did Jews and Greeks and Romans and Armenians and Syrians and even the Germanic peoples when still barbarians. Now, the pilgrim Body of Christ will continue its journey through this world bearing American marks only in the form of wounds and damaged organs. With all that we have to be ashamed of—the ethnic cleansing of native Americans, the brutal war in the Philippines after we pretended to free them, Dresden and Hiroshima and Vietnam and Iraq and Afghanistan and Pakistan and Libya and others—this is by far the worst of American sins: we claim to be a God-fearing people and we are waging war against God's Creation and the Body of His Son.

## 519 Hannah Arendt and the American Imperial Crisis

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1992>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/03/19.]

With most of my books packed away and not easily accessible, I'm going to let my sometimes misfiring memory have a partially free rein. I remember that Hannah Arendt (see [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Hannah\\_Arendt](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Hannah_Arendt) had once asserted—I believe in *Life of the Mind* [5]—that Americans (by circa 1970) had already made political decisions which would force us to a crisis point in a generation or so (which would be circa 2000-2005). We Americans would be forced to either voluntarily fall back to a state of relative impoverishment or become more openly an empire and start stealing what we could no longer produce by our own efforts. In her earlier analyses of Adolph Eichmann, the master-planner behind the Nazi work-camps and the round-ups of Jews and others, Professor Arendt had argued that he was a nice man without real moral character and then had claimed this was true of Americans. Yet, she thought that the American people would accept a partial collapse of American wealth and power rather than becoming a looting and marauding empire. I'm not sure why a hardheaded thinker would imagine “moral niceness” to be adequate for making such a difficult decision, but, as it turned out, there was no explicit decision of the sort made nor were the common folk of the United States involved in the decision which was made by our ruling class.

She was certainly right that the American Colossus of 1940-1970 was beginning to lose his power to shape events throughout the entire world—the United States has retained plenty of power to cause trouble throughout the world, sometimes to the benefit of our ruling class but sometimes not

even to their benefit. Our leaders are Moe, Larry, and Curly pretending to be Alexander, Napoleon, and Bismarck.

Yet, how right Arendt was about the relative loss of American wealth and power even if she was somewhat wrong in thinking we would refuse to steal, for example, the portable wealth of the former Soviet countries or the oil of Iraq. We Americans might not be so good at this piracy business—the country as a whole doesn't seem to benefit much from the rather inept efforts of the Three Stooges in Southwestern Asia nor from our bullying of countries all around the globe. At the same time, various parasitical creatures and institutions—politicians and bankers and think-tankers and aerospace executives—make out well in the short-run. The American people pay good money for the chance to damage their own country as well as other countries; the American people make sure the profits remain high at Lockheed and General Dynamics and the zoo of mercenary armies we've spawned while immense amounts of money and human blood—American and foreign—are poured out on the sands of Southwest Asia.

So, what happened?

The American people didn't exactly demand our country invade various countries around the world and commit miscellaneous acts of financial terrorism and thievery in still more countries, but some did and the rest mostly went along. Our leaders made it clear not too many years after our retreat from Vietnam that they would return to the struggle throughout the world and would fight to the last drop of blood of the last American soldier to maintain that ruling class's power and wealth, though some of us only saw this in the rearview mirror and some still refuse to see it. (Some would claim that Nixon, when he took the dollar off the gold standard, was risking the prosperity of the common American citizen in a gamble to maintain the power and wealth of the American ruling class; I don't know if he consciously did so, but the general suggestion would seem quite plausible.)

Of course, there are reasons for serious historians to write 900 page books about topics such as this. The desires of the individuals and more particular groups in the American ruling class to create a New World Order where American hegemony was to be maintained forever was, so far as I can tell, the driving force in the construction of an imperialistic monster of sorts, a monster which spouts pious words about spreading democracy and respect for human rights as it wreaks havoc upon regions of dense civilian populations, using brutal attacks of modern weaponry such as bombs designed to suck the lungs out of nearby creatures and cluster bombs containing bomblets

which are covered with brightly colored plastic, looking very attractive to children, and holding explosive charges intended to maim rather than kill so that the victims will remain burdens to their communities. But we're too Christian to chop off heads. I don't think God is fooled by our pious and antinomian pretensions—see Chapter 320, *In a Complex World, the Community Must be Smart for the Individual to Be Smart* or the earlier Chapter 495, *Quietly Charitable or Quietly Murderous But Always Quietly American*.

After destroying a country's infrastructure, sanitary and medical systems and schools and many residences, the moral giants who rule the United States will often try to rebuild the country to their own needs; they haven't quite gotten that part right even though they had mastered the arts and sciences of destruction.

There are many doctoral dissertations and many history books, academic and popular, to go before we can claim we have a good handle on exactly how this moral and political disaster has occurred, a disaster which probably will lead to a (perhaps) temporary end to the levels of American power and wealth necessary to support our accustomed standards of living. The activities of that giant juvenile delinquent known as the United States have certainly brought about millions of deaths and the destruction of vast amounts of infrastructures of countries struggling toward prosperity—and sometimes not doing so well in their struggles, especially when the American Colossus comes along to stomp on their collective faces.



# 520 Still Quietly American, We Destroy What is Not Us or Ours

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1995>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/03/31.]

See Chapter 495, *Quietly Charitable or Quietly Murderous But Always Quietly American* for my take on the topic of one important aspect of American moral character. Solzhenitsyn had a similar take and summarized the situation as: Americans are a uniquely evil people. He was speaking of large-scale American crimes against Russian POWs and refugee peoples in the two or so years after World War II. See the Wikipedia entry on *Operation Keelhaul* at [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Operation\\_Keelhaul](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Operation_Keelhaul) for a description of those crimes, which apparently devastated a number of young American soldiers who had to carry out these crimes against civilians including children and then returned to the US to be told, "Shut up, we're celebrating how wonderful we Americans are and don't want to hear about it." I've listened sympathetically over the years to men only a few years older than me who had tried without success to speak of crimes they had committed in a war, that on the peoples of Vietnam, which was rudderless in Washington except for some guidance from McNamara's computers and was often—though there were honorable exceptions—poorly commanded on the ground. Those returning veterans had too often heard, "Shut up! It's in the past, so learn to live with it." And so it was that we've not healed ourselves from the real Vietnam Syndrome—the unwillingness to honestly evaluate our own actions—so much as we've repeated mistakes and crimes we refuse to even acknowledge.

And now for a take on the situation by a brave and honorable soldier who was a Green Beret combat officer in Vietnam and has served since

then in various ways, including high-level work in military intelligence and in mixed roles (combat/intelligence) as a military attache. Col Pat Lang, US Army (ret) describes himself as a rough boy, a man who can fight and kill with detachment so long as he thinks it morally proper to do so. Read a very brief biographical sketch here: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W.\\_Patrick\\_Lang](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W._Patrick_Lang); Col Lang deserves a lot more than that and the United States, and all our victims around the world, would have been well-served if Col Lang had received the respect and hearing he deserved on various matters of national security, especially in matters having to do with Southwest Asia and contiguous regions. (But he has wise and insightful things to say about various situations in the world, including the dangerous mess we Americans have made in Ukraine.)

So it isn't too surprising that, in a recent essay, *The US as Shiva, Lord of Destruction and Renewal* at [http://turcopolier.typepad.com/sic\\_semper\\_tyrannis/2015/03/the-us-as-shiva-lord-of-destruction-and-renewal.html](http://turcopolier.typepad.com/sic_semper_tyrannis/2015/03/the-us-as-shiva-lord-of-destruction-and-renewal.html), Col Lang took the American people, as a nation and as individuals, to task for... Well, his concluding line is: "In pursuit of perfection in human society, we are making deserts so that we can call them Peace." Some of those deserts were once filled with human beings and some were even on their way to being prosperous societies with some serious possibility of peace and good moral order.

But read the entire essay. It's short and packs a punch, at least to someone who knows even a little about history and about the American activities in recent decades. It's a horrible story of a country once promising though always dangerous in its self-righteousness but, more recently, gone horribly bad, a country once well-liked and admired throughout much of the world and now a country increasingly feared, hated, and distrusted.

For those who like to examine the roots of a problem, I can recommend one of my own essays included in this book as Chapter 408, *The Need for Abstractions in Moral Self-understanding*. I point to bad signs which showed themselves right from the early decades of the New England colonies by exploring the attitudes of New Englanders toward the native Americans. Many critics have seen the problem of American bigotry toward other people and peoples and the hatred we show toward them when they don't act as we think they should. Usually, people think the problem is best solved by concrete means, including allowing radically different peoples into the United States to live and by replacing soldiers by medical or

religious missionaries. Against this view, I argue that even the very intelligent and well-educated Puritan elite showed an all-too American incapacity to engage in an inadequate abstraction of moral and other understandings of the world. As Melville and Hawthorne and others have pointed out, we Americans don't approve of the real world which was created by God; we prefer the one which floated around inside the communal mind of the Puritans of New England in those days and now floats (in somewhat different form) inside the communal mind of nearly all American citizens in this year of 2015.

Proper action in a complex world must be founded upon a proper, necessarily abstract, understanding of that world. Inadequate abstractions led the early New Englanders to improper action, but the effort to act as if the world is simple will simply lead to us acting as if barbarians who would enforce simplicity upon a complex world.



# 521 Liberalism and the Decay of the West

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2043>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/05/05.]

By “liberalism,” I mean a closely related set of systems of freedom of a specific sort, those emphasizing and even ‘enforcing’ an individualism which in its moderate form is compatible with the traits of many north-western Europeans and fewer other Europeans and—for the most part—far fewer others. [An example of enforcing individualism would be changes to property laws or inheritance laws to take away family powers and rights and create only judicial power and individual rights.]

In a sense, this essay is something of a fantasia, if not an outright fantasy, but it is a fantasia or fantasy which serves truth by writing of one decay process among several. For example, much of the larger-scale destruction of the West has been the results of actions taken not by economic liberals but rather by families or ‘gangs’ which are often from the established power-elite but sometimes from outsiders—there are feudal aspects but the modern West, until recently, has been too dynamic for any rigid feudalistic structure. Even the wealthy and powerful men who formed dynasties and companies of vassals lasting at least a couple of generations have had to compromise to some extent with a society dominated by liberals ranging from collectivist liberals to libertarians. There are many liberals lying between those extremes as well as a number of conservatives or traditionalists who hold some liberal beliefs even beyond the handful which are truths to be found in the Bible and other ancient writings or traditions. All of these liberals are ideologically closer to each other than they are to those who think in terms of family wealth and power.

In addition there is the complication that liberalism has likely proven to be of some use to those who are more family-centered or even feudalistic. Close-knit units would be devastatingly effective in a war-zone where the enemy soldiers were fighting as individuals seeking their own survival and their own prosperity.

I'll bypass that greater reality to write of the liberalism of the early John D Rockefeller and the railroad magnates before they discovered how readily governments could be used to restrict access to markets. I'll write as if the Rockefellers and Harrimans and Fords and Paynes and Whitneys and Walkers (including the Bushes) are naught but households from which individuals leave to pursue their own goals and interests and to which they return home to eat a good meal and socialize before resting up so they might pursue their individual careers or interests the next day.

Mostly, I'll write of the liberalism of those conditioned to act as free individuals who truly "pursue their own goals and interests." And I'll freely admit that this liberalism has worked very much to seemingly good ends for much of the past few centuries. But freedoms were the goal and there were, and are, no logical constraints on the critique of power of communities over individuals (including the power of a ruling class over an enslaved class). The individual freedoms of liberalism became absolute moral goods, rather than goods within the moral order of greater communities, and many things, even marriages and the resulting families, were sacrificed to these greater goods. The decay processes powered by Western liberalism worked far more slowly than those powered by various flavors of Marxism but it remains possible the resulting decay was deeper and the path back to well-ordered and properly prosperous communities will be steeper and take longer to travel than the paths Russia and China are currently traveling.

Human being is what it is, what it was shaped to be by evolutionary forces acting in varying contexts throughout the world. Those evolutionary forces act in response to specific environments and not to select traits according to some philosophical program. If entities in this world are entangled with each other rather than being isolated, then we work from that point rather than ignoring reality and positing a complex entity created as if by magic, an entity born with a talent for freedoms not otherwise found in this world.

Of course, natural selection doesn't force any living entity upon any one course. There will generally be more than one set of responses which can lead to survival of a family line. Along with the varying environments of

the earth, this results in some variety of human traits. Anthropologists have found some general rules including these two which relate to agricultural activities and which seem to offer insight into the spectrum of human possibilities:

1. Grain-farmers are relatively more individualistic.
2. Rice-farmers are relatively more communalistic.

Northern Europeans are largely descended from populations which were selected in agricultural communities which depended strongly on grain. Northwestern Europeans are said by some modern anthropologists and geneticists to be even more individualistic than their cousins to the east in Northern Europe. It is even said that these Northwestern Europeans can be identified, perhaps defined, by their unique marriage habits—late marriages and higher rates of unmarried men and women and etc. Given such peoples, the political theories of Locke and Jefferson and others, the economic theories of Smith and others, and the resulting, full-blown Classical Liberalism of Bastiat and Mill and von Mises and many others, have strong initial plausibility. (See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical\\_liberalism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_liberalism) for a discussion of this way of thought and attitude.) At the same time, we have to remember that these thinkers all lived in the modern age in which empirical exploration of this world was progressing rapidly and the most basic levels of reality were shown to be not quite, in some cases—not nearly, what they had been thought to be. This is a complex story in which some lines of empirical thought were adopted or at least celebrated only when useful to the political or cultural reformers or agitators of that day. On the whole, there was—to say the least—inadequate allowance for new discoveries about the nature of space and time and matter, human origins and the resulting nature of modern human beings, abstract and at least contingently absolute truths accessible to the human mind.

In broad terms, Christians and non-Christians in the West—including the main thinkers of Classical Liberalism have done their best to protect their favorite assumptions about this world, including human being, in order to protect their favorite doctrines. Sometimes, this protection was little more than willful blindness toward empirical knowledge not fully compatible with their favorite doctrines and sometimes that empirical knowledge seemed to strongly contradict those doctrines. Christians, following

Augustine—see Chapter 631, *Lost in a Sexually Polymorphous Cosmos*, saw men as creatures with a supernatural origin and a supernatural component and many modern intellectuals, including the main figures of Classical Liberalism continue to see men as having natures, minds and desires, which are universal and beyond the reach of what is merely empirical, especially when various local manifestations of human being seem to be outside the capture of a single universal model.

For most Christians, it's true everywhere and always that men are fallen creatures with transcendental souls because Adam and Eve were ensouled and in a state of grace and we are merely dirtied images of such blessed creatures and thus men of all ages since that (admittedly mythical but "meaningful") event are just as Adam and Eve were after their fall; so it is that Latin Americans and Africans are just potential middle-class Americans no different from the descendants of those who shaped this country to their inherited traits and the cultures and political systems built by ancestors who were at least developing those traits; so it is that Christians no longer are content to go to impoverished countries to help those peoples to improve their lot and instead bring them over here that they might realize their true potential as American liberals; so it is that any Amerindians or Latin Americans or Africans who don't take to our ways are defective human beings—see Chapter 408, *The Need for Abstractions in Moral Self-understanding*, for a discussion of this attitude on the part of the European colonists during King Phillip's War.

For most modern liberals of all sorts, it's simply the case that there was a time in prehistory when true human beings came to exist and they had minds immediately capable of accessing transcendental truths and desires which, very implicitly and even sneakily, assumed a certain type of human being; this all seemed to tell us that the only real human beings are those who take to life in a wide-open marketplace of individuals. Empirical reality enters only in the form of higher-level and highly stylized studies in history and sociology, levels and styles which could have been designed to hide such matters as the spectrum of human being: many Englishmen being highly individualistic and most Chinese being highly communalistic—apparently those from the south of China even more so. Englishman good, Chinaman bad.

Liberalism is mistaken, but it isn't inherently an evil system, though any system can be made evil in implementation. It's simply wrong in light of modern knowledge of human characteristics. And it has contributed to

a great evil: the decay of the West including the premature decay of the very young United States.

In complex human communities—and their various smaller sub-communities familial and economic and political and cultural, moral order is made possible by a correct understanding of the nature of human morality including the location of moral knowledge and responsibility—family or local community or state or religious community? Laws and institutions, ways of doing business and ways of entertaining yourself in public areas, create disorder rather than order when they aren't compatible with human being in the specific form it takes in that particular complex human community, such as Boston or San Francisco or the United States or the West as a whole.

Again, all human being is both individual and communal but there is a spectrum of those who are extreme individualists through various mixtures of individual and communal being and on to those who are extreme communalists, but even those at the extremes are a mixture or else truly pathological creatures. God's plans clearly allow and might need various mixtures of individual and communal traits in human animals. Much good and interesting and fruitful human being might well be found in the extreme regions of those who are radical individualists and those who are self-sacrificing communalists.

The countries of the West, most especially the United States, have instituted a form of economic organization to the benefit of only a small minority of the human race. (A reminder of reality: it benefited still more those wolves in sheep's clothing who entered the marketplaces not as individuals but as members of dynastic wolf-packs or other tightly-knit units.)

But liberalism in the economic domain wasn't entirely an illusion, not by a long-shot, despite the tendency of some of the greatest of competitors to turn to such behavior as collaborating with politicians and regulators to restrict market entry—once those competitors were themselves established. Yet, liberalism did increase material prosperity in the West and that material prosperity spilled over even into many exploited regions in Asia and Africa and the Americas.

And that seems likely to be the judgment of history: the liberal beliefs and ways of behavior which developed in the West in the post-Medieval period brought great prosperity—so long as the foundations laid by those from earlier generations lasted. No known form of liberalism is capable of building a civilization or even a major community of any sort inside an

existing civilization. At their best, liberals have provided cogent criticisms of specific abuses of communal power over individuals, but that negative power of criticism has led quite naturally to a license to attack any and all powers of communities over any and all individuals and those attacks have made one damned mess of the West and most of its communities and most of its individuals as well.

# 522 Power Without Responsibility and Morally Irresponsible Illusions of Power

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2046>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/05/11.]

In March of 2015, Justin Raimondo wrote an essay, *Rand Paul, Revisited* at <http://original.antiwar.com/justin/2015/03/17/rand-paul-revisited/>, in which he quoted Gareth Garrett (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garet\\_Garrett](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garet_Garrett)):

“There are those who have never ceased to say very earnestly, ‘Something is going to happen to the American form of government if we don’t watch out.’ These were the innocent disarmers. Their trust was in words. They had forgotten their Aristotle. More than 2,000 years ago he wrote of what can happen within the form, when ‘one thing takes the place of another, so that the ancient laws will remain, while the power will be in the hands of those who have brought about revolution in the state.’”

Garrett was here writing of the New Deal but he might just as well have been describing our post-9/11 world. Yes, we still have a Constitution, which is hauled out and dusted off on special occasions—such as the need to start an unnecessary war—but for all intents and purposes it has been hollowed out.

Raimondo in his essay, and Garrett in the quoted passage from his essay, were dealing with the particular problem of Americans thinking that pieces

of paper and promises from politicians, even from those known to be crooks to some lesser or greater extent, would protect them. Vigilance becomes unnecessary and Americans could get the best of two worlds, gaining the benefits of being citizens of a republic without the sacrifices in time and energy which have always been necessary in healthy republics.

As I see it, the Constitution was probably unworkable as written; I should perhaps rather say, consistent with the general message of Garrett and Raimondo, that any written constitution is no better than the moral character and public habits and behaviors of the citizens, as individuals and as communities. Americans like to point to the Constitution and claim our rights; more generally do we claim that each and every one of us is equal to wealthy men, to prominent college professors or influential editors and commentators, to men who pull the levers in the political machines, to leaders of powerful or wealthy institutions such as religious communities and grant-giving foundations. In fact, powerful and wealthy men are . . . powerful and wealthy. If they are not given public recognition, they will work behind closed doors and in meetings in the shadows. They will conspire. Some of them will even collaborate on criminal or immoral acts and they will all cooperate on long-term projects such the creation of a regulatory agency or a national medical insurance program which can restrict entry of new competitors.

Powerful and wealthy men will do what they think necessary to at least hold on to what they have, but, given their desires and the nature of a dynamic world, they will likely be determined to increase their wealth and power as well as to have control over how it is passed on to future generations.

Anyone knowing even a little about history, the Bible, and science should have expected the United States to have decayed into a sham republic. New England shoemakers and classically educated southern philosophers of law created a Constitution for a country in which citizens were to be equal and no more than equal and those who were piling up fortunes in land or by way of merchandising profits refused such a great gift, as did such men even in the later Roman Republic with its body of rugged lovers of their sort of limited but true freedom. The Romans remained virtuous republicans so long as they had to work hard to feed and cloth and shelter all those on their estates or in their villages. Once they had hoards of surplus wealth, the game was up; in their case, that surplus wealth had been gathered from their wars which had seemed at first to be wars of defense though often

defense of borders which had been pushed far beyond Central Italy. The United States doesn't seem to have had more than a generation, if that, of status as a serious republic because there were not and are not many citizens with more than a complacent acceptance of the fruits of a republic earned for us by the struggles and sacrifices of a unique band of men—the Founding Fathers.

Most Americans are realistic enough to realize that most politicians have their prices, political power or money, but those Americans live in some sort of fairy-tale land where each citizen is as powerful as any other on Election Day and we don't bother to so much as contemplate the reality of our republic which has reached a truly degraded state. But the system did work remarkably well in the manner assumed by the citizenry. It produced much in the way of material goods, many of which were shared with the middle-class though it exercised little in the way of true political power. For a good two centuries, we Americans pretended to be free men and held out our hands to accept the gifts of our masters but this period of comfort at the expense of moral character seems to be coming to an end, an end which might prove very bitter for many over the 21st century and maybe far beyond. This is to say that the United States has much going for it but there is no reason to believe American citizens will suddenly show the moral character necessary to investigate the world and to make good judgments on the reality which lies behind appearances nor any reason to believe they will suddenly develop the moral courage necessary to act upon a good understanding of this sometimes nasty world.

The rich and powerful in the United States, even many in political power and acting in the public arena without morally responsible oversight, can exercise control over much, including the political system nominally controlled by the voters. The elite, however defined, have power without responsibility; once upon a time, an FDR committed his crimes knowing he'd pay at least a price in loss of power if the end-result wasn't favorable for the American people but even that constraint is largely gone. While we ordinary citizens dutifully march into the voting booths and then pretend the government is ours, the politicians and bankers and corporate executives get to work exchanging money and favors and rebalancing power-sharing relationships. Our pretense does nothing but allow this process to take place in back-rooms, maybe private dining-rooms at the local country club with its membership fees of hundreds of thousands of dollars per year and maybe a conference room at the NYC headquarters of a major bank and

maybe a Senator's office in Washington. Those sorts of power-sharing relationships will be formed and rebalanced when the elite power-holders feel the need. If we wish these relationships to be in the interests of a larger body of citizens and communities, we should recognize that our individual votes on Election Day don't give us any power over the government—as currently constituted. I don't know how to reconstitute the government of the United States or even to know if it be possible though I know the situation can be greatly improved if Americans were to develop the moral characters they claim to already have.

But I can also say that some compromise with the wealthy and the powerful will be necessary. I'll give one overly simplified narrative to point to the sort of compromises which could work if the wealthy and powerful were allowed more public, above-ground recognition of what they feel to be their well-earned rewards and if the rest of the citizenry were to be willing to challenge those wealthy and powerful men when they go beyond what has been allowed.

England was conquered in 1066 by Normans, Vikings who had learned how to mount large-scale military efforts, not just local looting operations, and also how to practice large-scale politics, organizing and administering larger areas and larger populations. The English and eventually the Welsh and Scots and Irish were under assault by a fresh population of energetic warlords, though warlords perhaps already organized in a ruling class of the sort necessary for a centralized state. Anglo-American political practices and theories emerged from these seemingly unpromising beginnings. The warlords were tamed, often helping to tame each other, by various means including one Americans will reject for falsely idealistic reasons: those warlords were publicly recognized for their high status and sometimes their capability and willingness to protect the ordinary citizens from other violent men; ambitious bankers and merchants and manufacturers greatly desired to join the ranks of those who had accepted meaningful constraints and public responsibility for their failures and crimes in return for public honor, legal recognition of a system such as primogeniture which allows the creation and maintenance of dynasties, and other benefits. Someone can certainly protest that this was exactly what the (leveling) Puritans of New England, and some others, wished to eliminate in forming what was apparently imagined as a great and wealthy republic which would be middle-class from top to bottom. Some acts of imagination can't be implemented and wise men will often recognize them in time to prevent damaging and ex-

pensive efforts to implement the impossible.

England was able to balance the needs and desires of the wealthy and powerful with those of the ordinary citizen up through 1800 or so; such a balancing act was never really considered in the United States because the Founding Fathers, great men but human and sometimes overrated, simply ignored the past behind the trends leading to greater power of the individual. Most of the Founding Fathers, excluding John Adams and perhaps a few others, seemed to assume that the granting of full, formal rights of citizenship, including voting rights, would secure the corresponding power for the individuals and for the masses of ordinary citizens. The victory of equality in the political arena and in court had been won once and for all time. Fat chance.

The English continued on their separate path but reached a point similar to the Americans, granting universal suffrage under circumstances which seemed to relieve the nobility and the other powerful leaders (such as Anglican bishops and a few other clergymen) of responsibility. Soon enough, the British institutions which tied together power and responsibility, and also otherwise moderated excessive concentrations of power, weakened greatly, but the power went to the bankers of the City of London and the owners of great factories and the politicians who learned to swim with the sharks—responsibility became that of elected officials for a while and then faded into the far-away heavens in the manner of a pagan god no longer needed but still remembered in the myths taught to schoolchildren and assumed by the many citizens who craved sophistication without effort.

I have no solutions for the problems of the United States and its citizens and doubt if years of contemplation would lead me to a program of reform in which I'd have any confidence. Any solutions will have to be worked out in that inconvenient realm of reality, but such a process can begin only after a recognition of our true situation: American voters and British voters and any voters in modern liberal societies are largely powerless. If those voters wish to gain any sort of power, any say over their own futures and those of their children, then it will take much energy and courage; there is no signs of such qualities in the peoples of the Liberal West.



# 523 Economic Problems More Fundamental Than Even Central Bank Shenanigans

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2095>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/09/21.]

Fred Reed is still working away at his vocation of recent years: speaking to a mostly deaf American public about the more serious and fundamental problems confronting Americans or all of mankind in these early decades of the 21st century. That he takes himself, and his writing, less seriously than do many of our sages is to his credit. Not that all critics should write so tongue-in-cheek as does Fred in most of his essays, but we need our Mark Twains, who often speak in humor-laden wonder but always with some insight into the sheer strangeness of the peoples and cultures of the United States. Unfortunately for us all, we and Fred live at a time when American bigotry and closedmindedness (now called 'exceptionalism') have combined with our ignorance (history is now bunk not just to simple farm-boy technological geniuses but also to our leaders and even their highly credentialed advisors) to make us a dangerous people to ourselves and to much of the world. Our only remaining criteria for our actions is: Does it make us feel good about ourselves? We are a people who think that high-school pep-rallies are the height of human cultural activity. We destroy the world which we'll hand on to younger generations and feel good about ourselves because we give them lots of electronic junk at Christmas to make sure their minds and moral characters are turned to mush so that they can't even react strongly against us, their enemies.

In this essay, *A Matter That Should Give Us PAWS: The End*

*Times of the Modern Economy* found at <http://www.unz.com/freed/a-matter-that-should-give-us-paws/>, he points out that we don't have just technical disruptions of the sort the United States suffered throughout the 19th century and into the 20th. Though our obvious technical problems are serious: such as those caused by central bank manipulation of currency and bonds, big-city bank manipulation of all sorts of markets including gold and silver and mortgages, movements of vast amounts of capital to the seeming goal of generating short-term profits for speculators and executives looking for huge bonuses. As serious as those more obvious problems are, there is a more fundamental disruption to human communities—'rot' is perhaps a better word than 'disruption'.

So it is that Fred tells us:

To date, the only way we know to distribute goods and services (houses, food, that sort of thing) is to have people work and pay them for it. It is an imperfect system, having been devised by humans, and pays a quarterback millions for throwing a pointy object to a downfield felon while a shock-trauma nurse can barely eat. Still, it has been reasonably serviceable.

Despite the apparent beliefs of even some of the most intelligent commentators on our economy, we are facing a radically different basic problem from, say, circa 1900 when some major crafts and entire industries were shrinking into niches or even disappearing completely. We aren't seeing the shrinkage of horse-breeding operations and the associated leather-goods industries; we aren't seeing the opening of the auto-industry. We are seeing the introduction of new modes of producing goods and providing services; we are seeing automated production of goods and provision of services with most men and women being on the outside of the entire system. It's not so much that new products and services are replacing old as it is that the ways of manufacturing all products and providing all services are changing in ways which have eliminated many of the ways of making a living. And it's far from clear that most of the human race can function as workers in this new environment and not really even clear that most of the human race is even needed as workers of even the most menial sort.

The world has grown richer and more complex than it was when our current ways of living and making a living grew up and we haven't shown much

willingness to deal with the situation—other than an occasional fascination with dystopian novels and movies of our prospects.

Something of the sort was shown in Disraeli's novel, *Sybil*, which took place in the 1830s or so, a time when textile manufacturing skills had been replaced by sophisticated machinery and the craftsmen were less desirable as workers than their unskilled and uneducated or under-educated children. The United States took advantage of this transition quite well when the Lowells and others redesigned manufacturing operations to use the inclination of American men to acquire a variety of more general skills; those American men working in Yankee factories could out-produce those English teenagers. The jerry-rigged solution of the Yankee organizational geniuses have failed. Heck, those all-round Yankee workmen don't even exist. My generation (born 1955) was mixed in this regard but I can remember some of the last such American workers nurturing their skills on the rolling rust-buckets they bought as their first cars. Now, you can't work on your own car without a computer diagnostic system and you can't repair what has been sealed in modular parts designed to be thrown away and replaced after 40,000 miles of service. Anyone who has access to Daddy's modern machine-shop, and takes advantage of it, and anyone who goes to MIT—and goes through their remedial education courses for engineering students who can't wire up a simple electrical outlet, will gain deep knowledge and powerful skills. Few have those options and our modern economy doesn't seem to need many such workers, machinist or electrical engineer.

There are no solutions in sight because the modern factory can be automated to the point where it needs only one or more teams of experienced and perhaps highly skilled engineers along with a small number of blue-collar workers. As Fred notes, we aren't looking at a transition to new types of jobs, perhaps in new locations or in new industries. Rather are we looking at a wholesale disappearance of jobs as machines are beginning to take over in vast expanses of the economy. New industries might arise to produce new goods or provide new services, but the robots will be there from the beginning. Robots are even beginning to replace some sorts of surgeons.

This might have a good ending centuries from now; many of the upward movements in human history involved periods of great suffering, especially at the beginning of those movements. But we are certainly heading into a very bad middle which might include such disasters as massive depopulations of large regions of the Earth, disease and famine and war might come

upon us. Modern Europe began with the destruction of the Western Roman Empire by mass migrations which many historians think to have been more in the nature of peoples looking for better lives than of invasions by barbarian warriors—though there was some of that as well. The interested reader might wish to read *Empires and Barbarians: The Fall of Rome and the Birth of Europe* [70] by Peter J Heather and *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* [144] by Bryan Ward-Perkins to gain an appreciation of the havoc which can result when there is a mismatch between economic opportunities in a region of the world and the needs and desires of the peoples in that region or bordering regions—where ‘bordering’ includes all who can see, for example, Germany on the television and read on the Internet about the prosperity of German corporations and generosity of German welfare systems. (I suspect bordering should also be generalized in our world to include the borders between inner-cities and prosperous suburbs or gentrified urban areas.)

# 524 Comatose for Generations, Western Civilization is Being Pushed into the Grave

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2102>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/10/06.]

I had exquisite timing this summer, was well prepared to think in a rational, fact-based way about Europe's crisis with immigrants as well as with the slower moving crisis in the United States. For the umpteenth time, I was also reminded of one of my high school history teachers: a somewhat eccentric man who was the best sort of teacher in his devotion to his subject as well as to some vague process of 'teaching'. Once a student began to pronounce his opinions on some political matter—don't remember exactly but it was 1971, so guess if you will. Mr Bousquet came to stand in front of the row where the student was seated and stood there quietly until the student grew confused and then quiet. Mr Bousquet then said, "You have no right to an opinion until you've learned some facts about the matter," and then returned to the blackboard to teach as if nothing had happened.

If only the likes of American politicians and public-policy (pseudo-)intellectuals and Catholic bishops would have enough moral character to realize the truth in that admonishment: "You have no right to an opinion until you've learned some facts about the matter."

My good timing this summer was in reading several books dealing primarily or in part with immigrations in the context of early human history and human prehistory, most importantly: *Empires and Barbarians: The Fall of Rome and the Birth of Europe* [70] by Peter J Heather and also *The*

*Fall of Rome: and the End of Civilization* [144] by Bryan Ward-Perkins. These aren't books likely to be found in prominent spots at your average Barn of Books. (Actually, I once made some prime purchases out of the loft of a barn—three volumes from a collection of Nathaniel Hawthorne works, circa 1870. Not in good enough condition to be valuable but some of the pages hadn't even been cut—a claim probably confusing to many who are under the age of 100 or so unless they've read a history of books.)

These large-scale movements into Roman territory involved a mixture of peoples looking to steal or otherwise obtain the goods of a civilization they didn't understand, couldn't have—and didn't—maintain, and which they could easily destroy. The Germanic and other barbarians who came across the borders into a Rome which had moved much of their best and most loyal troops to fight the Sassanian Empire. Some of those top-notch troops were themselves Germans from earlier waves of tightly controlled immigrations into the prosperous regions of the Roman Empire. Some were Gauls (or Celts) who were pretty much fully Romanized; those Gauls were the ancestors of the modern French peoples, some of the Spanish, and maybe some of the westernmost Germans.

In those books mentioned in the above paragraph, we learn that Rome fell, and Europe suffered during centuries of true darkness. The European population was substantially reduced as the economy was disrupted and supportive communities were weakened or destroyed. Living standards for the survivors didn't recover until the 12th or 13th century. There was something for every couch-potato barbarian to enjoy—modern day political leaders and Christian leaders alike: poverty and ignorance and violence and famine and wars. Some of these things might not seem to be so righteously exciting once they hit London and Kansas City rather than just Baghdad and Damascus.

This somewhat indeterminate dark period (use the period 500AD-1000AD as a guide) was often hell on earth and never really reached the high levels of prosperity or the low levels of personal violence of the years of the Roman Peace.

Those historians and archaeologists and geneticists and evolutionary theorists and physicists/chemists who are producing a scaffolding, bare and not yet fully trustworthy, for an understanding of the story of modern mankind tell us that we should value these periods of civil peace because rates of death by violent acts of other men are higher outside of organized states, such as the Roman Empire or the pre-imperial United States. If

you wish to be humorously skeptical, you can adopt the language of some historians: the stationary bandits protect the taxable sheep against the nomadic bandits. Yet, you have to face up to those high death-rates of nomadic or other pre-state peoples. To speak in a dramatic but true way: those Amerindians in the Amazon and those peoples in the South Pacific, all glorified as so 'peaceful' by Margaret Mead and others, had or even still have higher rates of death by human-inflicted violence than Europe had in the 20th century with two great wars and a host of smaller wars.

Bottom-line: the destruction of the states, in general—of the settled communities, of Europe will almost certainly lead to a long period of violence and chaos. Women will retreat from the public areas for reasons of safety. Slavery will return. Literacy and economic productivity will shrink to low levels. Europe won't become a multi-cultural paradise—it will repeat the Dark Ages in perhaps a more modern form as the warlords fight it out to see who will be the prosperous stationary bandits of the next stage of European history. That stage might have such horrors as Nazism and Leninism—or maybe not. It might be prosperous and be conducive to the freedom of individuals and the communities inside the territories of the stationary bandits—or maybe not.

As for the opening of the borders in the United States?

It's a grand and dangerous experiment at best. The situation in the United States and the context of the Americas are far different from anything Europe has known, but any wise man or woman would be fearing for the worse and maybe the worst. So far, we don't have too much reason to believe that these immigrants from Africa and Southwest Asia will either assimilate to European-American ways of life or perhaps build compatible ways of life in separate communities. We can't even assimilate Amerindians to the extent of drawing them into ghettos in the mainstream of American life and even Mexican immigrants are said to de-assimilate themselves after—perhaps—a generation of promising achievement. I'm not sure that there will ever be a true merging of European-American and Chinese/Japanese/Indian communities—nor that there should be such a merging. Yet, we are perhaps creating a situation where—at least—the west coast of North America might become part of Chinese civilization, not by conquest but simply by of a peaceful takeover by hardworking peoples. A people who treat educational systems as excuses for dances and football games and pep rallies should be more cautious about the immigration of such hardworking and disciplined and serious peoples as the Chinese and

the Japanese and some of the peoples of southern Asia.

We live in interesting times indeed and have made these times far more interesting by engaging in a variety of unwise experiments upon human beings—individuals and communities. We Americans love to destabilize countries which were potentially chaotic regions—and known to be such by historians and diplomats and various analysts in the intelligence communities of this world, civilian and military alike. We have even allowed our ruling classes to destabilize our own countries. In the case of Europe, we have the example of the fall of the western regions of the Roman Empire when, according to recent historical analyses, that region of Romanized Europe was still a going venture. And, yet, American leaders through their lapdogs in Europe, and with the cheers of the likes of Pope Francis, have allowed conditions in Europe to approach the disastrous conditions of the sixth century in Italy and in the Romanized Celtic regions (France and Switzerland and Spain and the Western Germanic countries). And those same American leaders are conducting very dangerous experiments with their own country.

We are indeed blessed with interesting times and we seem determined to make them still more interesting and we do so by acts of fraudulent charity which will strip our children's countries of prosperity without doing any long-term good for the immigrants from the countries we've destroyed in Southwest Asia or North Africa and from the sub-Saharan countries where the residents refuse to moderate their own reproduction or that of their animals during the good years of the monsoon cycle and then start trying to get to Europe during the bad years.

# 525 Why Can Foreign Policy Realism Produce Good Insights?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2151>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/01/18.]

Realism, as the term is used in foreign policy, builds upon the same foundations as Adam Smith's Invisible Hand analysis of economics. It is an empirical analysis at the level of human actors without necessarily making any explicit attempt to understand why it is that those actors behave as they do. Hence, the invisibility. And unlike thinkers in certain ideologies (such as neoconservatism or libertarianism), foreign policy realists look at the various actors, individuals and various sorts of communities—especially nations, as empirical entities—as Smith looked at the butchers and bakers in London and Glasgow of the middle of the 18th century. It's far from clear that we can build up the Soviet Union as of 1955 or the Scottish and English economies as of 1760 by using individuals as building blocks, but deeper insights can be derived by those who understand the history of Marxism as well as the history of Russia prior to the Bolshevik Revolution, by those who understand the history of the Scots: Gaels and Picts and Anglo-Saxons or Anglo-Normans, pagan Celts and Celtic Catholics and Roman Catholics and Presbyterians and various sorts of dissident Protestants.

Those human beings formed by the various historical processes were, and are, the result of general sorts of evolutionary processes. By the phrase, "general sorts of," I mean that these processes include the two understood well by Darwin, natural selection and sexual selection, as well as various genetic processes which sometimes operate with surprising independence—in the short-term—from reality external to genes. There are still other complications such as some mysterious and difficult-to-define "group selection"

processes which seem to exist except when studied.

These processes didn't operate to produce a human race which has remained free of deep changes ever since some magical date. The peoples in much of China and Southeast Asia have the characteristics, personality and others, which allow them to survive and to reproduce successfully as communal rice-farmers while the peoples of much of Europe have the characteristics allowing them to survive and reproduce in as wheat-farmers with a much stronger leaning to individualism. I wrote of this in two other chapters in this book:

- Chapter 324, *Yes, Genetics and Evolutionary Biology are Relevant to Our Political and Social Problems* and
- Chapter 326, *Darwinism is Fine so Long as I Can Still Believe All Human Beings are Just Like Me.*

As I noted in those essays, scientists now think human evolution accelerated greatly about 10,000 years ago when our ancestors began living in more complex societies, especially the civilizations at the center of large regions such as Mesopotamia and China. Relatively great changes in personality and—yes—IQ can occur in a surprisingly short number of generations when human populations are relatively isolated at least as a breeding population. For a good and accessible overview, see *The 10,000 Year Explosion: How Civilization Accelerated Human Evolution* [23] by Gregory Cochran and Henry Harpending.

So it is that we can learn from more specific works by the geneticist Bryan Sykes and the historian Norman Davies, two thinkers well-read in the field of the other, that modern Scots are a mixture, as a population and as individuals in varying combinations, of:

- the European population at the last retreat of glaciers which occurred on the order of 12,000 years ago,
- Scandinavians, settlers and Vikings (“raiders”), who were sometimes the same men,
- Brythonic Celts whose culture/language and much of whose genes came from the ‘Scythians’ who developed proto-Indo-European culture and language—roughly—in the steppes of Ukraine and southern Russian (north and northwest of the Black Sea),

- Anglo-Saxons—a catch-all for various Germanic peoples, some of who hadn't really developed a strong tribal identity when they showed up on the radars of the Greek and Roman historians, and
- Irish, Gaelic Celts, who are now said to be a mixture of those 'Scythians' and a people resulting from the slow movement of "first-farmers", coming from the region in northern Iraq and adjoining regions of Turkey where complex agriculture and cities first developed in Western Asia; those "first-farmers" migrated over centuries along the northern shores of the Mediterranean and mostly settled in the region of Portugal and northwest Spain where they mixed with a Celtic people before some moved into Ireland (largely uninhabited so far as anyone can tell) and maybe some parts of Great Britain.

This sort of information, along with information about the physical environments and climates of the British Isles and other parts of Europe, helps greatly in understanding why it was that particular British peoples responded in certain ways to specific possibilities given by the environment and by surrounding populations—as well as the challenges brought by pirates and raiders and invaders and merchants coming from previously unknown cultures and so on.

This is all still best understood by the traditional methods of historians, though supplemented by the new scientific knowledge. Certainly those who seek to understand must be open to other forms of human culture, to other forms of human being. I suspect that some day historians of human thought will explore one of the strangest and most contradictory of complex events: by way of empirical analysis of their own peoples and their own best (or at least good) ways of living and of organizing political systems and so on, a major line of thinkers (Hobbes and Locke and Human and Adam Smith and through the Classical Liberals and Libertarians of the past two centuries) have arrived at the idea that all human beings are supposed to be Northwestern Europeans with their strongly individualistic inclinations. In other words, empirical investigation of a specific group of populations of human beings was allied with a true blindness to the characteristics of other populations of human beings; the 'true' human nature of Nigerians and Samoans was at hand with a proper understanding of Anglo-Saxons. Even the West's own political and economic and moral and other systems were to be deformed far beyond the true particularities or peculiarities of the peoples

of the West. (And the nature of spreads in human characteristics even in well-defined populations tells us there are many human beings in Glasgow of 1770, who were not so individualistic as the entrepreneurs, butchers and bakers, observed by Adam Smith.

Read about this subject of foreign policy realism from the viewpoint of a thinker, Justin Raimondo, who follows von Mises: *Why the War Party Dominates the Media* at <http://original.antiwar.com/justin/2016/01/10/why-the-war-party-dominates-the-media/>.

Raimondo's essay was partly a response to one written by a notable advocate of foreign policy realism, the Harvard Professor, Stephen Walt. Walt's essay, *What Would a Realist World Have Looked Like?*, is found at: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/01/08/what-would-a-realist-world-have-looked-like-iraq-syria-iran-obama-bush-clint>

Walt's essay is definitely worth reading, along with his other writings and those of other foreign policy realists. Some of the foreign policy realists I often read are: Stephen Cohen, Paul Robinson, Chas Freeman, and William R Polk. And read Raimondo if you wish to see that wisdom can come out even when the thinker holds some wrongful understandings of human being—the same is true in spades of the late and great libertarian thinker, Murray Rothbard, whose thought was studied by Raimondo. Then again, I think Rothbard was and Raimondo is more pragmatically realistic than might be implied by their own labels of 'libertarian'.

# 526 Liberty for the Elite Doesn't Always Flow Down to the Common Folk

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2155>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/01/25.]

Historical narratives will typically note that the *Magna Carta*, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magna\\_Carta](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magna_Carta), was a result of struggles between an unpopular king and a group made up of secular lords and lords of the Catholic Church in England. It's actually a pretty complicated story which played out over centuries and also had a long prologue, but the point is that noblemen struggling against the excessive centralization of many kingdoms and empires were only tangentially concerned with the liberty of commoners, and then mostly the merchants and bankers with whom they were allied. The serfs or free peasants, even blacksmiths and owners or managers of large textile mills or large grain mills, were of little concern to anyone. In the short-run.

So it was that European elites gained positive rights and liberties while most Europeans were repressed to a lesser or greater extent with some being essentially enslaved. But our history books tell us that, in the long-run, through the efforts of many, various sorts of positive rights and liberties were granted to wider and wider groups of residents becoming true citizens. Is this for real?

Partially. We need to recognize that the formal granting of positive rights and liberties doesn't, in and of itself, mean that those rights and liberties will be truly honored. More importantly, a people freed from serfdom or even less oppressed states might not be capable of properly exercising

their newly gained rights and liberties. In the American political tradition, the common voter chooses from a small slate of candidates chosen in a process managed by the political-machine operators captured in literature (*The Last Hurrah*) and cinema (*The Candidate* but perhaps more clearly if more comically in *Miracle on 34th Street*). More recently, the system seems to be largely in the control of managerial-elites reporting to the national committees of the two-headed monster, Republican and Democratic. (Rogues who are either scoundrels or honest and courageous men have disrupted the system, but the system rapidly returns to business as normal as soon as the better sorts such as Eugene McCarthy and Pat Buchanan and Ron Paul are cast aside with greater or lesser showing of respect. Or disdain.)

This was made possible and continues to be made possible by the moral irresponsibility of clergy and professors and authors and musicians and painters and—perhaps most of all—parents. In one of the most important and oft misunderstood books of the modern world, *The Revolt of the Masses* [60], Jose Ortega y Gasset claims—with good backup—that the elites of Europe failed the liberated masses of Europe in the 19th century. The failure has become an outright betrayal, but I'll just describe quickly how they failed the recently liberated commoners, noting first of all that it is parents who have the primary responsibility to see that their children are well-educated and that the moral characters of those children are well-formed. Training one's children to be fans of one or more teams of the National Football League is, at most, optional.

But let's go back to the 19th century when European school systems were expanding and peoples of at least a little literacy were trying to make sense of this greater world they were discovering, often after leaving behind farm or village to seek employment or perhaps higher education in Edinburgh or Berlin.

People who knew only their own villages and parish churches were suddenly exposed to, and sometimes sent out into, a world of many villages and parish churches of slightly different cultures as well as the Cosmopolis of the West in its different manifestations such as London and Paris and Rome. This was a world in which the old myths, of the Heavens as well as of tribal chiefs become national founders and pagan gods or heroes become Christian saints, were increasingly being seen as implausible, to say the least. (We now know that many of these myths held truths about, say, the founding populations of Europe, but that's another story.)

Those peoples were struggling out of states of illiteracy and of igno-

rance of the world outside of their villages and outside of their small stock of myths and legends and old housewives tales and so on. As Ortega y Gasset pointed out, those with the responsibility to integrate their peoples into what might be called Western Civilization chose instead to drop down to the level of a vulgar and parochial peasantry. So it is that we have the blind trying to lead the blind. For example, we have Christians trying to recover the glories of Christendom with pep-rallies and music which sounds as if written for television commercials; none can understand, perhaps few know, that those glories of Christendom began with an entire culture aiming for the Heavens. The early music came from the anonymous composers (monks?) of Gregorian chant and early forms of polyphony and other modern music; the later music came from Palestrina and Bach, Handel and Mozart, Beethoven and Mahler. Similar statements can be made about literature and architecture and even political thought—even the powerful and erroneous ideologies of modern politics and economics emerged in a healthy Christendom as it started to catch colds and other minor ailments; the future diseased state was likely hard to see at the time.

Can the people resulting from this failure to hold on to what was good and to improve it be able to understand ‘it’? Can they even understand liberty as more than a chance to look at dirty pictures or to choose a church community with more lively fellowship—independent of any effort to seriously think about the theological or moral or cultural issues?

If we accept the likelihood that there are scoundrels who wish to exploit others, then a regime of positive rights and liberties could easily be turned to a fraud in which the powerful and wealthy exercise their rights and the common folk are treated as sheep for the shearing and slaughter.



# 527 Political Machines Run the United States, It's Not a Liberal Democracy

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2187>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/02/24.]

Bertrand de Jouvenel (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bertrand\\_de\\_Jouvenel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bertrand_de_Jouvenel)) was a French political philosopher active in the middle two-thirds of the 20th century. He was considered to be an expert on the American political system, which at least means he didn't just naively take American leaders and academicians on their word that the United States is a liberal democracy. The United States is run by political machines and isn't anything like a liberal democracy, let alone the morally well-ordered republic envisioned by perhaps most of the Founding Fathers. We were told this by de Jouvenel and probably others. (See the website of *Liberty Fund*, <http://www.libertyfund.org/>, for affordable, good-quality reprints of some of de Jouvenel's most important works and for reprints of many other worthwhile books.)

As de Jouvenel quite reasonably saw matters, political machines exist to deliver the goods. As a consequence, they do their best—sometimes apparently quite good indeed—to screen out any potential political candidates who have much in the way of moral character. When Wall Street or the weapons manufacturers have paid you to deliver in the form of more tanks and aircraft carriers, you don't want Senators or Representatives or a President who tries to honestly determine if that is the right use of American taxpayer money at that time. No one with moral character need apply to the Republican and Democratic parties. Some with a little or even much

of moral character or integrity do slip through but the parties seem awfully efficient at screening them out in recent years and have even driven out some seemingly well-established honest politicians of the left and right. Others have simply retired or left when young to be replaced by types more acceptable to the political machines, moral invertebrates.

The classic ethnic political machine was the ‘Irish-American Bostonian’ machine as depicted in the novel, *The Last Hurrah*, by Edwin O’Connor which is discussed at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Last\\_Hurrah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Last_Hurrah); the protagonist was likely modeled on James Michael Curley (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James\\_Michael\\_Curley](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Michael_Curley)) who served in various elected positions in Massachusetts, including Governor and Mayor of Boston. Curley was always a powerful decision-maker and not just a front man. (My great-aunt, Mary Gordon Thompson, was a labor-union leader and feminist and campaigner for child-labor laws; she was a political enemy and a personal friend and admirer of Curley—she was very impressed by the man.) You can also see this sort of ethnic machine politician in action in comedy scenes—the meetings with the judge—in the movie, *Miracle on 34th Street* (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miracle\\_on\\_34th\\_Street](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miracle_on_34th_Street)); this setting was New York City and perhaps it was an Irish-American machine again.

Obviously, power was also exercised by the wealthy members of the establishment, call them ‘Wall Street interests’ or the ‘Eastern Establishment’ if you will. The national Republican Party, and perhaps many of the local Republican parties, were influenced greatly by Rockefellers and other bankers and their allies. The Morgans exercised great power within the Democratic party until the collapse of their banking empire, circa 1950; a Mayor Curley wasn’t about to do their bidding but his power was mostly local or statewide. Let me mostly ignore the past forms of political power exercised by Wall Street and its allies. I’m making a simple point by telling a part of a complex story of centralization by destruction of local power, but a centralization which seems to have merely created two nationwide, technocratic political machines where we once had a multitude of machines which would at least partly respond to real human needs beyond those of the investors and executives of JP Morgan and General Dynamics.

Let’s go back to the 1970s when Senator Eugene McCarthy (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eugene\\_McCarthy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eugene_McCarthy)), a rather independent-minded Democratic Party politician, joined with Senator James L. Buckley (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James\\_L.\\_Buckley](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_L._Buckley)), an equally

independent-minded Republican Party politician, to oppose some proposed campaign finance laws. (Libertarians and civil rights advocates also joined McCarthy and Buckley in their fight against those laws.) Usually presented as an effort to prevent public financing and limits on contributions to at least some sorts of campaigns, both McCarthy and Buckley said over succeeding decades that they were concerned that the laws were intended to destroy the (partially) independent political parties (such as the Progressive Party prominent in the Midwest and the Conservative Party of New York) and to outlaw any campaign corruption only if it were not under the control of the national committees of the Democratic and Republican parties.

I'll go out on a limb to claim that the political campaign 'reforms' which began in the 1970s, partially failing at first because of McCarthy and Buckley and others, were the first stage of an ultimately successful destruction of the ethnic (and perhaps other) local or statewide political machines and the centralization of political machine power in the two national parties, Democrats and Republicans.

The ethnic political machines no longer exist, at least not as independent power-centers. But power continues to exist in the form of political machines, those run by the national committees of the Republican and Democratic parties, run in a similar way to General Motors or Citigroup or McNamara's Defense Department. In other words, corruption controlled at the level of states and municipalities was simply replaced by corruption controlled by highly centralized and technocratic political parties, the national organizations of the Democrats and Republicans.

Political machines have greater control of the United States than before and they are machines allied to the American Warfare State; they are machines participating in the attempt by the Western, mostly American, power elite or 1% to steal all that doesn't already belong to them, in the Middle East or in Des Moines or in Moscow.



# 528 Is Putin Guided by General Moral Principles Rather Than Greed or Ideology?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2192>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/03/15.]

I'll start with a link to another insightful and honest analysis by Paul Robinson, a seemingly true expert on Russia who is a professor at the University of Ottawa: *Patriotism is enough* found at <https://irrussianality.wordpress.com/2016/02/04/patriotism-is-enough/>.

Western analysts often mistakenly describe the people now governing Russia as nostalgic for the Soviet Union, an idea which Putin's recent statements about Lenin should surely discredit. But if it's easy enough to say what Putin is not, ideologically speaking, it is much harder to say what he is. Judging by a comment he made on Wednesday, the man himself might tell me that I am wasting my time trying to work it out.

What were Putin's words as quoted by Professor Robinson?

We do not have and cannot have any unifying idea other than patriotism. . . . You said that public servants and business and all citizens in general work to make the country stronger. Because if that is the case, then each of us, each citizen will live better, and have higher incomes and be more comfortable, and so on. And that is the national idea. It isn't ideological, it isn't connected with any party or any stratum of society.

It is connected to a general, unifying principle. If we want to live better, then the country must become more attractive for all citizens, more effective, and the public service and state apparatus and business must all become more effective. As you said, we work for the country, not understanding it in an amorphous way, like in Soviet times . . . when the country came first and then there was who knows what. The country is people, that's what working for the country means.

And Robinson ends by telling us:

That doesn't mean that Putin lacks personal beliefs. It's just that he appears to draw a distinction between what he believes and what he thinks should be the ideology of the state. Take Lenin, for instance. Putin doesn't like him. But he's made it clear that that is his personal opinion. If other people happen to like Lenin and want to have a statue of him in their city, or name their town square after him, then Putin isn't going to stop them.

I think we have trouble distinguishing between what might be called ideologies and principles. Ideologies are cathedrals, more often than not the product of some insane architect. Principles are more like general rules of building, perhaps even the materials as well.

Principles are mostly embedded in some way in our very bodies. For example, Lt Colonel Dave Grossman (in his book *On Killing*) deals with the imperfect but significant instincts found in some (many? or most?) species not to kill other members of their species. There are warriors and psychopathic sorts who enjoy killing. There are warriors who don't enjoy killing but can do it under moral circumstances without being disturbed, though they might walk away feeling genuine sympathy for the poor bastards they just killed. Most men, at least in the West, can't kill a recognizably human target without being greatly disturbed, perhaps in a slowly diminishing way for the remainder of their lives, yet men can kill members of their own species with greater ease than wolves can. Men can even be taught to see members of other tribes or ethnic groups as being non-human. Moreover, there is some reason to believe that some ethnic groups have stronger reluctance to kill, or abuse, other human beings; some have weaker reluctance.

The Fifth Commandment is written in DNA, though imperfectly. There is a principle there, which can be greater or lesser in scope. More people and types of peoples can be included in that category of human beings. Probably, more or fewer specific acts (rape, beatings, psychological torment, etc) can be included as what is to be excluded.

So, there is something that might be described loosely as a principle of non-killing which can be extended to non-violence and even non-coercion.

So, what is this ‘patriotism’ Putin claims to have as a political leader of Russia? I’d suggest it is simply a principle of bonding which leads to a significant unity not defined by accident (though based upon accidental circumstances) nor by utility—though not fully independent of utility.

Whether intending to do so or not, Putin has wisely retreated to a more fundamental stage of social morality, a stage where various peoples not yet one (and maybe not really headed towards unity) act as if one by way of a form of patriotism. Putin’s patriotism seems to certainly cover those who live near each other and perhaps are intermingled with each other, but it is more general than that.

Before continuing, I need to point out that I write and speak of a worldview as being an understanding of what exists and that I regard abstractions which have real effects as abstract being. If you wish, you can call it an effort to combine what seems right about dualistic theories of being with what seems right about more monistic or reductionistic theories of being. In these terms, an ideology is a corrupted worldview, though sometimes a once plausible worldview which has rigidified and become entrenched, even if clearly at odds with reality. It has also become necessary for the continued existence of human institutions of various sorts.

The people and peoples of the West hold ideologies which are nearly caricatures of a partially formed worldview of a more Christian West through 1800 or so. That older worldview was never more than partial, but that was a good thing because a Christianity which respects God and His works in Creation, respecting also currently existing understandings of God and those works but not idolizing those understandings, remains always open to revisions in its worldviews. During the centuries from, perhaps, the 11th century, human understandings of Creation have been growing rapidly, becoming richer and more complex, including new understandings of those parts of empirical reality which are human history and traditional human texts, such as the Bible. These new understandings often presented great difficulties to received ways of understanding the words of Jesus or the

Christian Creeds, but great thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas could deal with those difficulties. Sometimes this enrichment and complexification was in the form of technologies developed by trial-and-error and sometimes by way of more exact and more accurate knowledge of a misformed astronomy or chemistry (alchemy). But understandings which were forced by results of trial-and-error came from an honest effort to deal with a world rapidly becoming richer and more complex, partly because of growth in human communities and forms of human relationships and sometimes just because of rapid growth in knowledge of the earth and the heavens and abstract reasoning, especially mathematics. In other words, evolving and developing human communities were truly new forms of human being and they were evolving and developing in a world becoming much richer and more complex, a world of great and open possibilities.

Putin, for whatever reason and at whatever level of explicit awareness, has seemingly regressed from a 'pure' idea of Russian civilization (which may or may not be misguided) and is pushing a patriotism which covers many people and peoples, some Orthodox and some Catholic and some Protestant and some Buddhist and some Muslim. It's not even clear to me that the current autocratic state is intended to be permanent, even by the standards of this quite impermanent world. Even with smooth development and evolution of human communities, I couldn't even guess what we will see result if Russia, in its mixtures of peoples, and some neighboring countries, succeeds in generating true patriotic devotion. It might be something different from what we seen in history, in our tribes and kingdoms and empires and democracies and republics and theocracies.

In what way will it be different? A question worth addressing but the answers will be misleading and dangerous if you forget that we're dealing with a world which is more open, richer and more complex, than we humans can anticipate—God has a very powerful imagination. We can only anticipate ranges of possibilities and then try to remain openly perceptive of what happens and responsive to it.

Ideologies become still worse when they are hijacked by careerists, as seems to have happened in the United States with its system of politics which is not a democracy and not a republic, not truly liberal and not at all conservative. The United States is dominated by political machines which deliver the goods if they wish to get their required revenue. (It's certainly a distributed machine so that much of the money and benefits go to cogs or to smaller machines rather than all of it going to the national

parties of Democrats and Republicans. See Chapter 527, *Political Machines Run the United States, It's Not a Liberal Democracy* for a little more discussion.

Putin seems to be aiming at a new form of political organization but not directly—he has maybe retreated to a process of growth, of development, by way of a general principle which he labels ‘patriotism’, which seems to truly be patriotism though not of a jingoistic, or barbecuing, sort as found in the United States on those grand party days of Memorial Day and Independence Day. Veteran’s Day, which consists mostly of simple ceremonies to honor those who served and most especially those who died isn’t such a popular holiday. Who wants to plan a barbecue in Maine for November 11? Maybe it’ll be warm, but. . .

Anyway, despite seeming to be a true Russian Orthodox, Putin is trying to define a patriotism which might bind together a new Russia which would include a variety of Slavic peoples and Turkic peoples and others, of Christian and non-Christian peoples. Despite being from an autocratic tradition and seeming to be a member of an unofficial hierarchy of intelligence professionals, he has made no obvious claim to dictate who will be his successor—the truest mark of an autocrat of any sort. He also seems inclined to lay back a little and let the situation develop before responding, perhaps by temperament or perhaps by deliberate choice.

The contrast between Putin and American leaders is extraordinary. If he is corrupt, as some of his enemies strongly claim with no presented evidence, that has little effect upon his ability to take care of the interests of Russia—unlike the two thieves named ‘Clinton’ and the Wall St gangsters which are the (seemingly short-lived) dynasty founded by Prescott Bush. Though admitting that the Bushes were true patriots so long as American interests weren’t in conflict with the interests of those they served and perhaps still serve—their Walker relatives and perhaps other families from the Harriman and Brown Brothers branch of the House of Rockefeller, that isn’t enough in a complex world where such conflicts will regularly develop. If Putin is financially corrupt, he’s managed to arrange his investments to match the interests of Russia.

Even more important is the contrast with American leaders who view the world and plan their actions according to a complex ideology which doesn’t seem to match reality, though many seem to profit despite the mismatch. That profit is a loss for the country as a whole, but the think-tankers as well as the politicians and generals and weapons-manufacturers walk away

with wads of cash from each disaster Americans create overseas and others profit in a similar way from such disasters as Obamacare and the welfare system which is the real lure for illegal immigrants.

But Russia does seem to be in a bit of a mess after at least a couple centuries of misrule, brutal misrule under the Bolsheviks. And Russia has what we might label ‘entanglements’ with various non-Russian peoples. Rather than take up with pre-existing Russian ideologies, such as various sorts of Pan-Slavism or ‘right-wing’ Russian nationalism, Putin seems to have chosen that retreat to a patriotism which is not non-nationalistic but rather pre-nationalistic as well as pre-ideological—if ‘nation’ and ‘ideology’ are the right concepts to cover what is growing up. It isn’t clear what is going on, but Putin seems to be offering to lead the formation of an expanded multi-nation of sorts, a multi-nation including a variety of peoples living in or near Russia.

Could this be one of those great ironies of history? Putin and some of his allies are exploring the possibilities of that multi-nation or whatever it should be called, while Americans blab on about multiculturalism despite our proven inability to assimilate, that is—rationalize relationships with—native Americans, African-Americans, and now a variety of peoples who brought to the United States cultures radically different from those of the Anglo-American world, most of those recent immigrants not showing signs of interest in the cultural possibilities of the Anglo-American world. I would claim that, if we Americans were a people capable of respecting others and compromising with them, we should have long ago peacefully absorbed both Canada and Mexico into some sort of confederation of republics—with the current United States perhaps entering that confederation as several separate republics.

No peoples in their right minds would ever trust the current ruling class in the United States. The British peoples had struggled for centuries to ‘tame’ their Celtic and Anglo-Saxon and Norman warlords. Breaking away from those nations with their imperfect but somewhat effective ways of offering something to the already powerful and the ambitious in return for good behavior, the American peoples seem to have regressed so that we have a ruling class largely composed of soft-boy gangsters, banksters and fern-bar warriors, without even the warrior virtues of the earlier rulers of the British peoples.

Americans, especially those in the ruling class, are ignorant and bereft of imagination. Apparently, neither is true of Putin and perhaps this is

why American leaders hate him—it's the hatred of barbarians for one who seems to understand something they just can't perceive, let alone conceive.



## 529 Not Isolationism but a Short-term, Quiet Retreat

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2195>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/03/21.]

For some reason, isolation is seen as only ‘isolationism’: a total policy, an ideological hardening of sorts. Even highly intelligent commentators of realist leanings will write and speak as if we Americans can choose only between some sort of major involvement in international relationships or a permanent and total withdrawal. This hardly accounts for all possible policies.

Yet, I would, in fact, advocate a near total sort of isolation from international involvement by the American government for the purpose of taking stock, evaluating our true interests, evaluating our true diplomatic and military needs, and then starting to prepare for a fresh engagement with the rest of the world.

I’d be pretty sure that an honest, self-examination would reveal that we have few solid and trustworthy experts for most countries or peoples in the world—not every people in the world has their own country or is likely to have one any time soon. Nor do we have so many experts in the setting of strategy for the purpose of meeting national goals of security and prosperity and so on; our alleged experts seem mostly to specialize in meeting the needs of the oil and gas industry or the weapons producing industry or the financial industry.

By experts, I mean those who speak the relevant languages fluently—a thick accent, as with Kissinger, is allowable; those who know the history and the modern culture; those who have some in-depth understanding of the technology existing or likely to exist; those who know the geography includ-

ing the situation regarding natural resources. It would seem to this outsider observer that American expertise in international matters now consists of knowing which countries are of interest to natural-resource extractors from the West and of being able to draw possible pipelines onto a topographical map before getting to work to overthrow dictators and elected heads of government without much distinction.

Even more dangerously, American foreign relations are held hostage to political campaigning needs. While we should realize that these campaigns are tied, by donations and in other ways, to oil-companies and weapons manufacturers and bankers and with ideologists who would see the reduction of entire regions of the earth to abject poverty and powerlessness before the American power-elite, we should also realize that American politicians are far from being without power, far from being mere puppets of other sorts of powerholders, though the intellectual and moral degradation of politicians and voters allows other sorts of powerholders to often manipulate the policies of the American government to their own purposes.

We, the American people should call a timeout and send ourselves into a corner for some quiet meditation on the mess we've created around us. If we continue even a moderated intervention in foreign affairs, we will continue to pass money over to the true criminals in our midst and we will continue to destroy this country and to greatly restrict American involvement in international affairs when we, inevitably, find our country as one of several great powers or even as a second-rate power wondering if the Chinese or the Europeans will extract compensation from us or inflict vengeance upon us. We are in danger of becoming a state and a people distrusted and hated.

## 530 The Issue Is Not the ‘Depth’ of the State but Rather the Moral Disorder of the West

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2202>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/03/29.]

The title tells it all, but—of course—I have a bit more to write.

We are somewhat realistic about the inner-city results of disorder in modern human communities. Gangsters come to local power. Thuggish young men begin to form gangs which fight for control of the distribution of heroin and other drugs in a few blocks or more. They fight for control of street-walkers in parts of their city. They begin protection-rackets and demand payments from merchants and bookies. Yes, even bookies and that puts them in a struggle with established gangs, even the fabled mafia which perhaps had softened itself by taking on a limited role when they had first formed during an era of weakening but still substantial moral order.

Human nature is human nature. During periods of moral disorder, men and women of disordered moral characters are to be found in banks and the ranks of politicians and bureaucrats, on Wall St and even in the Pentagon. Higher-level crime might be more sophisticated and sometimes less violent, at least during the years of prosperity and highly profitable companies ripe for embezzlement and other forms of thievery. But gangsters make money according to their particular talents and opportunities. To take just one example, there were some gangsters in the CIA at the beginning around 1950, or at least men willing to play the role or to work with the Mafia or with, say, anti-Communist warlords of rather low moral standards.

I could write much more about heroin manufacture and smuggling and

of the CIA involvement in such matters during those years in which even good men committed terrible crimes, very destructive of Western structures of order, because they thought such was justified by, even made necessary by, the struggle against Stalin and Mao and various others. It's perhaps more informative for me to point to the work of Bryan Sykes (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bryan\\_Sykes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bryan_Sykes)) and other geneticists researching various existing or deceased populations; there are also many historians and anthropologists and others working the same territory from a slightly different angle. They've discovered that men with a talent for **organized** violence leave a disproportionate number of descendants as a result of their success during periods of disorder. Tens of millions of men in Central Asia carry a Y chromosome (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Y\\_chromosome](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Y_chromosome)) which almost certainly comes from Genghis Khan (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genghis\\_Khan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genghis_Khan)). There is allegedly an emperor of ancient China who left even more descendants. Similar statements, though with a few millions and not tens or hundreds of millions, can be made regarding an ancient High King of Ireland, Niall of the Nine Hostages (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niall\\_of\\_the\\_Nine\\_Hostages](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niall_of_the_Nine_Hostages)), who left many descendants among the Irish Gaels in Scotland and Ireland. (In *Saxons, Vikings, and Celts: The Genetic Roots of Britain and Ireland* [130], Bryan Sykes writes about this and even about an "Irish" founder of several important Scottish clans who turned out to have had a Scandinavian Y chromosome.)

Of more recent origins: a majority of Y chromosomes in modern Mexican men are of Spanish origins though other genetic evidence indicates nearly all mothers were native Americans.

These genetic facts speak more eloquently than mere tales of conquests and of wars of the brutality and exploitation practiced by men who are skilled in the arts of organized violence. They kill some men and wipe out the family-lines of others by providing such opportunities to their own sons as to allow them to greatly out-reproduce commoners. And we think that powerful and ambitious men really respect the lives and property of others? Some do, but 'some' ain't 'all'. Many of the most powerful and ambitious men in history, including some Popes and other religious leaders, have been gangsters. Gangsters don't always have the freedom to act according to their inclinations; likely there are many men in history who succeeded in honest and moral ways but would have been willing to act as gangsters if necessary to reach their goals.

Gangsters are very prominent during periods when civilizations or lesser regions of settled peoples present soft targets. During periods of moral disorder, even a civilization or lesser human community well-ordered in the past will present a soft target for both externally born and internally born gangsters.

Oddly enough, and as was true of the ancient warlord-emperors we know from the Bible and other sources, these violent and thieving men seem to have played a role in building the ordered structures of human communities: as some historians say: “Stationary bandits protect the sheep against the nomadic bandits.” This is because they are shearing and slaughtering the sheep in a sustainable manner.

Yet, even the most brutal of great conquerors and other nomadic bandits have their virtues, if only those of warriors supplemented by those of political founders. The systems built up by the violent warlords of the West, and others of a more refined moral nature, over the past thousand years and more are breaking down. The nomadic bandits are in the saddle again, though not always truly nomadic—some might be better labeled as ‘parasites’ or ‘fern bar bandits’. In recent generations, some barbarians have grown up in the midst of the great cities and they are itching to take advantage of disorder, stealing with the pen or with knowledge of the law or by violence if so inclined. The structures, including those created by such violent and brutal men as William the Conqueror, are breaking down—at all levels.

Reality.

Very disedifying for many, including those naive Christians who think that the gentle Jesus of Nazareth overcame in this mortal realm the brutal aspects of reality shown in the historical works of the Old Testament and interpreted, in some sense, by Isaiah and Jeremiah.

Didn’t happen. We still live in the same world as Uriah who was abandoned in battle to die at enemy hands—at the orders of King David so Beloved by God. Why? So David could cover the great sin he’d committed by impregnating Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah.

Our world is one of huge and greatly complex political and economic and religious communities, but it’s still the same—in some ways—as that world of brutal Semitic warriors fighting for control over such tiny regions of the world and over such small piles of wealth. It’s also a much different world if only because many of the gangs seem to live at least partially inside the power-structures we inherited from a world that no longer exists and

the members of the various gangs are sometimes embedded in those power-structures of governments, banks, corporations, and the Catholic Church. It has become possible, for example, for gangsters properly positioned, to carry out large-scale criminal conspiracies against the current powerholders, gangster or not, and against large numbers of private citizens and the various human communities. This might involve the destruction of an elected office-holder or a false-flag event or a pseudo-terrorism event of a scale making possible large speculative profits on the stock-market as well as the ensuing profits from criminal wars. It might involve the looting of gold vaults or maybe the looting of gold being transported by other thieves or by smugglers. MH-370 was flying the largest volume gold-smuggling route in the world, Kuala Lumpur to Beijing, and might have had some tons of vaguely described cargo; doesn't prove anything but it raises questions and points to similar opportunities for men of low moral standards and a high taste for risk.

I most certainly am not saying that all of this is done by gangs inside the CIA or the Russian FSB or such governmental agencies of the world, though I suspect there are revolving doors between private gangster organizations and the CIA/IMF/FSB/etc, just as there are revolving doors between the money-center banks and the SEC and other regulatory agencies. And we have to remember that Wachovia Bank wasn't just fined for laundering the money of Mexican drug-lords, it also had more than \$100 million of drug-smuggling profits seized; the banks and corporations might well have their own gangsters of the violent sort and not just the sort who steal through hiding profits or manipulating their own stock and the stock of other companies.

Acknowledge the stink of moral disorder and remember that Oxford- and MIT-educated financial experts, engineers, and bureaucrats will be better at carrying out Deep-State and false-flag criminal conspiracies than the illiterates who populate Al-Qaeda or the locally-grown drug-gangs. Again, let's remember that these become more possible, even more common, during periods of moral decay.

The world is neither a realm of Satan nor Sunnybrook Farm. The human race is neither fully depraved nor at all angelic. And something of the depraved man, something of the angel, is to be found in nearly all human beings.

The world is what it is, what it was made to be by God. The human race is also what it was made to be by God: a species evolved from apish

creatures and a species still struggling raise itself off its knuckles. More relevantly, so far as this essay goes, the human race has a very weak version of some laws, including the Fifth Commandment, written on its collective and individual hearts. We need to nurture what is good. Perhaps God lets loose the horsemen of the Apocalypse just because we need terrors and suffering if we are to be good in a tougher and more lasting way.

For those of us who think this world is a work of God and those who think of it in other terms, the world is what it is, in both the goodness and the disorder discussed by serious historians and moral theologians and evolutionary theorists and novelists and others. Currently, we in the West and perhaps some others in the world are going through a period of serious collapse into states of disorder. Until we make peace with the world as it is, we have no chance to return to a state of the moral order which makes possible peace and prosperity.

If we come to our senses, maybe we can even have a sustained state of moral order so that men of more peaceful inclinations can leave peaceful descendants; this was the case to a surprising extent during the last few centuries of the Christian West. A failure by Christians to properly engage the modern world, in its questions and possibilities, and the ensuing development of a secularism at a scale never before seen, killed the West and the various sorts of moral order it had established, however defective and incomplete those moral orders had been.

Who knows for sure? We could perhaps know a little better if we came to understand these issues of moral order and other sorts of order. And it will take work as some might know from having at least glanced at writings or documentaries about the discoveries by mathematicians and other scientists about the true nature of order. In this world, it seems to be almost always self-generated and not imposed in an hierarchical way—an issue which will cause great disturbances to the shrunken minds and bloated hearts and hyperactive hands of many, perhaps Catholics most of all.

Perhaps, in choosing hierarchies: kings with golden crowns rather than men with a hand on a plow and Popes on thrones rather than on fishing boats, we sow the seeds of disorder in our individual and communal selves.



# 531 Why Does a Developed Country (the United States) Have a Gangster/Warlord Ruling Elite More Suited to a Rising Barbarian Country?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2213>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/04/27.]

I've been reading serious history books regularly over the past couple of years and a bit more infrequently for much of my reading life before that. My knowledge isn't so broad as that of many scholars in the communities of academics or even the communities of commentators in the mass media or the alternative media on the Internet. Yet, I've found that I sometimes can find hints of patterns in situations where even most deep-thinking historians only provide a fact-based narrative. Such narratives are important, but raw facts are essentially concrete randomness, manifested chaos—organizing facts chronologically and geographically doesn't nearly eliminate that chaos.

It's the transition from raw facts to facts ordered to some tentative or firm patterns, patterns necessarily set in a global understanding, that helps us to better and deeper understandings of the general human condition and that of, say, that of humans living in a river valley in the western region of Massachusetts. That transition can also produce ideological distortions, but I'm willing to take the risk if only because I tend to work from my new understanding of empirical reality rather than starting from any strongly formed political or social beliefs which can rigidify into ide-

ologies. For example, I have no particularly strong commitment to any of the accepted forms of political organization because I don't think that individual and communal human beings as we know them fit well into the structures of monarchy or oligarchy or aristocracy or democracy, though we Americans, as one example, do our best to pretend to be capable of self-rule when evidence is growing that the United States is not a democracy, is not well-governed, and is not morally well-behaved in our internal or external activities.

In these terms, my beliefs underlying my thinking is simply a firm belief in the Christian Creed (choose Nicene or Apostolic or Athanasian or any other similar statement). These beliefs allow God the freedom to have created a world, and human being, to suit His purposes and we can—mostly—read those purposes out of the empirical world which is part of His Creation.

I'll concentrate in this essay upon a level in between all of humanity and the residents of the Chicopee River Valley: the United States which is a region of highly mobile and thus interpenetrating nations and classes held together by a highly centralized political State (Washington) and an excessively financialized economic system (Wall Street). This is a form of order only loosely tied to traditional beliefs, moral and otherwise, of the West.

How did we get here?

Well, the legend tells of brave souls seeking religious liberty in the New World. The reality has more to do with a Europe, mostly England and Scotland and Wales to start, in which young men and women were acquiring education and gaining knowledge of a world wider than their village or their neighborhood in London. Unfortunately, opportunities—including the basic ones of employment or entrepreneurial possibilities—weren't developing nearly as fast as these young men and women were being freed from the constraints and securities of excessively local societies. It wasn't just that these men and women partially released from parochial lives couldn't find jobs "good enough" for their ambitious and literate selves. There were not nearly enough jobs for all of them. From the 1600s onward, some came to the United States (or the English/British holdings or trading centers elsewhere). You can check out the 'revisionist' writings of Bernard Bailyn (such as *The Peopling of British North America: An Introduction*) and others who discovered surprising amounts of documentation on those emigrating from the British Isles.

The United States wasn't some sort of "city on the hill" but rather a place where many could find ways of making a living and maybe even make a fortune. Most of these men and women seem to have been inclined to hard work and to peaceful and stable lives, though willing enough to make war against the natives. See Chapter 408, *The Need for Abstractions in Moral Self-understanding* where I tried to apply deep reasoning about the nature of human being and being in general to find patterns where most will find raw facts which can be harvested for supporting evidence of one or another ideology such as those centered around: the superior European Christian men at work building that "city on the hill" or the brave native American warriors fighting off vicious invaders or the victimized native Americans who never had a chance against a people who weren't superior but they were, kind of, you know... superior. There is truth in some of these ideological renderings, some great amount of truth even in the tensions between each of the conflicting ideological views. There is distortion as well, but—even more importantly—a lack of insight into the human condition, including that of the individual and communal human beings of the residents of the eastern seaboard English colonies and the United States which arose from them.

A civilization isn't set in a world of raw facts. That way lies barbarism. A civilization is, at root, an ordering and an understanding of those raw facts. In our current lack of such an ordering or such an understanding, we see clear evidence of the advanced state of decay of Western Civilization. So it is that I'll provide a tentative answer to the question which is my title: *Why Does a Developed Country (US) Have a Gangster/Warlord Ruling Elite More Suited to a Rising Barbarian Country?* To throw in a wrinkle, I'll provide an answer which emphasizes the contingency and chaos in the quite raw facts of recent American history:

- The ongoing failure to assimilate African-Americans or even to try to understand why this assimilation hasn't happening and shows no signs of happening for most African-Americans.
- The mishandling of our relationships with native Americans has continued in the form of a large unassimilated people who are largely ignored as our politicians seek desperately for non-European peoples to bring into this country with the illusion they will be assimilated.

- The criminal and unjustified wars against other countries—possibly Korea and certainly Vietnam and Iraq and Libya and now Syria.
- The corrupting interventions into the internal affairs and foreign relationships of many other countries—nearly every Latin American country if we go back to 1900 or so, the Philippines from the years of our brutal and murderous war of 1899-1913, Pakistan since its founding, Iran from the overthrow of Mohammad Mosaddegh in 1953 through the current deceitful behavior of the American government—and Kerry is quite proud of this—in not living to its side of the deal in the Iranian abandonment of some sorts of nuclear research, Russia during her prone years in the 1990s, and so on.
- The regular occurrence of events in recent decades, such as the assassinations or attempted assassinations of non-mainstream public figures in the 1960s, the destruction of Nixon in light of recent revelations by journalists who've actually listened to the White House tapes that George Bush and John Dean knew of the Watergate crimes before Nixon and Mitchell, the Iran-Contra scandal in light of plausible claims that it was mainly intended to protect the CIA's heroin factories in the borderlands of Pakistan and Afghanistan, the unexplained crash of Flight 800, the ever-famous 9/11 in which affair we can readily find as much circumstantial evidence of participation by the government of Israel and the CIA and the US Air Force as we can find of participation by the Royal family of Saudi Arabia.

Let's get one thing straight: from at least the time that the prophet Jeremiah was warning the people of Israel, intelligent skeptics have known that many wealthy and powerful men will kill or rob others when enough wealth and power are at stake. They will kill innocent people, even engaging in attacks upon population centers or unleashing useful barbarians or mercenaries. John Adams was aware of this general historical (that is—contingent) truth and apparently engaged in ultimately successful efforts to convince Thomas Jefferson that wealthy and powerful men will do what is necessary to pass on that wealth and power to their sons—no matter what the American illusion is of equal opportunity. Most of the advantages will come to the privileged children because they go to school with each other and marry each other's siblings and so forth, but murders and even mass-murders and epic-scale robberies have never been out of the question

when enough is at stake. And we should remember the always profitable manipulation of gold-prices, stock-prices, currency values, and so on. And, sometimes in all periods and regions of human history, such crimes can result from the efforts of vassals and other subordinates to take over or just to join their former masters in the top levels of wealth and power.

Such crimes require professional, unbiased, and competent investigations of the sort they haven't gotten in recent American history. I'm not going to attempt to determine who really did what—anyone who thinks Al Qaeda or even Saudi Arabian intelligence and military personnel could have pulled off the well-coordinated, technically demanding attacks on 9/11 is free to do so; belief in the Easter Bunny is optional. I am going to claim that we began as a country with wonderful possibilities but a dangerously inadequate understanding of human nature, even as made evident in the Bible and in other historical writings as well as the simple and well-justified skepticism which Thomas Jefferson found in illiterate French peasants but not in the supposedly more sophisticated American citizenry. He claimed Americans to have a perverse sort of literacy (literalistic deformations of texts and other presentations of facts or narratives?) which leads to an invincible ignorance. This ignorance still exists.

From the beginning, Americans were a hardy people who stood on their own two feet when it came to clearing woods to grow corn or to build houses or churches. They were also a people unconsciously dependent, **fully** dependent, upon European civilization in such a way that it was water to our fishy selves. Thus it is that we invite many non-European peoples, as well as having brought Africans in chains, thinking that we are all generic human beings. Exposed to a life which is simply human—middle-class American life in recent decades—and not a limited and defective type of human life (that of non-Americans), all immigrants could adjust easily. It was simply a matter of tossing aside the corruptions originating in the Fall of Man and taking on the life of that true, purified human being—us in the US@. As to the slaves from Africa? It seems likely the Northeastern slave-traders and Southern slave-owners alike considered them to be so primitive, or maybe child-like, as to be receptive to a permanent role of doing menial labor for more complete or more mature human beings. Some improvisation is necessary with any sort of ideology, even that which truly underlies American propositional beliefs such as those arising from John Winthrop's vision of the "city upon a hill". (See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Winthrop](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Winthrop).)

If I tell someone about some recently declassified information that, yes, the United States (CIA and General Schwarzkopf the Daddy) overthrew a legitimate, democratically elected Iranian government in 1953 so that the US and UK could take Iran's oil without paying taxes or royalties or even offering jobs to Iranians, they shrug and move back to telling me how the Iranians aren't to be trusted because they don't think rationally like Americans do. Apparently, Iranian man is a close cousin to Neanderthal man and, like that robust man, would still be using paleolithic technology if not for contact with us who are truly modern men, wise-wise men or *homo sapiens sapiens*.

So it is that the citizens and other residents of a country once potentially great, and perhaps that potential will re-emerge, live in a world which is dream-like, even hallucinogenic. The country was started to provide economic activities and attracted men and women willing to work very hard for the chance to own their own farm or blacksmith shop or even simply a house in Baltimore in which the wife engaged in some sort of profitable home-craft and cared for the 8 children while the husband went off to build those famous Clipper sailing ships. Even in the 1960s and early 1970s, when I was a pre-collegian, even as the bloody war in Vietnam raged and was waged, I had a sense of some shallow but strong sort of American decency. Even as more and more men went to work for bloated corporations, including some aircraft manufacturers which were part of a more respectable but already dangerous American weapons industry, there was still a sense of stability, of respect for strong family ties, even a sense of place more readily associated with the American South. Sunday school picnics were truly part of our lives—up to my 12th year or so—and not a joke. Little league was in a proper proportion to the totality of human life and teams were sponsored even by churches and other organizations (including insurance agencies and other businesses) whose leaders assumed and quietly demanded a respect for Sunday and for good sportsmanship.

Many, perhaps most, Americans never developed a proper skepticism about men who seek wealth and power. Note I say “seek wealth and power” rather than, perhaps, “seek to do well while building great cars.” Countries formed by heavy application of broadswords had their gangster experiences early; in some cases, including England and the France in which lived those skeptical peasants Jefferson studied, countries went from constant local warfare between warlords to a greater order and stability, often because one warlord—call him Charlemagne if you wish—used his broadswords effec-

tively and intelligently against the lesser and greater in his realm. Those who couldn't act properly were sliced in half, top of the skull to the groin. And, over time, the surviving warlords and their descendants were integrated into their countries, receiving certain prerogatives and public honors in return for good behavior and for helping to keep others behaving well, or at least peacefully enough that the growing central power could collect needed taxes.

Americans didn't have to conquer warlords during the early generations of this country and never had to submit to a king who would bring those warlords under control in return for that submission.

Warlords are a form of gangster and that is a type of human being who can be found in all times of history and among all peoples, though some differences exist between Genghis Khan and William the Conqueror, between Ivan the Terrible and Henry VIII@. We now have a plethora of gangsters in the United States and that includes a heavy percentage of leaders in Washington and on Wall Street—though some are a bit softer in their own persons than was William the Conqueror. We've had them for at least a few centuries but they had few opportunities until the United States was founded and wealth and power began to consolidate and grow. In other words, a gangster is a pretty small fellow in lightly populated colonies with people struggling to feed themselves and make a future for their children. And, Americans, despite sometimes being good fighters as we saw in Morgan's riflemen from the western regions of Virginia, weren't much inclined to warrior ways as were, for example, the pastoral peoples disciplined into armies by Genghis Khan and by Shaka Zulu.

The gangsters began to show themselves in American history with a lot of probably justified smuggling to avoid British taxes and with early participation in the opium trade in East Asia; after all, there wasn't much New England could make or supply that the Chinese would take in return for all that blue and white porcelain dinnerware. Americans got into that opium trade in a bigger way after England, desperate to balance the trade between China and India before China could come to own India, fought wars for the right of English drug-dealers to exploit human beings of the Chinese persuasion. In the latter decades of the 18th century and early decades of the 19th century, Americans of mostly the northeastern variety got into the slave business in a big way. Men with "the moral character of gangsters" from all countries and all ages will make money trading other peoples as chattel slaves, trading substances that destroy other human beings from

inside out, stealing the wealth of other countries or that of their fellow-citizens. Quoted phrase is from Lord Acton who noted the problem with centralized and powerful governments is the way they attract those sorts: men with “the moral character of gangsters.” I’d say that all piles of wealth and power will attract such men, but Americans seem to assume that the gentlemen of honor, the George Washingtons, and even the bastards of honor, the Andrew Jacksons, are the ones who end up controlling the wealth and power of, say, the American government. Could be so, if the American political system had even as much integrity as the old-fashioned ethnic political machines, but the American political system is as well-ordered as the streets of our inner-city regions, as well-ordered as the money-center banks, as well-ordered as the boardrooms of our weapons manufacturing companies which resemble too well their depictions as true centers of evil in some science fiction movies.

Our government and our money-center banks and some of our corporations are run by men who are Harvard-trained and Stanford-trained gangsters, having no better moral character than the young thugs fighting for control of the drug-trade in inner-cities. And we have no social systems to keep them under control, no immune system which can handle these parasites run amok in our body public. And Americans remain oblivious to the real situation, some believing in universal conspiracies run by wizards in finely tailored business suits, the vast majority seeming to believe the world is run the way we learned in 3rd grade social studies and 12th grade American Government classes. The parasites will continue to suck out American wealth and misuse American power until the country collapses in one way or another. There is nothing that can rescue the United States of noble myth even if American men were to recover their balls and their brains. The parasites are attached to every major organ in the body public of the United States.

[For a more optimistic viewpoint—over the long-run when I’ve been long in my grave, see Chapter 484, *The Fragmented States of America*.]

# 532 Exceptional Could Have Been US

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2225>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/06/01.]

Over the prolonged founding of the United States, we were bereft of the baggage of the past. In this lay our great promise.

Over the prolonged founding of the United States, we were bereft of the baggage of the past. In this lay our possible madness, but so strangely decent and often gentle and kindly form of madness.

Nowadays, historians hold newer opinions, and new than that at times: the colonies which would one day form the United States were settled in the main by men and women looking for a job, to put it a bit tersely. They were British people of some education or serious vocational training and with little hope of any good employment if they remained in the British Isles where population was growing even faster than the opportunities generated by the early (or even pre-period) of the Industrial Revolution. Those people dreamed of a decent pay for either entrepreneurial efforts or for honest labor for another, and those people were willing to work hard and smart to reach their dreams. A decent pay but also respect, a chance to form a household, perhaps for an existing family or for a new family formed in the New World.

A very modest dream for most. Few held even the dream of substantial but not spectacular wealth such as that achieved by Benjamin Franklin or, God willing, the flashier wealth achieved by the trader (and smuggler) John Hancock. We had our boasters displayed so well, as I dimly recall, in the characters of Davy Crockett and Mike Fink. We had our boosters and hucksters who played so important a role in developing the American West, building shacks with false-fronts planted in almost arbitrary spots in Kansas

to entice settlers and to trick the railroads into adding a station. We had our slave-traders and opium-dealers (the second category including Russell & Co with its operations officer, Warren Delano—grandfather to FDR). We've had our political scoundrels, including some who benefited from the conveniently timed demise of political opponents. We've had professional politicians who never made huge salaries given their needs to entertain and be seen in the best of clothes in the best of places; those same politicians seemed to have saved so many thousands of dollars out of their spare pennies so that they had tens of millions by retirement from the White House or Senate. The same stuff we sneer at when it happens in some Latin American banana republic or some African country manufactured to the needs of Western natural resource companies. Same old, same old.

And, yet, as someone who lived in a small town in a part of New England that knew few blue-bloods, I remember a basic decency that was a bit like those sit-coms on TV—but a bit more real and less plastic. It was perhaps inspiration for DisneyWorld and for Westworld, but still part of God's world. Hannah Arendt might have been right in her claim that, like the German middle-class of the 1930s and 1940s who built and ran the chemical factories and made the trains to Auschwitz run on time, Americans are better described as nice than as moral, generous and well-behaved in good circumstances and possessing little in the way of the moral courage which is needed in tough circumstances. We go along, even with leaders we've begun to suspect of being low-grade in morality or competence.

We weren't exceptional, though our citizens who had never been overseas but in US Army uniforms did read *National Geographic Magazine* and sometimes popular history books or middle-brow novels which seem to have great intellectual depth compared to most of what's published nowadays. We didn't need graphic depictions of bodies being ripped apart by bullets—an empathetic man or woman, boy or girl, could read Kenneth Roberts' *Arundel* and understand the sufferings of the New Englanders and Virginia riflemen as they made their way up to Quebec under the command of Benedict Arnold and Daniel Morgan. The war novels of James Jones and Norman Mailer told what an intelligent reader needed to appreciate the physical and psychological horrors of more modern forms of war.

And some of those less-traveled Americans, most of whom had never eaten in Thai or Lebanese restaurants, could identify a good number of countries on the globe. They knew the American states and cities and river systems. Many had some serious knowledge of the two World Wars and

maybe the Civil War and Revolutionary War. Some even could name some of the American Indian tribes which had lived nearby and could talk of the horrors committed by red-man and white-man alike. If biased a bit by current standards toward isolation, they could often justify their stance by some knowledge of and a gut-level feeling for the complexities of the world.

And those Americans were reasonably hardworking and pretty well-balanced in time they spent on other parts of their lives—family and church and maybe military reserve or guard unit. The children were also a bit better balanced. It was important to know the standings of the major league sports teams and of the power hitters in the Major League home-run derby and the goal-scorers in the NHL; it was important to run inside and catch the score for those early Super-Bowls; it was most important to spend Saturday afternoon playing pick-up baseball or tag football. It was good to spend Sunday afternoons at family picnics or church picnics or at the lake for those lucky enough to have an uncle with a cabin and a boat.

It was a country where people tended to get complacent about job skills and about the school system—we were on top and would never have to worry about competing with factories on Taiwan or about finding our children in university classrooms competing against Bulgarians who'd already had two or three years of (American) college-level physics in their high schools. Wasn't even on the horizon, though in 1973, when I was trying to figure out why I was floundering so badly in my freshman year of college, I could walk through science and engineering buildings and see a high percentage of Asian graduate students.

Over the prolonged founding of the United States, we were bereft of the baggage of the past. In this lay our great promise.

Over the prolonged founding of the United States, we were bereft of the baggage of the past. In this lay our possible madness, but so strangely decent and often gentle and kindly form of madness.

In past writings, I've noted the claims of Ortega y Gasset that the West entered a serious process of cultural decay in the 19th century because large numbers of peoples and people were freed from parochial lives and their leaders failed to raise them to a state appropriate for a cosmopolitan people. Instead, those leaders sank down into the vulgar masses to enjoy, in the modern setting, movies making the Three Stooges seem sophisticated and television shows teaching ideas which would have been considered morally perverse in Greenwich Village back in the 1950s. Clergymen and teachers, politicians and novelists, musicians and painters, prepared the way for the

low standards of mass entertainment and mass education. Remember—under such circumstances, standards will be low if larger markets are to be created even if the various peoples have rich and deep cultures. In recent years, the music industry has produced interesting and good quality collaborations between, say, African and Celtic musicians. Earlier such collaborations, sometimes unconscious and over generations, had produced some interesting and even some good-quality results, but mostly profitable ephemera, in rock-and-roll and country genres. Too often, what resulted from efforts to appeal to teenagers, white and black, urban and rural, Northern and Southern and Western, was sheer junk celebrating emotional and cognitive immaturity, as well as celebrating various moral and political ideas disapproved by most parents, though many of those parents were the ones who turned the television set to the programs which were the most questionable. And now such low, trashy standards prevail throughout American society.

We were a people of interesting innocence, streaked with that corruption which led morally conservative men and women to watch Norman Lear's fare along with their children. That innocence, cynical and likable at the same time, left us generally vulnerable to that cultural Marxist march through our institutions of education and entertainment, of journalism and political activities, of serious culture and religion. So it was that Lear and other pseudo-sophisticates, ignorant and untalented men and women with snooty attitudes, were able to complete that American process of passing from barbarism to decadence without going through a stage of civilization in between.

We didn't mature out of that innocence which sheltered us while building much, and tolerating crimes by our most ambitious against Amerindians and Africans—as they practiced for what they've started doing to all of us. We, as a people and a country, became the image of Dorian Gray—self-serving degeneracy gilded with a thin layer of likable innocence.

Ah, but we can at least cast a substantial part of the blame on some others.

Because of the moral irresponsibility of European leaders in the first half of the 20th century, we Americans were thrust into a role of world leadership for which we were far from ready even if we'd been able to handle the morally degenerate exploiters arising in our midst. We've performed as badly in the international realm as could have been feared, failing to even learn from experience, even those post-9/11 kinetic activities resulting in the

death of thousands of American soldiers and the psychological or physical maiming of tens of thousands of others and the deaths of probably better than a million people in Iraq and Afghanistan and Libya and Syria and the tribal lands of Pakistan. And to no purpose. We are no safer inside the United States, not that we were ever in so much danger as the residents of most other countries, and we've destroyed other countries while killing those million people in Southwestern Asia.

Only time will tell if we Americans have destroyed our capacity to be either a good or a great country, let alone both at once. For now, we're best described as a juvenile delinquent of a country.



# 533 Dorian Gray's Everlasting Day Off

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2232>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/06/14.]

As I move forward on my project to make sense of human being as both individual and community, I'm reading in certain areas of mathematics (topology and differential geometry and abstract algebra and others) and also trying to keep up my readings in history and literature. The project threatens to swallow me at times, but I'm finding a sense of peace and even of wholeness as I seem to be recovering, as I approach the age of 61!, from some of the damage done to me by my failure to pursue my own interests and talents, by my failure and the failure of the adults in my life to help me develop both mind and moral character. Sadly enough, I can say only partly tongue-in-cheek that I'm recovering from being a modern American and a modern Christian—as I partly recover my mind and moral character.

Even by the mid-1960s—I was born in 1955, American culture—including most certainly the educational systems—was degraded so that it failed to nurture intelligence and moral character; it seems in retrospect that parents and educators were advancing the interests of a shallow sort of pop culture—television shows of the caliber of *The Monkees* and *Laugh-in* and rock-and-roll music and obsession with pro sports and all that—as if deliberately disrupting a healthy maturing process. The minds and moral characters of an increasing share of the American youth were being increasingly deformed and stunted; it's hard to see how the process could advance much further than it already has in 2016, but evil has often surprised those who tried to play the role of prophet or seer. In any case, even truly loving parents, other relatives, teachers, clergymen, and so on played a willing role

in deforming and stunting minds and moral characters under some strange ideas about childhood and young adulthood and how it was good to simply delay entry into full adulthood rather than to gently guide the maturing process, trying to keep it at a pace natural to the particular children or young adults.

This glorification of youth, this effort to see children as the true Adam and Eve—pre-fallen human beings, has served the interests of some corrupt and unwise members of the power-elite (or whatever you wish to call them) but the bulk of Americans, as if following Tocqueville's script, had started the process in some ground-up manner as if we were a chaotic mass with a tendency to self-organize into some state of perpetual youth, as if we wished to be a country of Peter Pans. Tocqueville had noted, in a book published in 1828—*Democracy in America*, that Americans were capable of overlooking even the most obvious of facts if those facts were in conflict with our own favored view of things and it would seem that our favored view is centered around some sort of Eden populated by Peter Pan and the Lost Boys. As some have recently written, Tocqueville—in the midst of saying many good things about Americans as they were and as they might be—feared we would develop into a self-brainwashing, self-censoring people living gladly under a gentle sort of totalitarianism.

As I approach my 61st birthday, I look into the mirror and see a gray-bearded fellow who matured enough to marry and form a family at about the age of 35 but had fallen into a state of poverty. I had been, from the age of about 12 to 35, a terrible under-achiever, first in failing to persist in pursuing my true interests of physics and mathematics once it had proven to be a difficult task—especially for someone with a weak secondary education, and then had failed to put in an honest effort in pursuing—quite reluctantly—a career in actuarial science and then...? Am I succeeding in what I think to be a true calling of reviving first my own mind and then providing some encouragement and maybe substantial ideas for the reviving and nurturing of other minds? Can such a revival occur and perhaps bring about a revival of Western Civilization? Can it at least help in the formation of a Christian civilization in some other region? Is it merely the meaningless flounderings of a man who has wasted his life?

It was a weak or immature moral character that kept me from digging in and doing my duty as a student and then as a well-paid insurance professional. I had good reason to feel cheated in life, but there is only a small percentage of even highly talented human beings who have gotten a good

chance to develop their talents. For all we know, some of the illiterate slaves of Plato or his friends might have been far smarter than any of the famous Athenians. There might have been an unschooled farmer born in 1770 who was potentially a better mathematician than was Gauss. Most certainly, there are men and women in the United States who are far better qualified to be President or Secretary of State or CEO of JP Morgan/Citibank/General Motors than those who have held those offices in recent decades; it is quite possible that some of those better men and women might have been kept out of power just because they had moral character.

What was was? Does it do any good to dwell upon these issues? Does it do any good to give up some chance of prosperity to recover a mind or a moral character? Will it help future generations in any way?

Can I even claim to have a firmer and more mature moral character as I live in poverty, surviving on the kindness of my sister and other relatives and friends?

If so, what does that say about a country and a (decaying) civilization which fails to support serious efforts in literature and philosophy and theology and the unification of knowledge (all of the preceding plus empirical science) yet throws millions a year to felons in the NBA and to those who make movies based on kiddie sci-fi shows (Flesh Gordon → Star Wars and Star Trek) and kiddie cartoons (Superman, Spiderman, Flintstones → the obvious) and to those who write books or make adult movies that make the 1950s with its middlebrow novels and history books and gorgeously filmed distortions of history look like a revival of the Elizabethan Age?

Arguably, Dorian Gray has stepped out of his picture to discover the world is in a far greater state of moral decay than he was and maybe still is. And there are signs that Ferris Bueller's Ferrari is choking and grinding to a halt; what will such a people do when they have to fix all the broken and non-maintained stuff around them?



# 534 It's Not Hypocrisy, It's Brainwashing Deeper than Orwell Foresaw

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2251>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/07/26.]

Recently, I read *The China Mirage: The Hidden History of American Disaster in Asia* by James Bradley. In early chapters, Bradley describes the American role as junior member of Great Britain's Opium Trade in China. The Americans were freeloaders of a sort, relying upon the British Navy and Army to prevent the Chinese government from protecting its citizens against these predatory Western gangsters. To be sure, the British wouldn't sell Americans any opium from their plantations in India and Americans were forced to transport opium from Turkey.

Are Westerners born to be drug smugglers and slave-traders? Not really. The young men who came from the northeastern parts of the US and entered the China Trade were from respectable families, mostly of modest economic means though sometimes of relatively high education. They set out to make a fortune and to make it fast. As was probably true of most American slave-traders preying on Africans (and on future generations of Americans both black and white), the American opium-dealers were devoted to the highest possible rate of return on their time and money.

So, the opium trade in China wasn't started and run by men who were the equivalent of the semi-literate street thugs who are the bad guys of modern movies and television shows. It was started and run by the "boy next door," much like the young CIA agent in *The Quiet American* [63] by Graham Greene. That young man of that novel was in Vietnam in

the early 1950s to support warlords committing acts of terrorism including mass-murder; as described, he was a nice young fellow from a nice New England town by way of a nice American college. With a good voice, he could have auditioned for one of those 1950s groups which sang about summer romances and high school dances. The American opium-dealers in the “China Trade” and American slave-traders in the “Africa Trade” seem to have been early 19th century versions of that “boy next door,” though some were a bit more upscale at least in terms of lineage—Mayflower and all that.

So, it wasn't that there had been a conspiracy by pre-existing drug-smugglers. Why, then, had ambitious young British and American men starting coming to the coast of China to make their fortunes by preying upon the Chinese? Why did the British navy and army protect these men engaged in selling a substance, opium, that could ease pain when properly used but destroy bodies and minds and moral characters when abused? Moreover, it was a substance declared illegal in Great Britain because of its bad effects on individuals and communities—including the state.

It was tea that was the initial problem. The people of the British Isles loved their tea from China. Silks and porcelains were optional. And the Chinese wanted little of what the Western countries had to offer. The British tea-merchants started paying for the Chinese product with silver. The British government quickly realized that the China tea-trade would drain the entire Empire of silver and then would drain the Empire of. . . Something else valuable or else the flow of tea would cease and some powerful merchants would be out of business. Under the young Queen Victoria, who was either a fraud as a moral leader or simply out of her depths, the British government responded to a request by the Chinese government to bring British opium-dealers under control by sending warships which pounded some Chinese coastal cities, killing many innocent people as well as destroying much property. So it was that the Imperial government started encouraging the opium trade as an indirect but financially successful way to pay for the tea-trade. Morally repugnant but financially successful.

American opium-dealers, including Warren Delano—grandfather of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and source of most of his fortune, geared up their already existing operations. Delano and many others were able to engage in a nasty business without too much dirtying of hands—they brought in the opium from Turkey and turned to look away as Chinese smugglers came onto their ships or into their facilities and moved the goods. Those

good American gangsters returned to their Boston parlors and New Haven churches as distinguished (that is, rich) American gentlemen who told stories of the China Trade—silks and porcelains and all that, especially when the blue-blood or nouveau riche ladies were about. And the children. Even the sons who might take up work in one trade or another—though those blue-blood families left those trades in the late 1800s (higher rates of return in steel mills and railroads) until the Cold War led them to enable the opium and then heroin business of anti-communist insurgents in Southeast Asia. Enabling at times included smuggling heroin into the United States in coffins of American soldiers killed in Vietnam. The China Trade involved silks and porcelains and that newer Southeast Asia Trade involved the spread of democracy and freedom. There is also some reason to believe that this more modern trade had something to do with oil, copper, and gold in Indonesia which had originally been stolen (in the ground) by the Dutch and then by a group involving various American corporations as well as the Rockefeller family and. . . Some others from the usual suspects.

Time to forget in the way I can learn from some of my betters.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt was apparently born to forget, or even never know, inconvenient facts. As Bradley tells the earlier story, FDR never acknowledged by even a hint that his fortune by way of his mother came from opium-smuggling and not from all those silk gowns and blue porcelain plates and cups. Bradley gives a quote from FDR's son Elliot which shows he knew about the source of the family money. (FDR's father was prosperous but less so than the Delanos and I don't know where his money originated.)

This drug-gangster money was used to build hospitals and schools as well as factories. It was part of the fuel for the explosive growth of the American economy in the mid- to late-1800s. Undoubtedly, along with money from the Africa Trade, some money from the China Trade helped to develop the American natural-resource companies and investment groups which went to Indonesia and other countries in the 1950s to fight the spread of communism.

I've already mentioned the African slave-trade but I'll write a little bit more. Americans from mostly the northeastern states (New England and New York and Pennsylvania and Delaware) brought home chests of gold from that trafficking in human beings which began with perhaps some capture but mostly purchase of human beings on the west coast of Africa and went through the truly nasty transportation (as many as half of the Africans

died in chains and all of them sat in their own waste or the waste of others and the culinary offerings were less than healthy, the sleeping arrangements less than luxurious) and then the selling in various countries including the United States. According to Lincoln's most prominent modern biographer, David Herbert Donald of Harvard, the 16th President's planned generosity to the South at war's end was actually an act of justice in his mind because of that profitable human trafficking by northerners. Those virtuous men of the north left the southerners holding the hot potato, though I'd add those southerners had committed crimes as well in buying human beings to work in poverty for the enrichment of said southerners. They also committed crimes against their own descendants, indeed all future generations of Americans, by bringing into their own land a mass of (at best) difficult-to-assimilate human beings.

Gangster States of America?

But even those engaging in the nasty slave-trade apparently returned to the formal parlors of seaside mansions in Providence and Salem, returned to their Congregationalist or Unitarian churches, returned to perhaps finish up at Harvard or to fund a fraternity at Yale, returned to take up the honors of a rich investor in job-producing and wealth-producing factories, the honors of a benefactor of so many good and noble institutions.

Americans, including our historians, can be quick to point to the barbarian warlords and mercenary thugs who played important roles in many countries. We Americans are quick to remember the Nazis who killed Jews and forget the Americans who transported Africans across the Atlantic in ships of horror and the Americans who won the wars with the natives and then refused to give them a good stake in the country which resulted. We remember the Sicilian and Colombian and Mexican drug-gangsters and forget the men named Russell or Perkins or Delano who made their family fortunes by destroying the minds and bodies and moral characters of Chinese.

This isn't hypocrisy because we, as a people and nearly all of us as individuals or members of families, remember not our crimes as a people. This is a deep form of forgetting. What conflicts with our understanding of our world, what conflicts with our own imperfect individual selves but our somehow morally pure American selves, is erased by some as-yet mysterious process.

Mysterious? Yes, but in a solvable sense. I think that the solution requires a better understanding of human communal being, that the memory

erasure is driven by problems in the memory of the American community. Some events of our past go into libraries and some go into paper-shredders. This doesn't make the past crimes and sins of our past disappear. Rather does it make them part of us by making us self-righteous and by teaching us how to lie ever more, to ourselves and to our children and to . . .

I don't think we're fooling God about our past or about our bloody and exploitive present. Yet, this process of lying is so much a part of American identity that nearly all Americans participate freely and enthusiastically though it now hurts many of us. The exploiters of Africans and Chinese moved smoothly into the destruction of the political and cultural structures of Korea and Vietnam and Iraq and Afghanistan and Pakistan and Libya, with more countries in Africa and Asia and Latin America under active or planned exploitative destruction.

Oh, I forgot to forget. It's the Iraq Trade in Freedom and Democracy, the Afghanistan Trade, the Brazil Trade and . . .

More to come, even to our own neighborhoods, though I hardly even know what to say about the transfer of middle-class wealth to various parasites who found a way to make higher returns on their time and money than could have been imagined for even the China Trade or Africa Trade. We Americans are so good at forgetting that we do so even when the victims have been our own selves and our children and grandchildren.



# 535 The 1960s Were a Time for Reaping Rotten Fruit, Long Past the Time of Sowing

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2255>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/08/09.]

In reviewing *A war for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars* by Andrew Hartman, Seth Bartee writes:

In *A War for the Soul of America* Hartman argues that the late 20th century's cultural conflicts were born out of the tumultuous 1960s. To most observers this might not seem a particularly provocative thesis, but recent literature, as Hartman shows, has tried to downplay the radicalism of the '60s by demonstrating that this era was also a period of great growth for conservative ideas. Where Hartman diverges from this view of a more moderate or balanced 1960s is in claiming that these years universalized "fracture," thus setting up a wide plane of debate between the left and right that grew to a fever pitch decades later. [See the article, *How the Culture Wars Began (and Ended)* at <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/how-the-culture-wars-began-and-ended/>

Baloney.

The 1960s were—at most—a political and cultural flowering of perversions long festering in the American mind and moral character and festering at a less toxic level in Western minds of various traditions. It was in the 1850s that Herman Melville expressed the fear that there as a strong streak

of moral insanity in the American character, and he thought that moral insanity was in the form of a rebellion against God. A decade or so later, a very mainstream Protestant group, the Congregationalists, dropped the requirement that the individual congregations (parishes or local churches) hold to one of the ancient Christian creeds. (For a book-length discussion of the dangerous silliness of people not holding to a Christian creed and still pretending to be Christians, see: *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* [137] by James Turner.) A couple of decades before the Congregationalist apostasy, Tocqueville had already seen the possibilities of a gentle totalitarianism growing up from the ordinary citizenry—my words: this was a citizenry already man-centered and not Christ-centered nor even Deity-centered. Let's add: Hawthorne and Henry James, Sr, contemporaries of Melville, had very similar opinions to him about one early flowering of this insanity; the three of them considered Emerson and Thoreau to be morally insane, largely in their rejection of (Christian) charity and similar communal bonds.

What is true about the 60s is that it was a public, undeniable, and—thus—disconcerting flowering of this insanity so basic to the American character and a lesser but—as it turns out—deeply embedded part of the Western character in general. The psychedelic, politically disordered, morally disordered 60s were less a new growth and more a fantastic flowering out of a dying plant or society—the story could perhaps be better narrated by Edgar Allan Poe than by the greatest of historians, just because it was driven along by what was inside the American people rather than by objective factors.

But we Americans had moved into the 60s thinking it was all wonderful and moved on with barely a sense of a deep wrong in our own selves and in the United States and in the West. Ordinary middle-class men and women could live the country-club, out-to-eat, Florida-retirement-home life of the rich and the factory managers of earlier generations.

Intellectuals also, (self-deluding) conservative and (cartoonish) progressive, came out of the same environment as I did (born in 1955). I never met some of my mother's upwardly mobile cousins though I was close to some of their parents, my great-uncles and great-aunts. In Sunday School, I learned little of those creedal matters still accepted by some local churches which were Congregationalist, but not in mine; we learned the most edifying stories of the Bible as well as some context-free stories, such as that of Noah and the Great Flood.

The two world wars and the economic extremes of the first half of the 20th century had freed many Americans with even a fairly small streak of moral insanity, freed them to be the individualists of their own morally perverse but all-American imaginations. The leaders were also freed. Consistent with the career of Bill and Hillary Clinton, I'd say that many of those progressivists of the 60s would gladly have become LBJ, or still worse?, if they had the chance. A lot of so-called conservatives proved little better when given a chance at exercising or influencing power.

In the end, most were false conservatives in the sense they were just defending an already corrupted state of American, or Western, society. A truer conservative, such as Russell Kirk at his ineffective best, would realize that decay had already deeply damaged the true traditions, the "permanent things," if you will. A true conservative in the Modern Age can be an outright reactionary as was Orestes Brownson or an outright radical as was Augustine of Hippo—the lesson being that the reactionary and radical defenders of tradition are one in a strong sense. Defenders of the modern status quo, even that of the 1950s, are conserving very ephemeral things.

So it is that Hartman apparently made the same mistake as many would-be conservatives. He associated the state of a decaying civilization with some sort of true order, though it wasn't one Hartman would have endorsed:

Hartman observes that fracture became evident in the 1960s as the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant consensus disintegrated. And according to him, "The culture wars were the defining metaphor for the late-twentieth-century United States." He begins the story in the 1960s, with New Left radicals who challenged the idea of "normative" America. Opponents of the New Left included former Leninists and socialists who became neoconservative intellectuals, along with familiar conservative political figures such as Ronald Reagan and Richard Nixon. [See the article, *How the Culture Wars Began (and Ended)* at <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/how-the-culture-wars-began-and-ended/>

More baloney.

I have significant sympathy and even some admiration for Reagan and Nixon, but each of those men—as Eric Voegelin might have said—merely wanted to turn around and crawl back to a more pleasant spot on the

downward path to decay and Nixon perhaps started his political career as the servant to established families which supported a sort of globalism-progressivism which served to protect or increase their wealth and power. Jacques Barzun might have also said something of the sort: after all, both Reagan and Nixon were born nearly 400 years into the downslope from the height of the West—see *From Dawn to Decadence: 1500 to the Present* [9] by Barzun. The “Present” of the title was 2000.

It took men more insightful than Reagan or Nixon, apparently more insightful than Hartman or Bartee, to see that the blush on the cheeks in the 50s was due to the fever preceding death. Tocqueville saw some bad signs in the citizens of this country who had freed themselves from the weight of tradition. Melville and Hawthorne, and maybe Poe in some sense, saw a bit more than even that great French thinker. Perhaps Flannery O'Connor saw the most deeply of all—she saw the South as a Christ-soaked but not Christ-centered region and seemingly saw the rest of the United States as voluntarily and happily free of the presence of Christ. I'd go still further in my understanding.

The 500 years of decay discussed by Barzun were a struggle by many in the West, not just intellectuals, to rid their individual and communal selves of Christ, blind to the fact that most of what was good in them, what was mature in them, what was sane in them, was intertwined with Christ and the communities of His friends—the Body of Christ. The West maimed its communal selves and its individual selves by the effort to remove Christ.

In my Christian understanding of human being, I make peace with Darwin and his successors. We are born human animals and something happens during some human lives to begin a transition to the state of moral person, including the higher state (not reachable in this world even by saints) of true membership in the Body of Christ. Perhaps we're now seeing a rejection of such membership by the many children of those who were sort-of Christians, at least they were sort-of Christians so long as Christianity and specific Churches or local churches served them. We're seeing a failure by the leaders and intellectuals of Christianity to keep alive some Christian understanding of this world and more. Perhaps we're also seeing other things at work, but the position of Hartman (and at least partly the position of Bartee) is wrong:

Hartman observes that fracture became evident in the 1960s as the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant consensus disintegrated.

And according to him, “The culture wars were the defining metaphor for the late-twentieth-century United States.”

Behind us, there was no consensus though our ancestors acted as-if there were. There is no possibility of such a state—there is either true community, that moving toward the Body of Christ, or there is nothing but an amoral struggle between individuals, even between a mother and the child in her womb. There is nothing so shallow as modern, liberal understandings of being. Yes, it goes that deep, far deeper than the political and economic and cultural issues which concern Hartman. The heavily compromised understanding of being held by modern thinkers including most so-called conservatives and even most self-proclaimed religious traditionalists is in direct and brutal conflict with all plausible Christian understandings, including the archaic and creaking understandings which pass in the modern world as “Christian truths.” When faced with problems of the sort which became obvious in the later stages of the Enlightenment (say, the late 1700s), Augustine and Aquinas became radicals to defend their faith and the true Christian traditions upon which their faiths rested. (All faiths, all human knowledge and feelings and acts, are—at best— approximations to the truth we’ll know if we join Christ in His Body.)

In the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we saw a new state of being, one seen in the Eucharist and the other Sacraments, indeed in all of sacramental reality. It took centuries before Aquinas and a few other Christian thinkers could develop an intellectual understanding of the being seen in the Eucharist. After the century or a little more of turmoil which followed the High Middle Ages, that deep understanding of being was thrown away pretty quickly, partly because the founders of modern thought, including those who built the foundations of modern political and economic liberalism, rejected Aquinas’ imperfect but promising understanding of being—divine and created, and adopted bad theories of being, mostly tinged or outright infected by some sort of Nominalism. Communities, even the Body of Christ, were nominalistic entities. The Trinity became not just a mystery beyond our immediate understanding; it was in direct conflict with our liberal beliefs in freestanding individuals and in the need to be able to touch and directly model any true being. Knowledge was fully externalized, bookkeeping entries, rather than man’s approximation to being, participation in God’s acts-of-being. More recently, thinkers remain obstinately blind to the lessons of Einstein and Dirac: true being can present

itself to the morally well-formed mind and imagination without being directly perceptible. To be fair, there is at least a hint of this in the claim of some scientists that “there are no facts without theories.”

No one saw that modern knowledge of the evolution of man and of the workings of the human body should lead us to fear that a man or a woman is but a placeholder, a named pseudo-entity, which actually points to a bundle of processes which sometimes fight against each other and of even alien creatures—bacteria and viruses which often play an important role in our good health.

No one foresaw, and few see even now, that modern mathematics provides ways of describing global entities made of regions which are real individuals in the sense of having their own independent parts and aspects. The universe is itself, a global entity, and also something of a collection of individual regions and localized entities, stars and comets and men and rattlesnakes.

The greater understanding of being which I’ve developed is that of a greater realm of created being which includes the perceptible and measurable being of this world and the more abstract forms of being described by mathematics and quantum mechanics and other realms of human study. It reconciles modern radical philosophers of quantum physics with St John the Evangelist in positing the primacy of relationships over stuff. Not surprisingly, this greater realm—Creation to some of us—can be seen only by a disciplined exercise of the imagination and only seen more clearly if the work I’m doing or the work done by others, philosophers and theologians and artists and poets and architects and technologists perhaps unborn, expands from philosophical sketches and contemplations to become part of a greater understanding of Creation, an understanding which is the true heart of a Christian civilization, an understanding implicit in the way we build houses as well as the way we speak of God and His acts-of-being.

Modern, Western man sneered at or simply refused that greater understanding of created being which existed in some form from the time of Aquinas or even earlier. In a weird and almost demonic dance of the mind and heart as well as of the hands, modern, western man gave up that understanding, gave up his faith, gave up a sacramental world, gave up the Sacraments given to us by the Lord Jesus Christ. To speak simply but not simplistically at all, the loss of faith in the Eucharist drove the West into what certainly seems to be a terminal state of decay. Perhaps the West might even revive without dying and being born anew, but such a revival

can happen only if Western man begins first to hunger for Christ's Body and Blood, begins to desire to be Christ's friend and to be part of the Body of Christ and to be Christ.

Otherwise, if something new springs up in Europe and the Americas, it will be pagan, though perhaps it and its members will be more open to Sacramental Christianity than are the current secularized, liberalized caricature of Western Civilization and its sad, cartoonish members.

It's sad that so many intelligent people have played seemingly profound games upon the surface of being, thinking that political and cultural and economic reforms, and other reforms, were possible without a re-understanding of a world different from, more complex and richer than, anything possible in the assumed or even proposed metaphysical systems of the modern world. Yet, modern man acted as if consciously knowing that metaphysics had to be obscured because the only such systems possible to Western men were those drawn ultimately from a truly weird but also truly profound and truthful combination of Biblical revelation with Greek philosophical speculation. Aquinas should be restored to a central position just because he was willing to somewhat (only somewhat!) distort Plato and Aristotle by subordinating them to St John the Evangelist. The distortion was not so great in the end because Plato and Aristotle saw truths of being more clearly than do the vast majority of self-proclaimed Christian thinkers of the modern West.

[At this time, I should point out that I also—honestly and explicitly—had rejected Thomism and other metaphysical systems, until I received some gentle but piercing critiques of that position in personal correspondence with Stanley Hauerwas. This is somewhat strange since Professor Hauerwas rejects, in principle, natural theology though my way of doing metaphysics through natural theology is closer to the ways of Aquinas and even Augustine than they are to modern forms of natural theology. And my way even resembles the way of that great, and persecuted, Catholic scientist and theologian named Galileo Galilei.]



# 536 Making the World Safe for Christian Beliefs

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2280>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/09/24.]

Over the past few centuries or more, Western Christians have retreated from a proper engagement with God's Creation. Many modern scientists and philosophers now work actively to sequester religious beliefs in the most general sense. Sometimes this is as crude and as juvenile as claiming that the success of the equations of modern physics prove that there is no Creator of this universe, despite the fact that there were some strong, sometimes unconventional, believers among the true geniuses who created modern physics. At least some of the non-believers, such as Einstein who seems to me at times an atheist and at other times a pantheist, didn't claim any categorical knowledge that the God of the Bible didn't exist.

It is the very weaknesses in thought of most of the modern skeptics and non-believers in science that led them to offer battle on the wrong field; unfortunately, far too many theists have accepted the challenge on that field. Not me. I'm not bothering to accept challenges from anyone who thinks that God's existence and power rise or fall with the Big Bang or with Schrodinger's Equation. See the demanding but richly rewarding *Bangs, Crunches, Whimpers, and Shrieks: Singularities and Acausalities in Relativistic Spacetimes* [31] by the philosopher John Earman for a much deeper discussion of this matter—at the end of the book which is mainly concerned with a technical philosophical analyses of the meaning of possible 'defects' in the spacetime of our universe.

What we need to do, and what I'm doing, is to step back and take a more global view—as Newton and Einstein did—from various directions,

Christian or pantheistic. Mostly, this stepping back is into realms of abstract being as captured in certain mathematical fields which have been well-developed in the past two centuries or so. I'll conjecture that it's not just coincidence that those fields were so well explored by mathematicians and scientists—human thought is moving with the problems and opportunities raised by our responses and lack of responses to the increasing richness and complexity of human being and the increasing richness and complexity of created being in general.

Why has there been no adequate response in the form of a richer and more complex understanding of Creation by philosophers and poets and historians? There have been good responses—especially by those artists and writers and musicians willing to explore abstract regions of reality. Other responses were off-target, and still others were more in the nature of non-responses. On the whole, we live in a collage where the assembled scraps represent different realms and types of created being. Even the most scientific of thinkers love but have no way of understanding in even the most speculative of ways what it is that loves or what it is that is loved. Of all the men of history, we modern men know the most but understand the least because we enjoy various types of created being but struggle hard to drive out of our intellects any form of being which is not quantitative.

Let me be more specific to the failures and weaknesses of those who share my Christian faith: Why has there been no adequate response in the form of a richer and more complex understanding of Creation by Christians?

In *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* [64], the historian Brad Gregory tells us truly that Christians need to return to Christian practices, ways of life and habits and attitudes and thoughts. Even the most academic of Christian studies will stay on course only when those who study are praying and participating in the other liturgies, reading the Bible, and participating in good works as Christians. Professor Gregory also tells us a return to Christian practice and to a stronger faith will be possible only if someone is able to deal with the wide range of modern knowledge to show how we can see our world as a Creation and talk and write about it as a Creation.

Gregory claims, as do I, that many Christians know the attacks upon theistic beliefs have been propagandistic and have not proven, for example, that the very concept of God is meaningless. He knows that pointing this out is no longer sufficient. Too many ignored the danger or even voluntarily took the challenge on the wrong field of battle and the atheists and their

allies have won and then moved into the City of Man to take control of schools and mass-media and cultural institutions and political institutions and others.

I would say. . .

We need to re-engage on the right battlefield—the entirety of Creation. To do so, we need to ratchet up our thought to a higher level of abstraction that we might consider all being, abstract and concrete, which is within the empirical or speculative reach of the human mind. And, to do so, we need to develop new tools of thought; I’m proposing that we can start by borrowing from certain fields of abstract mathematics. We should back off from the battle on the grounds of physics and biology, recognizing that non-believers have gained control of what might be called the background assumptions and methods of analysis which are used to understand all this modern knowledge of spacetime and matter and biological evolution and the genetic history of the human race.

Once we have the proper tools, we can treat this world as part of a far greater Creation, one which includes various levels of created being, abstract and concrete, going back to the fundamental truths which God manifested as the raw stuff of all of created being, the abstract and concrete stuff of Creation. Creation also includes the world of the resurrected, those who will be raised from the grave to share the life of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

To be sure, the two tasks need to be done at the same time, as I’m doing in my thinking and writing. In fact, my writings, including this book, constitute a plausible program of the sort Professor Gregory recommends. My program, as it has been developed publicly on my active blog, *Acts Of Being* at <http://loydfueston.com/>. But I don’t know who these people really are—many of my readers around the world might well be ethnically Chinese, either citizens of the People’s Republic of China or members of the Chinese diaspora.

It’s possible I’m building a foundation which is slowly being accepted as a plausible base for a revived or even new Christian civilization. It’s possible my writings are simply seen as some sort of eccentric but interesting reaction to Western post-Christian ideology. It’s also possible my writings are at least inspiring to someone who will build a different, maybe better, foundation for a new Christian civilization—perhaps in a way more to the liking of those from a region not part of the West.

We need to make the world once again safe for Christians and their

beliefs, to make the world one in which Christians can pass on their faith to the children of their communities without public schools and publishers and entertainment companies and others interfering to, very effectively, uproot that faith in the minds and hearts and hands of children.

# 537 What is This Elite Which is Seemingly Trying to Steal All of Creation?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2299>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/11/28.]

There is much talk and many words being spoken or written about elites, those who are destroying what was once good in the West and who have concentrated much wealth in their hands. These are the famous 1% or even 0.1% or still smaller groups of the ultra-wealthy and ultra-powerful.

Some serious thinkers in academia as well as some who might be labeled public intellectuals have made strong claims that most of the struggles in unstable periods such as the one which began in the West during the Cold War, after World War II, are between groups of the elite. I can't say that I put it in those terms, but some six years ago, I looked at conspiracy theories as a whole and concluded that we're seeing a general moral breakdown and the powerful and wealthy are engaged in gangster activities, including brutal fighting against competitors for power. These gangster activities aren't so much different from what goes on in the inner-cities as youth gangs fight for control of drug distribution and protection rackets. It's possible that one or more of those elite gangs will be destroyed.

For a general background on the questionable moral order of the American elite in the Northeast, you can read Gore Vidal's series of novels typically labeled as the *American Empire* novels but formally labeled (I only recently learned this) the *Narratives of Empire*—see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narratives\\_of\\_Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narratives_of_Empire). (Start with *Burr* to get some background before that empire begins to emerge more truly.) Vidal,

himself something of a self-marginalized “blue-blood,” reveals in a later novel in that series that marriages made the Paynes and Whitneys quietly more powerful than the Rockefellers and Fords and others by the early 1900s. This is similar to the Hapsburg’s, who conquered nothing but got control of major parts of Europe and then the New World and other regions of the world by, shall we say, prudent marriages.

Vidal also hints of the war between the so-called House of (JP) Morgan and the also so-called House of Rockefeller. Morgan’s highly centralized financial empire fell apart in the 1940s or so and the Rockefellers won with their looser system of alliances between powerful and independent kingdoms, the Harrimans and Walkers (including their in-laws and loyal servants—the Bushes) and the anonymous men who were the partners of Brown Brothers. The House of Rockefeller also ‘included’ such powerful law firms as Sullivan and Cromwell, the original globalists (including the brothers Dulles who were very close to the Walkers and Bushes). That House of Rockefeller also included, besides Allan Dulles, other men who structured the national intelligence agencies of the US (see the introductory article on John J. McCloy at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_J.\\_McCloy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_J._McCloy) for one example besides the Dulles brothers) which have done so much damage to the West and to various countries (Iran and Pakistan and Iraq and many in Latin America and Vietnam and Indonesia and so on) which were targets of profit-takers.

It’s somewhat amazing to me that even most Americans with substantial historical knowledge, certainly most high school teachers of history and perhaps many college professors, can talk about battles between the elites in other countries (think of the Conquest of England by Duke William or the later English War of the Roses or the struggles between Julius Caesar and others seeking power over an emerging empire or even the struggle between the later Russian Tsars and various groups of reformers or revolutionaries) and then take the mainstream histories of the United States as the complete truth, though the battles for power in those mainstream American histories are but the above-ground battles between political parties as if American power-seekers honor the law more than foreign power-seekers. Maybe there is a Boss Tweed thrown in but there is no sophisticated discussion of the war that Thomas Jefferson waged against Aaron Burr or the goings-on of the Texas settlers (who sold their American citizenships for power and money and then reneged on the deal and expected American soldiers to be sent to teach Santa Ana a lesson) and the activities of those hungry for power in

the oil industry (similar to what is seen with the water barons in the movie *Chinatown*) and the Rockefeller Brothers' theft of the largest pit mine in history, in Indonesia, and the sudden interest of the likes of the Bushes and the Dulles brothers in Vietnam. As a barrier to the Chinese?

There are various groups of Anglo-American men who have engaged in specific conspiracies to control the price of gold or the basic bank interest rates or to manipulate the stock market. There were and are men who engage in specific conspiracies to start wars for the expansion of the American Empire. On the whole, the so-called elites fight each other and take the common people as pawns for their wars and financial manipulations and their internal battles for power. We're potential collateral and potential serfs or even potential slaves.

For reasons I don't fully understand (see the website of Peter Turchin: <http://peterturchin.com/> for some insight from a mathematically inclined evolutionary theorist) the power of the American financiers grew from 1850 to near World War II, but then the House of Morgan disappeared as a great power; the House of Rockefeller (perhaps because it wasn't so centralized) survived but the common people did relatively quite well from the 1920s until 1970 or so.

We have switched back to concentrated wealth and an increasingly divisive war of individuals and groups in the class of so-called elites, a war for wealth and power.

In the case of the United States, there is an additional factor, one being used by some groups of elites to increase their power and wealth while putting on a show of compassion and charity: immigration. The periods when the ordinary American citizen did relatively well and the elites relatively badly were periods when immigration was ongoing but low and not always encouraged. The decades in the middle of the 19th century were the beginning of a long period of high-volume of immigration and an increasing concentration of wealth in the hands of the elite, ending in the early 1920s with laws restricting immigration and a period of increasing prosperity for the American working class and middle class. The immigration floodgates were famously reopened in 1964 and wealth once again flowed from the American working class and middle class into the hands of an elite in which the managers of giant corporations and national security officians joined bankers and politicians and rentiers in the elite.

All of this raises a question. Why are these individuals and groups of peoples, families and property-owning classes, called the 'elite'? The 1913

Webster's defines elite as: "A choice or select body; the flower; as, the [e]lite of society." The implication is that this elite has higher levels of talent as well—probably—higher levels of education and training. While there is much truth in this, it ignores the fact that Henry Ford in his non-elite days actually made useful things and generated wealth and a tremendous number of pretty good jobs for laborers as well as very good jobs for skilled workers and college-educated engineers. JP Morgan was a man who inherited some substantial money and became very rich indeed by taking over control of wealth created by other men and squeezing out the wealth into his own treasure vaults. John D Rockefeller was involved in the creation of wealth as a wholesaler as well as a founder of companies including some oil companies; he "went bad" when he decided to go the banker route and moved from Cleveland to NYC, to be followed before long by allies such as the Harrimans and George Herbert Walker.

The American elite seems now to be made up of the most greedy and most ambitious rather than the most talented. Moreover, in Vidal's plausible depiction, they are non-ideological. They might play lip-service to the modern liberal faith in free-markets, but only for the purpose of manipulating markets for their own profit. They might make a pretense of supporting 'compassionate' programs such as the immigration programs mentioned above, but make sure those programs work to their own benefit, maybe accidentally helping the immigrants but certainly hurting the existing population of American workers and small business-owners. There have been Northeastern blue-bloods, such as some of the Lowell's, who were interested in making things and creating wealth, though they also tried to create a company town in the city named after them. Mostly, the American blue-bloods have aimed to become an established class of rentiers and, for at least a few decades or so at a time, they can succeed in gaining control of large percentages of American wealth.

The Russells and their business partners, including FDR's maternal grandfather—Warren Delano—and source of most of his wealth, were a group of mixed accomplishments. Like many other adventurous young blue-blood men, they made their initial money in the slave-trade or in the Chinese opium-trade—the second in the case of the Russells and Warren Delano. Many brought back fortunes which they then devoted to manufacturing enterprises in the US or development of agricultural regions or of mines. In *The China Mirage* [15] by James Bradley, we can read a summary history of the exploitation of China and some of

its citizens by opium-dealing Americans, most seemingly blue-blood. In *The Great Chinese Revolution, 1800-1985* [32], by John K. Fairbank (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_K.\\_Fairbank](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_K._Fairbank)), we can learn that the Russells weren't committed to, or limited to, criminal activities: when they could get higher rates of return by manufacturing farm machinery for developing the great American plains, they liquidated their opium smuggling operations in China and built factories in the United States. We can also learn in *Lincoln* [29] by David Herbert Donald (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David\\_Herbert\\_Donald](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Herbert_Donald)) that Lincoln knew that it was northerners who made the big profits in the slave-trade and then used those profits to develop the Northeast and Midwest, having abandoned slaves and Southern slaveowners to their respective fates. Some of those slavetraders and many of their relatives and friends and fellow college alumni jumped on the bandwagon to destroy the competing elites of the South while pretending to be morally opposed to the slavery system they'd help to create. Having destroyed a major opposing class of elites, the Northerners went on to half a century of peaceful looting and general mayhem.

The American elite is 'select' as Webster's put it, but the criteria seems to be greed and ambition, only accidentally tied to higher ability. They are manipulators lacking the warrior virtues and (almost certainly) the high levels of social intelligence of some of those who founded the West. (See Chapter 332, *Are Warlords and Their Top Warriors Responsible for Our 'Smart' Genes?*.) Why do we mis-use the term 'elite' for them? Or do we wish to define 'elite' by those lacking scruples but possessing plenty of ambition and greed? (To be fair, the elite who swarmed over England to their own profit but the purposes of Henry VIII, a highly intelligent and capable brute to be sure, seem to have been as low in moral character as the current American elite.) We could better define them as parasites, as does the controversial and insightful economist, Michael Hudson—see <http://michael-hudson.com/> for information on a book about the so-called elite with the interesting title: *Killing the Host*.



# 538 Looking Backward, Moving Forward, Moving in Circles

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2326>. It was finished and uploaded on 2017/01/23.]

Conservatism: looking backward for wisdom and understanding about human being and about all of God's Creation.

Progressivism (of a truer type): moving forward into an everchanging world.

Liberalism: unleashing individual human beings from traditions and from true progressive movements to the benefit of would-be centralizers in (corrupt) politics and (corrupt) business.

The real point I'm making is that there are bad forms of conservatism and bad forms of progressivism, but liberalism—in all its forms of political centralism and market centralism—is inherently bad just because it tears individual human beings from our communal reality, especially from our movement through time. In fact, that's the only point I'm trying to make, but I'll have to provide short comments on each of conservatism, progressivism, and liberalism in order to make greater sense of my claim.

Even in a time of greater wisdom, of greater strength in thinking and feeling and doing to proper moral purposes, there will be those calling themselves conservatives who are outright reactionaries as well as progressivists who are advocates of an unbalanced attitude of "any change is good."

We aren't in a time of such greater wisdom, and unwise conservatives and progressivists dominate in number and authority and power.

We have a multitude of conservatives who understand the past well but don't see the possibilities ahead of us—one reason we've failed to take advantage of openings and now seem doomed to some very hard times in

the West. Those conservatives seem to believe:

If it is good to study the past to learn the wisdom of earlier ages of men, if it is good to keep what is wise in our current human minds and hearts and hands, then surely it is good to try to recreate the past or, at least, to fight to keep any given present with its peculiar mixture of traditional wisdom and nonsense, of more recent wisdom and nonsense.

We also have progressivists who see any change as good. They seem to believe:

If it is sometimes good, or at least necessary, to tolerate people with morally dangerous behaviors or thoughts, then it must be good to move on and to nurture those behaviors or thoughts in young people still struggling to develop their personal identities.

If those with conservative dispositions and those with progressive dispositions were to come to their senses, we would be able to do much that could be good.

Liberals take human being, mind and heart and hands in their individual manifestations, out of the stream of time, out of the reality of human being in its communal manifestations. Though individual liberals have done good, mostly by acting as conservatives or progressives on specific issues, liberalism is dangerous: it is destructive to human being by way of first being destructive to human communal being, even that of Western Civilization which, along with Western Christian churches as central organs, was the first large-scale manifestation of the Body of Christ.

## 539 Another Take on the Reality of Communities and Other Complex Entities

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2329>. It was finished and uploaded on 2017/01/30.]

[This essay is a lightly edited fragment from my upcoming book, *The Shape of Reality*, a book which might be delayed a bit longer (maybe middle of March?) because of a relatively mild but persistent sinus infection as well as major housecleaning tasks as the result of a death in my family.]

From ancient times, men have told tales and produced philosophical and theological works which state or at least imply that man has some sort of an interior which is immaterial in some sense. Many would-be traditionalists think wrongly that we can defend our religious and moral beliefs only if there exists an actual ‘immaterial’ entity which is part of an individual human being: soul or mind as conceived as a sort of strange substance attached to our physical substance. This assumption of a soul-entity or mind-entity is unnecessary, meaning it can be eliminated if not plausible given what we know about the world of concrete being. Soul and mind are useful ways of speaking about, of pointing to, relationships. Relationships involving human beings, other complex entities, all of Creation, and the Creator can account for all the immaterial aspects of human being.

Once again, the question arises: are communities real or just ways of speaking about gatherings of freestanding individuals?

At a speculative level, though we’re still dealing with sophisticated ways of thought drawn from modern mathematics, we can consider two sets of questions raised by the issue of communal human being.

- Can we think of the insides of an individual who then has communal relationships on the outside? Can we think of links between the insides of individuals or do all relationships between individuals take place on the outside?
- Can individuals overlap with other individuals in well-defined ways? Can individuals overlap with communal human being? Can communities overlap other communities?

Relationships are real. Communities are real. Conceptual tools, perhaps generalizations or abstractions of mathematical concepts such as state-spaces and manifolds (topological thinking in general), are good for providing disciplined ways of speaking about the plausibility of those realities, those parts of Creation. Such tools can lead to ways of thinking, frameworks if you will, which can provide for better testing for the reality and particular characteristics of communal human being. After all, even the most numerical of statistical tests, such as those used to test for group selection in evolutionary biology, can't provide answers outside the frameworks in which they are set; if you assume individuals are the ultimate and only reality in biology, then your tests will produce conclusions compatible with your assumptions. (Actually, insightful minds are often capable of seeing signs their ways of thought aren't fully compatible with reality. Such minds are those of Galileo and Newton and Darwin and Gauss and Einstein and so on.)

Relationships are real. Communities are real. After all, communities are relationships between individuals, strong relationships which outlive any individual. Biologists, as well as a variety of philosophers and other thinkers, consider the persistence of a gray whale or a human being to be proof of the real existence of those organisms despite the complete turnover of their basic physical stuff and despite the lack of any evidence acceptable to reductionists that the various cells and organs "sum up" to an organism—of course, we have to remember that the use of a reductionistic framework excludes any evidence of a non-reductionistic organism. The same thinkers don't consider the persistence of communities, genetic family-lines as well as cultures, to be evidence that those communities have a real existence. They make implicit or explicit appeals to *Occam's razor* (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occam's\\_razor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occam's_razor)) without seeming to realize any such powerful, high-level tool can be used only in some particular context,

ultimately some particular worldview. Since I believe in the reality of the Creation of the Christian God, since I specifically believe in the reality of communal human being, I would use that razor in the context of such a Creation in which communal human being exists. The only test of the reality of a reduced universe against the reality of a Creation understood in Christian terms is the plausibility and coherence of empirical reality in terms of those major worldviews.

Relationships can create new stuff and relationships can shape existing stuff, including the concrete individual entities made of stuff. And so it is that I repeat: communities are for real, formed by relationships between concrete individual entities, not directly manifested in communal ‘stuff’, just as souls and minds are real so long as you remember there is no soul-stuff or mind-stuff. There are relationships.

Relationships do not respect inside and outside, nor do they fully respect boundaries. Minds are formed by relationships and then go on to help form many new relationships, sometimes coming into some sort of synchronization, sometimes even forming something of a group mind. This happens among teenagers who are together in school and other activities for perhaps ten hours a day during the week and some hours a day during the weekend. This also happens to scholars and co-religionists and medical professionals. Hearts and hands also come into synchronization, where ‘synchronization’ should be taken as a mere pointer to a process where the synchronized entities or parts of an entity are being reshaped so that they are effectively a better organized entity and perhaps one which is a community of entities which retain their own individual identity.

For several centuries, Westerners and some others influenced too much by the West have regarded human beings as freestanding individuals, as if we have shells which prevent any direct contact between our insides and what lies outside, humans and other entities as well as what might be called the entirety of an environment. Relationships are now seen as no more than communications between freestanding individuals who may not even know each other and don’t really have any deep effects upon each other. Against this, Christians have traditionally maintained that:

- The world came to exist because God **first** loved it; the Almighty didn’t create the world and then choose to love it.
- We can change each other and help each other even by praying for

those not physically present.

There is no magic that ties together a human being's literal heart with his liver and brain and big toes. They are part of a system composed of parts which are synchronized in such a way that a human organism results. If you have the sort of philosophical attitude that requires that all of reality be explained in terms of some mythical first principles you carry around in your head, then you might object that we need a way to 'explain' (whatever that might mean in this context) why an entity becomes one, why an organism reaches some sort of state of awareness and maybe even self-awareness. Won't work. The reality of communities, the relationships which form real communities, come from the greater reality, from the nature of Creation—'just' the universe if you prefer.

Complexity theorists and other disciplined thinkers have analyzed complex entities to tell us much about **how** they work, but the why of the matter might run into the true principle that the world is what it is and not something to be explained (away) by Kant or any other such thinker. In fact, I'd suggest that the mathematical models of complexity theory are abstractions of properties of Creation or of 'just' this universe if you prefer.

Kant's botched understanding of the geometry of space and of dynamics should be a stronger warning than it has proven to be—reality is what it is and not something to be constructed from some humanly preferred assumptions. To a Christian, even much that might be explainable in more basic (usually more abstract) principles can't in fact be explained without considering:

- Creation was made through and of the Person who is the Son of God and manifests the divine Being of a Person.
- The basic principles can't even be seen directly because they are the truths manifested by God as the raw stuff of Creation and lie realms of abstraction beyond or above or beneath the still not understood abstract form of being from which concrete matter and energy are shaped: the wavefunctions of quantum physics.

Even a physical entity such as a star is made up of regions which exchange energy and matter by way of processes which take hundreds of thousands of years or even millions of years. The light which comes to us from that sun took only 8 minutes or so to travel the 93 millions miles of space

between earth and sun, but that light took probably those hundreds of thousands or millions of years to travel out from the nuclear fusion core at the center of the sun to the surface where it might be emitted into space. This is because of the density of matter in the core of the sun and because of the complex physical interactions between particles as a photon or other particle travels outward through and from that core.

How can a star be a single entity if made of regions which 'contact' each other over such long periods of time? How can an individual human being be a single entity if made of organs and other parts which are in contact in vague and ambiguous ways over smaller but still significant periods of time? How can Western Civilization be real if it is no more than persistent, long-term relationships between various ephemeral groupings of ephemeral human beings?

A star is a single entity. An individual human being is a single organism. A particular human community, such as Western Civilization as a whole or the musical institutions of Tanglewood and others found in the Berkshires of Western Massachusetts, is a single human community.

An individual human being is a member of multiple communities. We should take reality on its own terms rather than trying to explain it away by use of allegedly fundamental principles we carry around inside our little minds. Sometimes, we should start our efforts to understand by viewing reality in its various levels of complexity, including individual entities being parts of greater entities whether they retain their individuality or not. There is a sense in which the world, indeed all of Creation, must be understood as a whole before we can understand so much as an elementary particle or a basic operation of arithmetic.



# 540 From the Ideological Frying-pan to the Ideological Fire

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2339>. It was finished and uploaded on 2017/03/03.]

From 2006 to the present, I've been writing about the need to make peace with empirical reality. This is not simply a matter of a one-time adjustment when reality reveals itself as different from, usually richer and more complex than, the inherited worldview of a particular human being.

Unfortunately, it turns out that most human beings aren't very good at making even limited adjustments in their understanding of their environments, however defined. Even most of those with minds capable of learning difficult material and difficult ways of handling that material are not really very good after their initial education or training at handling material, difficult or easy. If new knowledge doesn't fit into the slots formed in their minds during their youth, it is often ignored even at the cost of great incoherence.

So, what happens when a culture—far worse, an entire civilization—falls into a disorder connected to—perhaps even partly caused by—a collapse of the communal mind of that culture or civilization? We need new thoughts or new ways of behavior and even new attitudes but all we get from the intellectual and religious and cultural and political leaders of the West is great confusion and little in the way of plausible suggestions for fixing our problems so that we can avoid the collapse of the West. Of course, there are some in those leadership categories who aren't inclined to respond properly since they're busy looting the resources under their stewardship; we'll ignore those in this discussion.

There are various short analyses and short comments I've read about

this situation: the collapse of a civilization and the general failure to do what's necessary to save it or at least to pave a reasonably smooth road into a new civilization. In *The Evolution of Civilizations: An Introduction to Historical Analysis* [119], Carroll Quigley wrote about the formation of human instruments of a new or reformed civilization; over time, these instruments become self-serving human institutions which will struggle, through institutional means as well as the efforts of their individual members and supporters, to survive even at the expense of a struggling civilization or a new civilization struggling through birth. In a similar vein—if you think about it, a great scientist once shot down the idea that scientists are so purely disinterested in their own ideas or institutions or other interests:

A new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it. [Max Planck, see [https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/m/max\\_planck.html](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/m/max_planck.html).]

So, even scientists hold on to their already formed worldview or parts of it, even when confronted by solid evidence they need to change their understanding of reality and maybe even some of their fundamental ways of thinking. Yet, science, for reasons well beyond the scope of this book, is self-corrective in certain ways that are substantial though also limited—scientists also draw upon worldviews outside of science and outside of its self-corrective processes. Young scientists can move on to new modes about thinking about some particular aspects or parts of this universe. There is no evidence whatsoever that scientists will 'rise above' the moral disorder of their age or even perceive, for example, the takeover of a once promising country by human beings with the moral character of gangsters. As I've noted before, scientists and engineers have helped to develop some of our horrible—outright evil—technology, nuclear bombs and lasers that permanently blind enemy soldiers and bombs that suck the lungs out of anyone nearby so they suffocate with their lungs hanging out of their mouths. It's true that they have also participated in the great rise in standard of living, that they have performed magnificently in exploring reality. This is no more than can be said for the blue-bloods of the northeastern United States. Read histories of the industrialization of the United States and then histories of the American part in the opium trade in China and you quickly find

some families appearing in both; you will find comments (ironic?—hard to tell in the context of American thought) that these ambitious people, founders of American industry and finance, weren't dedicated to crime but rather to getting a good rate of return on their invested capital and time. Scientists, as communities look for funding for work they enjoy and have been trained to do.

Why can these things happen? The moral failings of scientists, individuals and communities, are likely due to the same phenomenon that Planck referred to in the short quotation above. Scientists are early on indoctrinated in an instrumental ethics, a good one, that regulates how they do science, but it says nothing about the moral goodness or evil of their goals. Some of the physicists in the Manhattan Project realized after the first bomb was ready to be dropped that there were deep moral issues in creating and deploying and using such a weapon; too late—at least from some hundreds of thousands of Japanese as well as the moral characters of many human beings, they tried to raise the issues. More recently, there seems to have been some well-meaning medical researchers who were surprised to discover that some think there are moral issues involved in use of the flesh of human embryos, whether aborted or grown in the laboratory. Those scientists thought the only moral issues centered around their accepted duty to heal some terrible medical problems.

We all form worldviews and usually lay the foundations of moral character as children and adolescents followed by a basic intellectual structure in our later adolescent years into our adulthood. Most human beings seem capable of building at this basic level but once and then their brain is set in its connections or their mind hardens or whatever. Yet, to refer to the scientists discussed in the above paragraph, all of us have holes in our worldview and nearly all of us have minds too rigid to truly see those holes when confronting others who don't have those holes—this isn't to take a position on those issues, but only to point out that there are issues to be resolved in the best-intentioned of weapons development and medical research. This rigidity, at least in the case of those who are properly leaders or science or religion or politics or other fields, can be at least partially eliminated by the type of thinking I've recommended in this book, thinking which acknowledges the importance of abstract being and forces us—regarding important issues—to step up a level from our particular viewpoints and interests.

What happens when human communities begin to disintegrate, as the West is currently doing? What happens when the individuals and commu-

nities inside a civilization or a major religious community find their own children rejecting their beliefs and taking up with ways of thought and feeling and behavior forbidden not long ago, maybe not even so much explicitly forbidden as not even thinkable? What happens when those people find themselves and their children under pressure to live in ways which are in conflict with their beliefs?

Many will struggle to hold on to their seemingly outmoded beliefs, but I'm going to concentrate upon another group, those who struggle instead to make new sense of reality. If we look at recent history, during the various periods of turmoil, only a very small percentage of human beings engage in that second struggle but many follow some of those who propose new ideas, Lenin and Mussolini and Hitler and Gandhi and Mao and Martin Luther King, Jr and others. The phenomenon occurs in mathematics and science as well as we can know from the above quotation from Max Planck but I've already claimed that science can be self-correcting over as little as a generation or so. Such a controversial idea as infinities greater than that of  $1, 2, 3, \dots$  can be absorbed by those just learning their multiplication tables at the time though perhaps not by those already tenured professors.

I'll make a few general comments on the difficulties encountered in politics and economics and philosophy and theology and many other fields without the self-corrective processes of science. They lack those institutional processes of self-correctiveness for various reasons including the fact that they involve much more than mathematics or most sciences entangled concrete and abstract being. The individuals in those fields outside the ones labeled 'science' in modern discourse also tend to have different attitudes toward knowledge than do those inside the privileged realm of modern 'science'. They don't explore newly exposed lands so readily. They aren't nearly so appreciative of new information as are scientifically-minded human beings, let alone the scientistically-minded thinkers who carry a sci-fi attitude into their feasts upon the pictures of the outer planets, the discovery of planets around other stars, the search for and discovery of one god-particle or another, the discovery of Neanderthal genes in living human beings, and so on.

All of this new data, sometimes processed into forms plausibly labeled as 'information', is good stuff; it's good stuff that tells us much about God's Creation as are the new discoveries about mathematics which has led to serious contemplations about the very nature of mathematics, contemplations which are one of the main inspirations of the worldview I'm trying to

communicate in this book.

Let's consider the reformation of an existing worldview or changes so substantial as to bring about a new worldview. First of all, we have to realize that most human beings are not capable of doing the sort of work I'm doing, that of constructing a new worldview—just as I'm not capable of leading or administering a country or an army or a corporation. It would be a world of turmoil if too many were inclined to the sort of work I'm doing. It would also be a world lacking in important practical accomplishments, such as many of those which have led to our high standards of living and made it possible and necessary to think about these abstract issues. Because of this division of talents and responsibilities, most human beings will absorb a worldview and many of its parts and aspects—such as general attitudes—from their surroundings. This is still a matter of genius by the standards of simpler phases of human history, let alone the standards of non-human species. In the end, propaganda doesn't work because human beings might be willing to accept political and moral nonsense, especially in the context of a prosperous society such as the United States decreasingly is, but they do pay attention to their human and purely physical surroundings. This is what has so badly damaged membership in and strong belief in Christianity, whose institutions were the first to go out of synch with the modern world and its mountains of data only partially digested into information which is itself less fully digested into knowledge.

Now it has become obvious that our political communities are also out of synch with the best current understanding of those parts and aspects of this world which can be explored and analyzed by those labeled as 'scientists'<sup>1</sup>. In fact, nearly all human communities, even families and ethnic social clubs and sports associations, are out of synch with this confusion of data and information and knowledge which has destroyed our inherited understandings of even our universe, let alone our world (the universe as understood in light of moral order), let alone our Creation.

At least in the current situation of ongoing decay in the United States and the West as a whole, a worldview and its plausible variants decay into a multitude of ideologies of various sorts but most being implausible and ugly in various senses—moral and aesthetic and intellectual and political and so on.

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<sup>1</sup>In premodern terms, science is simply any disciplined study and can include literary analysis and musical composition and old-fashioned homemaking.

This process started centuries ago. Our current ideologies, New Left and Neoconservative and transhuman and trans-sexual and so on, are the ugly ideologies of the West, no more than the fragments and decay-products of the worldview of Western Christian civilization rigidified in recent centuries: the ideology of the nation-state as the center of human life or the overlapping ideology of the free-market as an absolute good are but two of those fragments or decay-products—two of the more plausible fragments at that, largely because they can be more easily integrated into a better and more complete worldview. What I refer to as the single worldview of Western Christian civilization (as it emerged from the wrongly vilified Medieval Period) was actually a spectrum of closely related variants; I'll ignore this complication as being unimportant to my main points.

I'll point to an interesting example of what I think to have been a promising political component to a better Western worldview: the American Old Right. The Old Right was largely non-ideological, in the sense I use it, because it was a mixed community of some who might nowadays be labeled as 'paleoconservatives' and of various sorts of morally conservative libertarians and even some who were inclined to old-fashioned village or local socialism. Despite the radical and incompetent (or perhaps dishonest) attacks upon the Old Right, it never congealed into an ideology as was happening in a very gradual way at first to New Deal liberalism and to certain branches of conservatism in the 1950s or so. As for the Trotskyites rebranding themselves as Neoconservatives, but keeping the taste for perpetual revolution itself rebranded as national security wars or wars to infect other countries with the American (corrupt, political-machine) political system, they are a strange and ugly story unto themselves.

So, how would I summarize my understanding of our current situation? I'll provide a mercifully simplified rendering of my complex understanding of recent intellectual and political history.

The Christians of the post-Medieval West, or Modern West if you prefer, failed to respond honestly and courageously and with faith in the Creator to the problems and opportunities raised by modern mountains of all that data and information and knowledge which came from exploration of the Earth's surface as well as the exploration of mathematical ideas and history and the behavior of light and so on. The worldview of the West began to decay into various strange and ugly ideologies, fragments of a badly deformed Western Christian worldview. These fragments ranged from:

- Western Catholic theology deformed as papal supremacy and Roman centralism of a degree certainly not recognized until after—not surprisingly—certain popes in way over their heads faced the loss of secular power. Not surprisingly, these exaggerated claims on behalf of the ecclesiastical descendant of the leader of the Apostles has resulted in various huge and unnecessary losses to Western Catholic Christianity.
- An implausible version of Christianity in the politicized form of reactionary aristocracy or monarchism.
- A still less plausible version of Christianity mixed with liberalism and concentrated by the Enlightenment into bloody and revolutionary democracy.

to the opposite extreme (by some understanding of ‘opposite’):

- Economic determinism of socialist and capitalist types.
- Scientism allied with technocratism.

And, yes, I do consider Marxism and runaway capitalism as being found near the worship of science and technology on this spectrum of nasty and unsustainable ideologies.

All of the above systems, which I would describe as corrupted by idealism or human ideas raised above empirical evidence, are closely related to good communal forms: Christianity or free-enterprise economies or science and technology. This would have to be the case because they are all fragments, decay-products of variants of Western Christian civilization (or communities inside of that greater community). It’s not that they are directly decay-products of that great civilization. Rather is it the case that a set of closely related worldviews at the foundation of Western Civilization decayed into a set of closely related ideologies. As the decay continued, those closely related ideologies fragmented and continued to decay, producing new ideologies that were thoroughly psychotic—detached from reality.



# 541 The Knowledge Possessed by a Creature

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2339>. It was finished and uploaded on 2017/03/03.

This essay is a lightly edited chapter from my book, *The Shape of Reality* [56].]

What is truth? Not so ridiculous a question as some would have it, certainly those who don't understand how difficult a struggle it has been to develop various plausible and implausible understandings of the abstract concepts of 'truth' and 'knowledge' over the past 10,000 years or so of rapid increase of human intelligence in certain Eurasian peoples—see the previously referenced *The 10,000 Year Explosion: How Civilization Accelerated Human Evolution* [23] by Gregory Cochran and Henry Harpending for an introduction to the genetic-historical study of the underlying events. If you wish to read of these events, or at least of snapshots of these events, from a philosophical or historical viewpoint, a viewpoint also more or less Eurocentric, you can see *The Origins of European Thought About the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time, and Fate* [106] by R B Onians, *Body, Soul, Spirit: A Survey of the Body-Mind Problem* [139] by C A van Peursen, and *The Discovery of the Mind in Greek Philosophy and Literature* [128] by Bruno Snell. General searches on the Internet or in your local library system on the *Axial Age* (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Axial\\_Age](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Axial_Age)) will lead you to to a variety of 'old-fashioned' and 'new-fangled' historical works on the strange and glorious transformation in human culture, including the intellect, which occurred from some time in the *Iron Age* (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iron\\_Age](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iron_Age)) and ended a few centuries or so before the birth of Jesus Christ. For a historical perspective which

relies on particular mathematical and statistical analyses rather than starting at the level of abstract being as I'm doing, see Peter Turchin's website at <http://peterturchin.com/> for an interesting, plausible, and powerful attempt at building applied mathematical models of events in human history; at the least, there are some good insights in the work of Turchin and allied thinkers. (One of Turchin's non-technical summary of much of his work, *War and Peace and War: The Life Cycles of Imperial Nations* [136] is itself a pretty work of history.)

The writings referenced in the above paragraph are but an entry into various sorts of literature dealing with the results of an important period of evolutionary and developmental changes in human being, changes which led to Archimedes and Augustine and Aquinas and Fra Angelico and Pascal and Newton and Mozart and on to Planck and Einstein and Picasso and Arnold Schoenberg and Eliot and Joyce and Sartre and others. A few minutes of serious thought will lead to the realization that any list of high achievers in recent centuries is remarkably short on great religious thinkers (John Henry Newman was at least a second-tier great thinker but few others reached anywhere near that) and writers or artists working in the traditionalist mode (Eliot was almost entirely modern in style though he advanced—did himself **adhere** to—important, central lines of traditionalist thought). Scientists and various mathematicians, including some great mathematicians discussed in earlier pages of this book, seem to be still more dominant, shockingly dominant, when we limit modern thinkers and writers and artists to those of undoubted greatness.

I'm not sure how many scientists or mathematicians would share my understanding of what-is, merely the universe to many of them and Creation to some of them and certainly to me. Only a few, mostly Platonists and mostly mathematicians, would even grasp the concept of abstractions as a form of being. Probably those Platonists would make the same understandable error as Plato—thinking of abstractions in terms of Reals which seem to be pure and ideal archetypes of complex entities such as human being; this idea seems implausible after Darwin and Einstein as seen through the eyes of the Reverend Monsignor Georges Lemaître (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georges\\_Lemaitre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georges_Lemaitre)) and other founders of modern physical cosmology (in the 1920s).

After the work of evolutionary biology and quantum physics and history, we don't even currently know what are the basic components of being, human or otherwise—where 'know' can be taken as involving the actual

truth or just the most plausible speculation of an age. We don't even know if there are basic components of the sort found in particle physics or nuclear physics. I suspect not, having found it easier to make sense of Creation in terms of abstract being and concrete being—to be sure, I think of concrete being as shaped from abstract being so that abstract being is something like an elementary form of being but it's a bit different and more consistent with quantum physics. In other words, the wavefunctions of quantum physics aren't like the elementary entities of particle physics, though those entities correspond to quantum wavefunctions.

We have no coherent and morally well-ordered understandings of Creation in light of evolutionary biology or quantum physics. Our moral philosophers and moral theologians and various leaders don't know how to view our communities and individuals in terms allowing even potential moral order of a sort which once seemed so clear to our minds and eyes. Our theologians in Christian traditions don't know how to talk about man's meeting with God, in prayer or worship or more specifically in the Sacraments; they babble on using terms which once meant something when the Greek philosophers and Medieval Scholastics seemed to have provided solid understandings of matter and mind and even God<sup>1</sup>. Modern thinkers sometimes just accept schemes of words and concepts of premodern times and sometimes try to build up their own—none of those modern schemes seem to be at all plausible in light of what we now know about Creation.

We are creatures embedded in a Creation arising from raw stuff which is and are the truths manifested by God through His Son. To our minds and hearts and hands, this Creation is quite dynamic for at least three reasons:

- Creation is so because it is inherently so, evolving and developing as it moves from its original primordial state toward greater particularity and complexity.
- Creation is so because we learn about it through our own evolving and developing minds and hearts and hands.

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<sup>1</sup>The Protestant Reformers disagreed, sometimes radically so, with the specific, 'higher-order' Catholic schemes for understanding Sacraments and a sacramental world and man's moral situation and so on, but accepted the words and concepts which existed at that time for discussing these things. Neither Martin Luther nor the Catholic Counter-reformer Cardinal Robert Bellarmine even pretended to engage in creative metaphysical or theological thought.

- Creation is so because our very efforts to understand and to exploit this Creation brings about changes in the evolution and development of our own human being and in much of the being with which we can directly form relationships of any sort.

In my updated version of Thomism, Creation is not a place containing entities but rather a set of relationships which are acts-of-being. Material stuff and even abstract stuff is the result of those relationships, most of which are highly dynamic. Human knowledge isn't settled from our viewpoint, human knowledge doesn't encapsulate the truth, until we can reach a better, more stable viewing place. But no such place can possibly exist so long as we're alive because we learn more about Creation and we also change what is by our active responses, as do all entities and lesser creatures, but only we humans can—in principle—encapsulate all that God has created in our own minds. Only we humans can—in principle—participate in God's greater acts-of-being, His thoughts and feelings and actions which take place in any realm or all realms of Creation. Only we humans can—in principle—share God's thoughts even as He creates from nothing.

Some principles can only be realized in the world of the resurrected where the friends of God share God's life by being part of the Body of Christ, by sharing directly in the human being of the Son of God. By so sharing we might even enjoy the dizzying sight of Creation from God's transcendental viewpoint. Then we will be able to understand.

## 542 From the Ideological Frying-pan to the Ideological Fire

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Unfortunately, it turns out that most human beings aren't very good at making even limited adjustments in their understanding of their environments, however defined. Even most of those with minds capable of learning difficult material and difficult ways of handling that material are not really very good after their initial education or training at handling material, difficult or easy. If new knowledge doesn't fit into the slots formed in their minds during their youth, it is often ignored even at the cost of great incoherence.

So, what happens when a culture—far worse, an entire civilization—falls into a disorder connected to—perhaps even partly caused by—a collapse of the communal mind of that culture or civilization? We need new thoughts or new ways of behavior and even new attitudes but all we get from the intellectual and religious and cultural and political leaders of the West is great confusion and little in the way of plausible suggestions for fixing our problems so that we can avoid the collapse of the West. Of course, there are some in those leadership categories who aren't inclined to respond properly

since they're busy looting the resources under their stewardship; we'll ignore those in this discussion.

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more than can be said for the blue-bloods of the northeastern United States. Read histories of the industrialization of the United States and then histories of the American part in the opium trade in China and you quickly find some families appearing in both; you will find comments (ironic?—hard to tell in the context of American thought) that these ambitious people, founders of American industry and finance, weren't dedicated to crime but rather to getting a good rate of return on their invested capital and time. Scientists, as communities look for funding for work they enjoy and have been trained to do.

Why can these things happen? The moral failings of scientists, individuals and communities, are likely due to the same phenomenon that Planck referred to in the short quotation above. Scientists are indoctrinated in an instrumental ethics, a good one, that regulates how they do science, but it says nothing about the moral goodness or evil of their goals. Some of the physicists in the Manhattan Project realized after the first bomb was ready to be dropped that there were deep moral issues in creating and deploying and using such a weapon; too late—at least for some hundreds of thousands of Japanese as well as for the moral characters of many human beings who came to casually accept the use of this weapon as they had come to casually accept the dropping of explosive or inflammatory bombs upon civilian populations. More recently, there seems to have been some well-meaning medical researchers who were surprised to discover that some think there are moral issues involved in use of the flesh of human embryos, whether aborted or grown in the laboratory. Those scientists thought the only moral issues centered around their accepted duty to heal some terrible medical problems. I can understand and even admire their acceptance of that duty but also puzzle over the way in which those scientists were oblivious to the moral beliefs of many in the West. Did they never so much as talk to one of their fellow-citizens who hold to the moral beliefs once shared by the grandparents of nearly all of us, scientists and non-scientists alike?

We all form worldviews and usually lay the foundations of moral character as children and adolescents followed by the development of a basic intellectual structure in our later adolescent years into our adulthood. Most human beings seem capable of building at this basic level but once and then their brains are set in their connections or their minds harden. Yet, all of us have holes in our worldview and nearly all of us have minds too rigid to truly conceive of our own holes when confronting others who don't have those particular holes. There are issues to be resolved in the best-intentioned of

weapons development and medical research, but few are those who step out of their ruts to so much as survey the region they're traveling through. This rigidity, at least in the case of those who are properly leaders or science or religion or politics or other fields, can be at least partially eliminated by the type of thinking I've recommended in this book, thinking which acknowledges the importance of abstract being and forces us—regarding important issues—to step up a level from our particular viewpoints and interests.

What happens when human communities begin to disintegrate, as the West is currently doing? What happens when the individuals and communities inside a civilization or a major religious community find their own children rejecting their beliefs and taking up with ways of thought and feeling and behavior forbidden not long ago, maybe not even so much explicitly forbidden as not even thinkable? What happens when those people find themselves and their children under pressure to live in ways which are in conflict with their beliefs?

Many will struggle to hold on to their seemingly outmoded beliefs, but I'm going to concentrate upon another group, those who struggle instead to make new sense of reality. If we look at recent history, during the various periods of turmoil, only a very small percentage of human beings engage in that second struggle but many follow some of those who propose new ideas, Lenin and Mussolini and Hitler and Gandhi and Mao and Martin Luther King, Jr and others. The phenomenon occurs in the purely technical side of mathematics and science as we can know from the above quotation from Max Planck but I've already claimed that science can be self-correcting over as little as a generation or so. Such a controversial idea as infinities greater than that of  $\{1, 2, 3, \dots\}$  can be absorbed—if not yet understood—by those just learning their multiplication tables at the time though perhaps not by those already tenured professors.

I'll make a few general comments on the difficulties encountered in politics and economics and philosophy and theology and many other fields without the self-corrective processes of science. They lack those institutional processes of self-correctiveness for various reasons including the fact that they involve—much more than mathematics or most sciences—entanglements of concrete and abstract being. The individuals in those fields outside the ones labeled 'science' in modern discourse also tend to have different attitudes toward knowledge than do those inside the privileged realm of modern science. They don't explore newly exposed lands so readily—scientists do explore, even the ones who sometimes reject what

they discover. Non-scientists are not generally so appreciative of new information as are scientifically-minded human beings.

All of this new data, sometimes processed into forms plausibly labeled as ‘information’, is good stuff. It’s good stuff that tells us much about God’s Creation. It’s good stuff that has led to serious contemplations about the very nature of mathematics, contemplations which are one of the main inspirations of the worldview I’m trying to communicate in this book.

Let’s consider the reformation of an existing worldview or changes so substantial as to bring about a new worldview. First of all, we have to realize that most human beings are not capable of doing the sort of work I’m doing, that of constructing a new worldview—just as I’m not capable of leading or administering a country or an army or a corporation. It would be a world of turmoil if too many were inclined to the sort of work I’m doing. It would also be a world lacking in important practical accomplishments, such as many of those which have led to our high standards of living and made it possible and necessary to think about these abstract issues. Because of this division of talents and responsibilities, most human beings will absorb a worldview and many of its parts and aspects—such as general attitudes—from their surroundings. This is still a matter of genius by the standards of simpler phases of human history, let alone the standards of non-human species. In the end, propaganda doesn’t work because human beings might be willing to accept political and moral nonsense, especially in the context of a prosperous society such as the United States decreasingly is, but they do pay attention to their human and purely physical surroundings. This is what has so badly damaged membership in and strong belief in Christianity, whose institutions were the first to go out of synch with the modern world and its mountains of data only partially digested into information which is itself less fully digested into knowledge.

Now it has become obvious that our political communities are also out of synch with the best current understanding of those parts and aspects of this world which can be explored and analyzed by those labeled as ‘scientists’<sup>1</sup>. In fact, nearly all human communities, even families and ethnic social clubs and sports associations, are out of synch with this confusion of data and information and knowledge which has destroyed our inherited understandings of even our universe, let alone our world (the universe as

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<sup>1</sup>In premodern terms, science is simply any disciplined study and can include literary analysis and musical composition and old-fashioned homemaking.

understood in light of moral order), let alone our Creation.

At least in the current situation of ongoing decay in the United States and the West as a whole, a worldview and its plausible variants decay into a multitude of ideologies of various sorts, most being implausible and ugly in various senses—moral and aesthetic and intellectual and political and so on.

This process started centuries ago. Our current ideologies, New Left and Neoconservative and transhuman and trans-sexual and so on, are the ugly ideologies of the West, no more than the fragments and decay-products of the worldview of Western Christian civilization rigidified in recent centuries: the ideology of the nation-state as the center of human life or the overlapping ideology of the free-market as an absolute good are but two of those fragments or decay-products—two of the more plausible fragments at that, largely because they can be more easily integrated into a better and more complete worldview. What I refer to as the single worldview of Western Christian civilization (as it emerged from the wrongly vilified Medieval Period) was actually a spectrum of closely related variants; I'll ignore this complication as being unimportant to my main points.

I'll point to an interesting example of what I think to have been a promising political component to a better Western worldview: the American Old Right. The Old Right was largely non-ideological, in the sense I use it, because it was a mixed community of some who might nowadays be labeled as 'paleoconservatives' and of various sorts of morally conservative libertarians and even some who were inclined to old-fashioned village or local socialism. Despite the radical and incompetent (or perhaps dishonest) attacks upon the Old Right, it never congealed into an ideology as was happening in a very gradual way at first to New Deal liberalism and to certain branches of conservatism in the 1950s or so. As for the Trotskyites rebranding themselves as Neoconservatives, but keeping the taste for perpetual revolution itself rebranded as national security wars or wars to infect other countries with the American (corrupt, political-machine) political system, they are a strange and ugly story unto themselves.

So, how would I summarize my understanding of our current situation? I'll provide a mercifully simplified rendering of my complex understanding of recent intellectual and political history.

The Christians of the post-Medieval West, or Modern West if you prefer, failed to respond honestly and courageously and with faith in the Creator to the problems and opportunities raised by modern mountains of all that data

and information and knowledge which came from exploration of the Earth's surface as well as the exploration of mathematical ideas and history and the behavior of light and so on. The worldview of the West began to decay into various strange and ugly ideologies, fragments of a badly deformed Western Christian worldview. These fragments ranged from:

- Western Catholic theology deformed as papal supremacy and Roman centralism of a degree certainly not recognized until after—not surprisingly—certain popes in way over their heads faced the loss of secular power. Not surprisingly, these exaggerated claims on behalf of the ecclesiastical descendant of the leader of the Apostles has resulted in various huge and unnecessary losses to Western Catholic Christianity.
- An implausible version of Christianity in the politicized form of reactionary aristocracy or monarchism.
- A still less plausible version of Christianity mixed with liberalism and concentrated by the Enlightenment into bloody and revolutionary democracy.

to the opposite extreme (by some understanding of 'opposite'):

- Economic determinism of socialist and capitalist types.
- Scientism allied with technocratism.

And, yes, I do consider Marxism and runaway capitalism as being found near the worship of science and technology on this spectrum of nasty and unsustainable ideologies.

All of the above systems, which I would describe as corrupted idealism or human ideas raised above empirical evidence, are closely related to good communal forms: Christianity or free-enterprise economies or science and technology. This would have to be the case because they are all fragments, decay-products of variants of Western Christian civilization (or communities inside of that greater community). It's not that they are directly decay-products of that great civilization. Rather is it the case that a set of closely related worldviews at the foundation of Western Civilization decayed into a set of closely related ideologies. As the decay continued, those

closely related ideologies fragmented and continued to decay, producing new ideologies that were thoroughly psychotic—detached from reality.

# 543 Not Just Tradition, but Openness to What is Good and Beautiful and True and New

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2343>. It was finished and uploaded on 2017/03/07.]

In a recent article, *Sacred Music. An Appeal To Restore Hearing To the Deaf* at <http://magister.blogautore.espresso.repubblica.it/2017/03/05/sacred-music-an-appeal-to-restore-hearing-to-the-deaf/>, the Italian Catholic journalist, Sandro Magister, writes of criticism by musicians and musician-scholars of the loss of tradition in the liturgical music in the Roman Catholic Church: “This disdain for Gregorian chant and traditional repertoires is one sign of a much bigger problem, that of disdain for Tradition.” There is much more of interest in the article and much of the underlying criticism apparently comes from professional musicians with serious knowledge of theology and philosophy—at least one is a theologian as well as a choral director. Much of the criticism applies also to art and architecture, as Magister notes though claiming—probably correctly—that the issue of music is most important.

I’m fully supportive of these criticisms. Sometimes, I’ll put the hymnal back into its slot because of songs not worth the breath. In some of these hymnals, the best quality music is either traditional Catholic music—including those in the *Roman Gradual* (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman\\_Gradual](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Gradual)) and sometimes fresh settings of those chants—or else hymns from other Christian traditions, Methodist or Lutheran or African slave spirituals. And I will say there are times when music in a secular style might be good, especially in the beginning (entrance into) the liturgy

and the ending (exit from) of holy worship. I also believe the Protestant traditions of hymn-sings (outside of the Mass) can be very useful in helping even sacramental Christians to better worship God.

My problem with this article, and many others by supporters of the Western Christian tradition, is on the emphasis. Magister and the critics he's writing about know that the Western Church was a "maker and arbiter of culture," not just a lifeless treasure-store of some sort. I know that many traditionalist church (and synagogue) musicians strive to add to the tradition, or at least support those who do so strive. I'm sure Magister and the musicians mentioned in his article would agree that the tradition itself is alive and open to taking in what is good and beautiful and true in each age and adding to the store which it **dynamically** protects and nurtures and is. Unfortunately, this more complete view can get lost in commenting about an age where you have to search hard to find what is good and beautiful and true in the new—and the number of such new and worthwhile works can be low. And many traditionalists, especially those outside music, seem to have lost interest in the search so far as I can tell, perhaps because of the difficulty of finding something new which might plausibly become part of the tradition.

Those who strive for such new and worthwhile works don't seem to include the musicians who write for the hymnals now found in American Catholic parishes but some of the culturally conservative NPR classical music programs have provided a good screening. In my experience, the Minnesota Public Radio is particularly competent at finding and broadcasting good new choral music, much of it in one Christian tradition or another, though some is secular. After all, even Bach used the cantata form to glorify coffee.

All those who appreciate the wisdom of our Western Christian traditions and wish to publicly advocate for retaining what is good and beautiful and true in those traditions, should be careful to actively remember and actively say that this world and all it contains, including the pilgrim Body of Christ, is yet subject to the evolutionary and developmental forces the Creator set into play. They serve His purposes, including His main purpose in this world of nurturing that Body of Christ which was revealed to us in the life and death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Yet, music is a part of human life, part of that Body of Christ; music surely fulfills one of God's secondary purposes, being part of what is good and beautiful and true.

## 544 Concluding Chapter from *The Shape of Being: A Short Wrapup*

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2357>. It was finished and uploaded on 2017/03/22.

This essay is a lightly edited chapter from my recently released book, *The Shape of Reality* [56], a newly released and freely downloadable book. This is the concluding chapter of the last part of the book, titled *What Have We Done and Where Should We Head?*. The other two chapters in that last part are printed in this book as Chapter 541, *The Knowledge Possessed by a Creature*, and Chapter 542, *From the Ideological Frying-pan to the Ideological Fire.*]

We need to do better if we are to deal with our problems. We may or may not be able to rescue Western Christian Civilization; we may or may not be able to build something new if that Civilization completes its ongoing and ugly collapse; if all else fails, we may or may not be able to contribute to a new Christian Civilization on the Pacific Rim or in Eastern Europe—the most likely centers for a new Christian Civilization in my opinion. We should try whether or not there be much chance of success.

What else do we have to do which is more important or more potential fun than exploring God's Creation with mind and heart and hands and then trying to understand and spiritually integrate and act upon what we discover? What could better prepare us to share God's life in Heaven?

Appreciating the glorious project in the previous paragraph, a project not to be completed in this mortal life, we can see that this is the best way to build a pilgrim Body of Christ—a civilization at least approximating

the true Body of Christ, however incompletely and imperfectly. We can see that a Christian Civilization comes into being as it develops such a rich and complex understanding and feeling and doing of the acts-of-being which God manifested in Creation. We can see that we start this project only by coming to at least somewhat appreciate and nurture our communal human being. Only a group of communities approximating what is needed for a rich and complex civilization can build themselves into a singular human being, a communal human being of the best sort we can be in this mortal realm—one human being awaiting only its head, Jesus Christ, to be a perfect and complete human being.

## 545 Civilizational Decay as a Loss of Shape

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2362>. It was finished and uploaded on 2017/03/28.]

The title of this essay refers to a book I recently published, *The Shape of Reality* [56]. That book is an effort to move forward in our understanding of created being, perhaps even move forward a little in our understanding of the Triune God of Jesus Christ. That book builds upon my understanding of created being, as having both abstract and concrete forms, and the related understanding that relationships are primary and create and shape more particular forms of being. I borrow heavily, unscrupulously and opportunistically, from abstract mathematics—especially the qualitative reasoning which has arisen in such fields as topology and modern algebra. In the *Preface*, I wrote:

Is a man a unity or is he a collection of warring fragments?  
Or is the proper question perhaps my favorite: Is man some  
sort of complex being not describable in current terms of dis-  
course? I should qualify my statement of the last possibility,  
which I believe to be the closest to the truth: I think mathemati-  
cians working in the most abstract regions currently accessible  
to the human mind have discovered tools of thought, quantita-  
tive and qualitative, which can provide us with superior ways  
of discussing complex forms of created being. That entire argu-  
ment is one which can be carried out only by way of a program  
to show such is the case. This book will be the first step in such  
a program—unless this step sends me into a brier-patch or over  
a cliff.

My entire body of writings, including my novels—which anticipated my more disciplined efforts at philosophy and theology, provides the background for what I'll be writing in the remainder of this essay; that recent book, *The Shape of Reality*, is an effort to start bringing my work on understanding Creation into a tighter and more accessible focus.

There are times in human history, including the history of the West, when things have gone from great order and prosperity to disorder and poverty—sometimes the decay was pretty quick. As a rule, the common folk got their suffering first but the elite would get theirs eventually, or at least the grandchildren of those elite dominating at the end of that period of order and prosperity. Note that the elite are powerholders and wealth-holders, not necessarily those of greater merit in the senses of talent or accomplishment or moral character. I often note that the prophet Jeremiah claimed a disproportionate percentage of the wealthy and powerful are outright evil; I agree with him, though I think a far larger percentage simply have weak moral character.

In any case, the High Middle Ages were years of relative peace and great prosperity. A quick search will turn up analyses based upon documents as well as skeletal evidence which tells us that childhood death rates during the High Middle Ages (say, 1100-1300) were usually very high because of diseases which could not be handled by the medical techniques of that age. Those who survived childhood were comparable to modern human beings in robustness and size. They were well-fed and lived actively but not in a way particularly nasty, brutish, or short. ["Life is nasty, brutish, and short. . .," said Thomas Hobbes.]

See Chapter 674, *A Very Simplified View of the Woes of Christianity—Now and at Two Earlier Times*, for a discussion of the beginning of modern liberalism; in terms of my current discussion, liberalism should be defined as something like: the denial of the reality of complex entities and the consequent fragmentation of Creation and of human being. It should be noted that the human organism was arbitrarily—from a purely logical viewpoint—chosen as the 'true' level of human being; if you fragment the universe by denying the reality of complex entities made up of smaller entities which retain their individuality to some extent, then Richard Dawkins has as much right to choose DNA as the 'true' level of human being as Duns Scotus and William of Ockham, Locke and Jefferson, had to choose the human organism.

So it was the human mind began to decay by way of a new retreat

into some strange region of human schemes of knowledge. Hume had some good insights—though he was even less of a pure philosopher than I am, but it took Nietzsche to ridicule the entire Western intellectual effort for the absurdity it had generally been for centuries. Meanwhile, there was a revival of respect for Aquinas who was the Saint of Honest Responses to Reality rather than the imagined Aquinas who was the Saint of the Philosophical Schemes Which Judged Reality. After years of rejecting Aquinas as another philosopher who spoke gobbledy-gook, I was gently criticized for my attitude by Stanley Hauerwas and then re-read Etienne Gilson's explanations of the thought of Aquinas as well as a few comments by Hannah Arendt and I realized I was fooled because Aquinas was an artist in using gobbledy-gook to speak true wisdom. The best way to understand what he was really up to is to read his commentary on St Paul's *First Letter to the Corinthians*, (1 Corinthians). Then you can realize that the problems with Western understandings of created being began after Aquinas and not in his writings.

Books can be written upon this decay of the Western mind, individual and communal, and upon the similar decay in the Western heart and the Western hands. What I would point out here is the prolonged nature of the crisis which showed itself in those thoughts of Duns Scotus and the related thoughts of William of Ockham, but undoubtedly were developing before the births of those two men who sharpened some very bad and dangerous ideas to a state of rationalistic brilliance, a brilliance independent of nature because it was meant to be used to judge and evaluate nature and, indeed, all of Creation. The intellectual schemes of Duns Scotus and William of Ockham transcended Creation even as they tended to pull the Almighty Himself into Creation by denying His existence is qualitatively different from that of creatures. This was a brilliance which was but a gloss upon the decay of the human mind and a retreat from Christian ideas of Creator and Creation.

Similar processes of decay were developing and advancing in those other parts of human being: heart and hands. That had to be the case because a human being is, in aspiration and principle, a unity and thus it is that the human mind is what we see when a certain light, call it 'metaphysical' if you wish, is shined through a human being from a specific direction. Heart is what we see when that light is shined from a differently specific direction and we can see hands when that light is shined from a third specific direction. As a rule, decay will make its way into all parts of human being even if it starts

in but one. This doesn't mean that, for example, intellectual decay leads to moral decay of a truly degrading sort but it will lead to moral disorder which will make it difficult for a community to see its way to regrowth any time soon. All important human activities have a moral component, even if it is forms of order describable as 'proto-moral', foundational order such as the peace and obedience to law which can be enforced upon a society by a warlord wishing but to keep his taxes flowing and to be able to leave his realm to his son.

Things were already falling apart in much of the West by 1300 or so—26 years after the death of Aquinas, partly because of factors at play in this year of 2017, including: an excess of so-called elites, a concentration of vast amounts of wealth and power in the hands of a minority of that elite, and a lack of good jobs for the common folk. By 1400 or so, the population of common folk in Western Europe was far less what it had been in 1300—up to a loss of 50% of the population according to some historians or as little as 30% or so according to others. Then the common folk were in a position to bargain for better pay and a greater share of wealth and the elite, in an Invisible Hand (Invisible Mind or Invisible Heart?) sense, realized there were too many of their own sort. Various families and other groups among the elites began to fight it out—such as the House of Lancaster and the House of York waging brutal winner-take-all war (see *War of the Roses* at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wars\\_of\\_the\\_Roses](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wars_of_the_Roses)). In most such struggles, the winner family got the throne or lesser treasure, for a short time, and the loser family was more or less exterminated or at least reduced from an elite status.

We seem to have entered the early stage of a terrible period which may equal or even exceed the 14th century in a horrific devastation of the West, with the common folk bearing most of the suffering.

Let me correct an inadequacy in the above paragraphs. The decay of a civilization is a complex process composed of complex sub-processes. The decay of a civilization isn't just a matter of politics and economics and the elites who control centralized power in those realms of human communal life, but those sub-processes are very important and will likely become the dominant part of the avalanche once it gets going. Yet, the most important of all the sub-processes is the decay of human communal life; that will lead to recursive interaction with the decay processes involving the inner lives and moral characters, the intellectual and emotional and behavioral make-up, of individuals. As noted above, the West is decaying in mind and

heart and hands. Our thoughts and feelings and actions, individual and communal, are increasingly those of a barbarian people and the recursive interactions between individual and communal decay are probably well into that stage of an avalanche.

The astute reader who has kept up with my efforts to write about the shape of human beings, individual and communal, and even *The Shape of Reality* [56] might already suspect I'm trying to integrate my ways of understanding complex entities into my regular ways of writing. That astute reader would be right and, in particular, I'm interested in producing a better understanding of complex entities as made of other entities, where those 'smaller' entities retain at least part of their own individuality even as they become part of that complex entity.

If we imagine a civilization, or even the entirety of mankind, as the surface of a globe, we can eliminate complications and complexities in a useful way by producing maps of smaller human communities which are 'flatter' and simpler to work with—in the same way that maps of, say, the continents allow us to see regions such as European Russia and Spain and all that lies between in enough detail to understand some important matters of recent and even longfar agoway history. Usefully idealizing this mathematical process, we can then produce a new map from that of the pseudo-continent of Europe and examine European Russia and Spain separately and in somewhat greater detail. We can then map Barcelona or St Petersburg in the large to still 'flatter' maps than the ones above and then map neighborhoods of those cities in detail so that individual streets, even small side-streets, and major buildings can be all shown.

The smaller the region, the closer that region comes to being truly Euclidean when we speak of that simple case of mapping the surface of Earth. In mathematics, the functions useful for analysis are easy to work with, nice. Analogically, in carrying out this sort of a procedure for analyzing human being in its communal and individual forms, we can derive concepts and tools which are also easy (or at least easier) to work with. No guarantees of niceness, but a lot better than trying to gain an understanding of a complex and seemingly chaotic mess by using concepts and tools of thought developed in prior ages for application to much simpler forms of human being than what we have now. And are in danger of losing.

The individual human being as we idealize him is a limiting case of that extremely small region of of a manifold of communal human being far more complex than the surface of a three-dimensional ball such as Earth, even

allowing for Mount Everest and the Dead Sea set in the Jordan Rift Valley as well as the complex systems of valleys and mesas in all the badland regions of Earth.

We come to a difficult issue, especially when dealing with something so important as human relationships.

I noted in my recently released book that there is overlap, intermingling on the borders of the regions of any manifold which represents a true human community—even the abstract geometrical (that is, topological) representation of a community of two, marriage or friendship or intermingled economies of two countries or whatever, is extremely complex and complicated. One complexity is the ambiguity of boundaries between human beings: individual and individual, individual and communal, communal and communal. When one considers God's role in all of this, the general model I'm proposing shows itself as complex and complicated enough to be a plausible and perhaps realistic view of reality.

Think of a globe whose sphere (surface of that globe) is made up of regions which are separating in some ways, perhaps the areas shared with nearby regions are tearing apart in such a way that no regions, no human beings smaller than the global community, are complete to the extent they were before such a process of disintegration went into high gear. They have begun to shed communal human being, whether purposefully or not, whether consciously or not; they have damaged their individual human being in the process and the recursive interaction of individual and communal human being is underway. That communal human being which is really disappearing is not only necessary to the health of individual human beings, it is necessary for the very existence of complex human communities. The word 'really' in the prior sentence is important. In fact, I would deny any semi-liberal interpretations of the above claims. I would deny that we are watching freestanding individuals being freed from communal relationships for good or bad—we are watching the destruction and disappearance of human being.

The point of all of this—I can't say it too often—is that what seems to be, for example, qualitative functions drawn from modern abstract mathematics is true being, abstract being for sure but true being against the claims of the metaphysical foundations of modern liberalism—again, see Chapter 674, *A Very Simplified View of the Woes of Christianity—Now and at Two Earlier Times* for a discussion of those foundations as developed in the decades following the High Middle Ages—the peak of Christian

thought to that and perhaps this point, the thought manifested in Thomas Aquinas's insights into being and into the importance of grounding our thought upon empirical foundations. To be sure, Aquinas compromised his thought by supporting the idea of a mind or soul because he wasn't confident enough in the stuff God had created to support the opposing idea that a human brain can be the medium of even the most abstract thought—but he didn't know how dynamic matter, including the brain, can be. The dynamic nature of matter and the way in which relationships create and shape stuff and thing-like entities tells us of the reality of abstract being.

In somewhat simpler terms, the takeaway is:

If we live in an era or area where there are no plausible such functions involving rich and complex communities and also rich and complex individuals, or when or where such functions are grossly inadequate, then I'm further claiming that human being of that time or place isn't adequate, either because of a lack of properly developed mind in those responsible for understanding Creation or because of a more general lack of properly developed mind or heart or hands in some probably larger part of the human population.

The simpler sorts of communal human being, such as nuclear and extended families or tribes, can apparently reconstitute themselves pretty quickly—but they aren't likely to have the characteristics human beings ultimately need and we human beings of the 21st century desire that our lives be as rich as were in the near past. Civilization would have to be rebuilt, as is seemingly happening in China and the Chinese diaspora—though not in a clearly solid or sustainable way.



# 546 Is Democracy Possible? Is it Compatible with Christianity?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2393>. It was finished and uploaded on 2017/05/09.]

## 546.1 Introduction

On 2017/04/20, Judge Andrew Napolitano published: *What if We Don't Really Govern Ourselves?* at <http://www.unz.com/anapolitano/what-if-we-dont-really-govern-ourselves/>, a simple and coherent article questioning whether democracy exists in the United States and whether democracy is, in any case, an absolute good or an answer to our various political problems. Napolitano's essay is in the form of questions which move relentlessly through terrible possibilities. His essay begins:

What if our belief in self-government is a belief in a myth? What if the election of one political party over the other to control Congress changes only appearances? What if taxes stay high and regulations stay pervasive and the government stays oppressive and presidents fight wars no matter what the politicians promise and no matter who wins elections? What if the true goal of those whom we elect to Congress is not to be our agents of self-government or even to preserve our personal liberties but to remain in power by getting re-elected?

And that essay by Judge Napolitano ends:

What if the selective use of the data acquired from mass surveillance can be used to manipulate anyone by those who have access to the data? What if those who have access to the data have used it to manipulate the president of the United States? What if all this constitutes a grave but largely unseen threat to our liberties, not the least of which is the right to self-government?

What if we don't really govern ourselves? What do we do about it?

I fear and believe that we Americans are the citizens in a mostly gentle sort of totalitarian society. Such a society was, in fact, foreseen by Tocqueville back in the 1830s when he looked into the American soul and saw its potential strengths and weaknesses. (See any of the English language editions of *Democracy in America* which might be found in your local library or library borrowing system.)

For now, I'll move on.

A day after Napolitano published the above referenced essay, Pat Buchanan published *Is Democracy in a Death Spiral?* at <http://www.unz.com/pbuchanan/is-democracy-in-a-death-spiral/>, on the same, high-quality website run by Ron Unz.

Once again, I'll quote the beginning and end of the essay under consideration.

Buchanan begins with a quote:

"You all start with the premise that democracy is some good. I don't think it's worth a damn. Churchill is right. The only thing to be said for democracy is that there is nothing else that's any better.

...

"People say, 'If the Congress were more representative of the people it would be better.' I say Congress is too damn representative. It's just as stupid as the people are, just as uneducated, just as dumb, just as selfish."

This dismissal of democracy, cited by historian H. W. Brands in *The General vs the President: MacArthur and Truman at the Brink of Nuclear War*, is attributed to that great populist Secretary of State Dean Acheson.

Buchanan ends his essay thus:

How, outside an external attack that unites us, like 9/11, do we find unity among people who dislike each other so much and regard each other's ideas and ideals as hateful and repellent?

Democracy requires common ground on which all can stand, but that ground is sinking beneath our feet, and democracy may be going down the sinkhole with it.

Where liberals see as an ever-more splendid diversity of colors, creeds, ethnicities, ideologies, beliefs and lifestyles, the Right sees the disintegration of a country, a nation, a people, and its replacement with a Tower of Babel.

Visions in conflict that democracy cannot reconcile.

## 546.2 Is Democracy Possible? Is it Compatible with Christianity?

What is Democracy? Is it no more than a set of procedures for electing important government officials? Is it more complete, even to being a way of life? Is it a mere attitude which can cover the empowerment of a minority of Athenian men or a perhaps truer democracy in Switzerland or the political machine system of the United States?

Keep those standard ways of thought in mind, but keep another thought in the front of your mind: Christians are bound to believe that the Body of Christ is the perfect and complete human community; that Body is the union of Christ with all of His brothers and sisters. Our understanding of the Body of Christ should guide all of our thoughts about the best possible forms of human communities—including those we describe as 'political'. Even the most secular of political beliefs and acts should be compatible with our Christian beliefs.

That Christian thought should also guide us in answering two questions I'll raise, without claiming any plans or hopes of answering in any authoritative manner.

## Is Democracy Possible?

I doubt if democracy is truly possible, at least not for most human communities.

- First, most citizens in any large society will be ignorant of what needs to be known to be responsible voters and to retain their democratic forms; most will also lack the time or energy or sense of responsibility to learn what they should know and to think about it in terms of the issues or persons subject to votes.
- In addition, a successful society with any sort of government will likely build up wealth and centralized power that will attract various sorts of scoundrels right up to the level of ruthless men of genius and ambition, such as Julius Caesar or Genghis Khan. That's the end of the old form of government, democracy or other.

Let's consider the the United States which was founded as a republic (sometimes called a representative democracy) and fell from that state to one of political machines, including *Tammany Hall* (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tammany\\_Hall](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tammany_Hall)) which was founded a few years before the American Constitution was written and adopted. The distinguished French political philosopher, *Bertrand de Jouvenel* (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bertrand\\_de\\_Jouvenel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bertrand_de_Jouvenel)), made this claim: the United States has a political machine system and not a democracy or republic. We Americans act within a republican form which is increasingly being corrupted to a pseudo-democracy which seems to be even more useful for the two political machines left, the national leaderships of the Democratic and Republican parties; beginning in the 1960s, those two machines destroyed the local and ethnic machines and concentrated the money-grubbing and electoral power in their own criminal hands.

I am not saying that those two political machines are all-powerful. Outsiders have had some success even to the extent of gaining seats and holding some power at the state level and in the Senate and House of Representatives. Some have even had some lesser success in running for president. Bertrand de Jouvenel pointed out that honest politicians did sometimes arise and win important office, under that older American political machine system, but they were exceptions and they are probably more exceptional under the current system. In any case, that insightful Frenchman observed

that political machines survive by taking in money and valuable (money-generating) favors from satisfied clients; those machines need amoral or immoral politicians who will vote with the interests of those clients rather than voting with the interests of the nation or their particular voters (for example, in Ohio) or their moral beliefs.

Sometimes cynicism is justified: when I hear American political leaders or high-level bureaucrats or think-tankers speaking of “spreading democracy,” I see them as vultures, ready to exploit the peoples of the United States or Iraq or Ukraine or Russia or nearly any country or group within any country.

I’m going to run around a lot of interesting analyses—which I’m not immediately prepared to carry out nor do I feel called to head in that particular direction—and claim that democracies, even republics, under modern conditions are impossible so far as their self-government characteristics go. The form might exist but the reality of self-government can’t exist. The world is too complicated for even local leaders to understand to any meaningful extent; the common man has no time, no inclination, often no capacity, for understanding even the general backgrounds of North African countries, Middle-eastern countries. . . Heck, most residents of the Northeastern states of the US don’t even understand much of what is going on in California or Texas or Michigan.

It is a great moral fallacy, a matter of sin to Christians, to think there to be a right to a certain political system under which the crucial decisions (who are to be the leaders) are made by people who don’t, and often can’t, understand the modern complex world. This is to say it is a sin to claim and exercise even the illusion of power when you have no plans, and perhaps no capability, of gaining some understanding of those who, for example, face death as a result of you helping to vote an imperialist or interventionist into the White House.

Moreover, it creates a situation where all sorts of scoundrels can take advantage of those masses who escape their confusion and anxiety about the world by adopting simplistic ideas about that world, about the moral authority of the American leadership elites, about the thievery and other crimes those elites are committing against their own citizens and the greater crimes they have committed and are committing against citizens of other countries.

We should be starting to see a major reason for the Christian failure to even try to deal with political systems from a truly Christian viewpoint—

other than the Medieval and early modern eras when Kings dominated and Christ was seen as King, as if our Lord the carpenter and itinerant preacher were really some sort of failed King during His mortal life. The Lord Jesus Christ accomplished what He came to do; we should understand His life in that light. He wasn't a failed King; if He had wished to be a King, then He would have been a successful King, still greater than King St Louis IX—to say the least. In fact, He was a carpenter and then became an itinerant preacher. And He never agitated for democracy or any other form of self-government. I think He was in favor of, and will bring His friends to, a state of self-government of a sort, but not any sort we can quite realize in this world. Worst still, we Christians have failed to even approach the issue of proper political structure by considering Christ's life on earth and what He was trying to accomplish.

In any case, Christian churches have let themselves become ghettos outside of the domains of modern empirical knowledge and thought—however much fools can wave their hands and say, “There is no conflict between science and religion.” In a sense, that's true, but the conflict comes in human beings, communal and individual. The conflict is realized particularly strongly in the youth who learn from their culture, including entertainment as well as schools, that men evolved from ancestors shared with chimpanzees and then are forced to go to church on Sunday to hear someone babble on about men falling into their currently imperfect and incomplete condition, falling from a state of some sort of perfection. Were our ancestors in a state of grace and perfection? Or were they apish creatures?

We now know our line of evolution passed through some apish creatures. We share an ancestor with chimpanzees, before that with all sorts of nice or nasty creatures. If we Christians are to continue to speak our Christian truths as part of a package which includes the non-truth of a fall from a state of grace, we are likely to have a bad understanding of human nature, a bad understanding of human political possibilities, a bad understanding of God's plans for us—that is, a bad understanding of the meaning of salvation.

We need to consider both aspects of human being discussed in the prior paragraph: how human being evolved and what God's plans are for us. Leave aside the clear fact that we have some idea of God's plans for us but need to speculate a bit, to prepare ourselves for sharing God's life in the world of the resurrected.

So it is:

1. We human beings are embodied. We have limited capacity to acquire or properly use true knowledge, abstract or concrete—the latter being largely empirical. We have limited time and energy. We are imperfectly virtuous. We, at least the American ‘we’, are very bad at choosing leaders who are properly knowledgeable, adequately intelligent, even minimally morally well-ordered.
2. God clearly plans for us, some of us or many of us or—unlikely—all of us, to share His life through complete and perfect communion with His Son and with every other friend of His Son.

### **Is Democracy Compatible with Christianity?**

The Body of Christ has no governance in the sense of a central power structure. Christ Himself rarely ordered His followers about and when He did, telling them to put out in their boat and He’d meet them on the other side or announcing they were going up to Jerusalem, He was quite gentle in His manner. That despite the fact that the disciples were strongly against going to Jerusalem, for reasons that proved to be quite valid from the perspective of mortal human beings.

Jesus’ leadership was quite different than that of a general ordering his troops into battle, even much different from the leadership of a general who went into battle with his troops—we can think of General Teddy Roosevelt, Jr going with his men onto the beach at the invasion of Normandy in June of 1944. To be sure, the leadership style of the Apostles was a mixed-bag of sorts. They most certainly didn’t have the Presence of the man(-God) who taught with such authority. They sometimes led by way of developing a consensus, after which the community—or, at least, it’s many lower-level leaders—moved in a way sort of describable as “one.”

In general, there are some more suited to specific roles of authority; we should follow certain men and women in learning how to carry out acts of charity in a manner non-condescending and other men and women in learning how to listen and to counsel troubled human beings or how to guide boys and girls trying to find their way in life or still others in coming to abstract understandings of God’s Creation or parts of it. This last is interesting if only because certain abstract thinking for the Body of Christ, or one of His constituent parts, might be provided by some not ordinarily considered to be talented in abstract thinking such as tinkerers as the

most obvious example. Henry Ford was one specific example, Thomas Alva Edison another—perhaps the sheer theoretical brilliance of Nikola Tesla explains the antagonism each expressed toward the other. Even fairly mundane technology such as modern American house-building materials and techniques represent a partial but important understanding of this world and of human life. It says something about differences between peoples when we think of the tendency of farmers from the tribes of Northwestern Europe to live in nuclear families separated from their neighbors whereas most farming peoples live in villages with their fields sometimes being communal.

The Body of Christ is the perfect and complete human community and the goal of true Christians is to play their part in the development and life of that Body; we are saved as part of that Body or we are not saved at all. St Paul tells us so in his *First Letter to the Corinthians*—all of chapter 12 is relevant but there are some verses which are particularly enlightening in this context.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. [1 Corinthians 12:12, *The Holy Bible*, Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition, 1966.]

In a book I recently released for free downloading, *The Shape of Reality* [56], I reached something of a new level for my thought, making it a little more explicit how modern mathematical ideas can provide concepts and words for discussing the reality of communities. To date, I've largely drawn upon differential geometry and topology; I'm currently exploring basic abstract algebra as well as dynamics for further ideas on making my descriptions of complex entities more complete.

This is clearly of great importance in understanding all human communities, including political communities.

Communities are real and most certainly is it true that a Christian should believe in the real existence of that complete and perfect human community: the Body of Christ. That Body has properties seemingly inconsistent with the existing schemes for organizing human polities, starting with the targeted state of a Body which is itself and not just the sum of its members. Yet, those members retain their individuality even as they are

part of something truly greater than, in a sense—different from, any gathering of those individuals—however cooperative they might be. Communities are real.

But what about the Body of Christ, which I suggest has the properties I claim to be fundamental to a morally well-ordered world and a morally well-ordered Person or image of a divine Person: unity, coherence, and completeness?

Let me throw out this speculation about the Body of Christ, the perfect and complete human being: Maybe leaders in the usual sense are not necessary?

Maybe, just maybe, most human activities can be organized internally, and more or less spontaneously, by specific human sub-communities so that the members do what is necessary, taking on roles of leader or worker or user of products or services. After all, those sharing God's life in the world of the resurrected, or intending in this world to share God's life, would be mature enough to work together in proper ways, taking on or shedding various roles—including that of 'leader'—as needed. [Remember from my earlier writings that "to intend" in Thomistic and legal and biological traditions is not to have a motive or a goal but rather to move actively toward a new state. "To intend" is a growth process.]

This seems more than a bit speculative, but let's return to a great prophet: St Paul who tells us by analogy from an individual human body to the Body of Christ:

For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if that ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single organ, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. [1 Corinthians 12:14–20, *The Holy Bible*, Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition, 1966.]

This is where my thoughts begin to fade away, because I'm not quite

ready to speculate further on a good way to use Christian revelation to provide either a narrative or a metaphysical structure for putting together modern empirical knowledge and modern abstract ways of thought (largely mathematics) in order to make sense of the world around us. (Both structures are likely needed.)

Yet, I will put forward some thoughts which are tentative even as speculations.

1. All that is human, all skills of building and of teaching and of exploring reality and of making theories about what is known and so on, will remain with the Body of Christ in the world of the resurrected. Though we think of this world, Heaven or Paradise, as being a place of pure rest and play, Disneyland raised to some strange perfection and completeness, all legitimate and worthy human parts and aspects will be completed and perfected in that world of the resurrected, as parts and aspects of the Body of Christ.
2. The Body of Christ isn't organized in a manner at all hierarchical, though Christ is the Head in some substantial sense. Yet, even Christ Himself is our Brother much more than He is our King. His Lordship isn't that of a human king raised to divine levels but rather that of a wise and generous older brother raised to divine levels; the Lord Jesus is tolerant of our failings and weaknesses and there to help us become more like Him.
3. To expand a little upon the above, but also to borrow from ideas found in the letters of St Paul, each individual human being saved as a member of the Body of Christ, will remain himself or herself while also being the entirety of that Body. This is to say that each of us will have 'use' of all the parts and aspects of Christ and also of all the talents of intellectual and artistic geniuses in the Body and also of all the talents of the giants of charity (Christian love) in the Body and also of all the talents of the practical men and women whose skills of homemaking and home-building will remain part of human life in the world of the resurrected which is the true home of the Body of Christ.

The bottom line, in the context of dealing with democracy and other forms of human political organization, is: there might be leaders but we will

all share in those leadership activities and those leaders will not be bosses or exploiters as they often are in this mortal realm.

I wrote this essay under the title: *Is Democracy Possible? Is it Compatible with Christianity?*. To answer these two questions:

1. Probably not.
2. No.



# 547 Self-government Isn't Government Structure

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2397>. It was finished and uploaded on 2017/05/22.]

Let me expand upon the title: *Self-government Isn't Government Structure*, it's a claim for (positive) rights successfully made by a morally well-ordered population; that is, a claim for rights not magically granted to us but earned by real-world efforts and made possible by a bit of luck.

We, the American people and our government, can't just impose self-government on other peoples and governments. The procedures can be designed but the reality of self-government depends on a variety of other factors. In the modern West, self-government has been associated with some sort of complex independence on the part of a substantial percentage of the residents of a region; that independence is complex because it involves moral and economic and political and cultural factors.

The Swiss peasantry owned their own land early on compared to most regions of Medieval ('post-Roman') Europe and by the 14th century, those peasants owned weaponry—the famous pikes still carried in ceremony by the Pope's Swiss Guard—which allowed them to stand up to the knights in battle. The Swiss peasants worked hard to develop discipline and ways of fighting while the knights remained convinced of their inherent superiority. By the end of that tumultuous 14th century and after decades of massacres of common folk by armies led by warlords and bishops and abbots—perhaps a hint of what's coming for the countries and peoples of the West during the remainder of the 21st century—those peasants were able to drive out their Austrian overlords with all of their suits of armor and warhorses and broadswords and the rest of that. During that same century, peasants in

part of Portugal did something similar to their Spanish rulers, but I'll leave it to others to find out the details.

The common folk of the British Isles were more lucky than determined or disciplined, yet, they also gained some substantial forms of political rights. This is a complex story and is coming to no good end—a bit like all stories in this mortal realm of tears. After gaining a good amount of self-government, the Anglo-American political communities concentrated political power in centralized governments which were not really under the control of or likely to ever be under the control of the mass of citizens; that sort of control by common folk could have been exercised only by way of political processes which could have been labeled 'federalist' or—even better—described as a political form of the economic system of distributivism advocated by the Anglican thinker G. K. Chesterton. (He became a Roman Catholic near the end of his life, but he was really always an English Catholic, which I consider better than Anglican or Roman Catholic for one who was an Englishman.)

Anyway, we can skip a lot of history, much of it quite disedifying to those who think human rights come to us by some 'natural' endowment. Let's consider the sad case of two countries glued together by fiat of European colonial powers: Iraq and Libya. As brutal as Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi were, they had created economic conditions which had led to the growth of a middle-class and even some growth of a reasonably prosperous working-class. Gaddafi was even increasing prosperity and expanding those classes in some regions of sub-Saharan Africa. The existence of such classes isn't a sufficient factor in the development of self-government, political 'rights' for much of the common folk. The existence of such classes is a necessary factor.

The American destruction of those dictatorships and their prosperity put an end to some terrible crimes but also put an end to some social and economic and political processes which might have led to self-government in some form. The psychopathic juvenile delinquents who rule the United States and staff too many of its private and governmental institutions put in some half-assed efforts to jump to the state of (formal) self-government in Iraq after destroying one of the necessary factors for that state. Self-government in the United States is at an end, probably ended in the 1970s, since such wretched excuses for human beings so dominate the American political and economic and—yes—cultural communities; we have no virtuous bastard of the likes of Andrew Jackson (see

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew\\_Jackson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew_Jackson)) to destroy the centralizers and it's unlikely one would grow up in the West without being co-opted by the institutions at the corrupt centers of wealth and power or marginalized as a danger to those centers. The modern processes of rising into the ranks of—supply your own scare-quotes—academia and politics and banking and business and intelligence services and (increasingly) military services and religious groups seem to include selection for lack of knowledge about reality, lack of knowledge about how to acquire reliable knowledge, lack of mature and well-practiced thinking skills, and utter lack of moral character. Some of them, especially religious leaders, have some virtues but not the courage to exercise them and not the will to gain courage by way of pretending to have it—painting ourselves into a corner can often be a good moral strategy and it's one I accidentally developed and still practice though with trepidation.

Be realistic about what the real situation was in Iraq and Libya and about what seems to be happening in the West, not just the United States. Those who are greedy and overly-ambitious control great wealth and great power and they are not friends of God nor do they desire to be living in communion of any sort with the bulk of their fellow human beings. They have largely, though not yet fully, destroyed one of the necessary foundations of self-government in the United States and in Europe (an independent and prosperous middle-class and working-class) just as they destroyed similar foundations under development in Iraq and Libya. As I've argued in past writings about the entirety of the foundations of Western Civilization: they are mostly inside of us. That proper independence of human being, individual and **locally** communal, develops out of an understanding of all that exists, especially our relationship to God, and we no longer have a coherent understanding of that sort. To the extent we, especially the younger residents of the West, have any understanding of all that exists or even of just this world, it isn't coherent and it most certainly isn't Christian, nor is it Jewish, nor is it even paganistic. It is radically secularized, fully without any recognition of divinity of any sort. This is new in history and is the largest single factor in the general self-destruction of the West, including the decay into moral degeneracy.

In my writings, I'm providing an understanding sufficient to reform or to build anew a Christian civilization, which means it's sufficient to repair our own human being, individual and that of all the communities to which we belong to any substantial extent. I'm confident my own efforts

or those of someone engaged in a similar effort will help greatly in the re-establishment of Christian civilization. The pilgrim Body of Christ will find a new embodiment in this mortal realm. It would seem it will take years, perhaps decades, for my works or similar works to gain much attention. It will probably take generations to see much in the way of larger-scale results. And it will likely develop first outside of the West, leading to the self-marginalization of the West as a major region in terms of power and wealth and cultural influence.

We have let our exploitive classes destroy our own insides, our minds and hearts and hands—including all that is meant by “moral character.” We have, in old-fashioned language, sold our souls in return for television shows and the Superbowl and affordable tennis clubs and fancier housing than we need. As terrible as their suffering is, the peoples of Iraq and Libya are in better shape than those of the West because they, unlike us, didn’t voluntarily participate in the destruction of their own human being, individual and communal. Human beings who have sold, and are selling, themselves and their children to the exploitive classes of the West have shaped themselves to be incapable of sharing God’s life, incapable of living in the world of the resurrected. If such human beings are resurrected, their ongoing existence will be hellish even if they are located in Heaven. (A purging, necessarily painful, would always be possible for a merciful God, but a mere pass into Heaven by an absolutely forgiving God would lead to a wretched creature living for time without end in a place to which he is unsuited.)

Convert, turn to God, or accept damnation and pray that it means a permanent grave rather than a hellish existence without end.

End of sermon. End of lesson on what Christian leaders would be saying if they were not so well domesticated by the exploitive classes of the West, if they were more in touch with reality and if their minds were not so clouded by edifying homilies based upon scholarship having little to do with modern knowledge about God’s Creation.

# 548 Whence Come American Values?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2424>. It was finished and uploaded on 2017/07/18.]

In a discussion of a recent speech by President Trump, Robert Merry gives a short summary of one aspect of our current political mess—see *Trump’s Warsaw Speech Threw Down the Gauntlet on Western Civilization: Is America just ‘an idea’?* at <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/trumps-warsaw-speech-threw-down-the-gauntlet-on-western-civilization/>.

In Merry’s discussion, we can read:

In his Warsaw speech on Thursday, Donald Trump threw down the gauntlet on the meaning and essence of Western Civilization, and it fell at the feet of two writers for *The Atlantic*—Peter Beinart and James Fallows. They avidly took it up, and in the process distilled a fundamental debate of our time. Of course, Beinart and Fallows don’t see it as a legitimate debate, and they want to snuff it out. But it will continue to roil politics in America and Europe, much to the consternation of media elite figures such as these two writers.

The debate centers on whether American values, however they may be defined, are a legacy of the Western heritage or whether America is “an idea,” as Fallows puts it, that transcends any concept of civilization or the people who created it. Indeed, in the Beinart-Fallows view, merely an overly abundant mention of “the West” or “our civilization” constitutes a kind of white nationalism or tribalism.

I've proposed a better way of thinking about this general need to form morally well-ordered and sustainable communities, from families and friendships right up to civilizations. The three most recent and most relevant chapters are:

- Chapter 336, *What is the Totality of a Human Life?: Individuals and Communities.*,
- Chapter 337, *What is the Totality of a Human Life?: Individual and Communal Intent.*, and
- Chapter 338, *What is the Totality of a Human Life?: Unity, Coherence, and Completeness.*

Much of the problem relates to the secularization of the West and to a particular aspect of that secularization; we have forgotten that Christian communities, especially the ultimate Christian community which is the Body of Christ, are not just voluntary gatherings of individuals who are alleged to be the only real form of human being nor are they communities which absorb the individual so that only the community remains. Following St Paul, the Body of Christ is an entity with real existence and yet the members fully retain their individual identities.

In recent centuries, the individual parts and members of the West viewed as the Pilgrim Body of Christ were struggling to define themselves and to prevent other parts and members from wrongful intrusions. Parts and members include various communities at various scales, political and economic and artistic and athletic and other communities, as well as individuals. The struggles between these various human beings—communal and individual—can, and seemingly did, result in great damage to the global entity—the Body of Christ in this case. Many men and women of good-will can't even see that Body in the resulting mess which is the West.

As I discuss in more detail in the above-referenced essays, there is only one way to be a true Christian: to intend to do so, where “intend to become a true Christian” is used in the Thomistic sense of a process of growing and developing toward the state of being Christlike, a process as necessary for Christian communities as for Christian individuals. In this, I'd go a lot further than Merry, further than the public commentary of even Pat Buchanan who is clearly a devout Catholic. If we wish to rescue the Christian West, we must intend to be Christians. We must aim for a Christlike state of

being for our individual selves and also for our communities, aiming to be both individuals and communities who will be members and organs of the Body of Christ. In fact, the West isn't at issue. To those who understand the foundations of the Christian West, what is at issue is the growth and development of the Body of Christ. That Body doesn't exist for the sake of the West and its power and wealth; the West once seemed to be truly intending toward a Christlike state where it would have been a great servant, and also the largest and most complete this-worldly manifestation, of that Body. The Pilgrim Body of Christ in a way of thinking.

Christ will support and nurture what is legitimately human but that is different from thinking of Christ as the founder of human institutions which are the real things. The Lord doesn't play second fiddle to even an ambitious Christian ruler such as Charlemagne, let alone to the likes of Western leaders over the past few centuries. The Church Herself is not the entirety of the Body of Christ, as St Paul himself seemed to claim in a much different situation. The Church is the central organ which teaches us what it means to be Christlike and leads us in our worship of God.

In Christian terms, taking Pauline views of the Body of Christ seriously, modern efforts to understand the United States or the entire West as either "values" or "idea" puts individual Christians in a position of trying to be Christlike while living as members of a variety of communities which are non-Christlike. Unity and coherence and completeness of Christian forms of human being at all scales become impossible under these circumstances.

We need to view our human selves, individual and communal, as engaged in the intentional processes which will bring us to a more Christlike state, one which ideally (and impossibly in this world) lead us to become truly Christlike. So long as we live major parts of our lives, such as our political and economic parts, separately from these Christian processes, we will fail to recover the fullness of truths, though we may recover some parts of the West which were manifest in the glorious pagan civilizations and smaller-scale cultures from which we come or from which we have borrowed. The problem with that, at least to Christians, is that Plato didn't take on our sins and Caesar can't bring us to Heaven.



# 549 Whom the Gods Would Destroy, They First Make Mad and Then Stupid

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2487>. It was finished and uploaded on 2018/03/27.]

Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote stories depicting a moral sickness found deep inside the souls of New England Puritans, fearing he himself was infected by this strange malady which turned warm blood into ice-water. Great historians, such as John K. Fairbank (who mentioned in *The Great Chinese Revolution, 1800-1985* [32] that American opium-smugglers in China, all from the Northeastern states so far as I know, weren't devoted to crime but rather to good rates-of-return whether from criminal or legal activities) and David Herbert Donald (who wrote in *Lincoln* [29] of Lincoln's knowledge of the role played by Northeasterners in the slave-trade and how it led him to consider his intended 'kindly' treatment of the South after the war to be simple justice). More recently Alfred McCoy in authoritative books about or touching upon the crimes of the American national security agencies, Peter Dale Scott in a number of books on similar matters, and James Bradley in some books on the delusions and crimes behind the American Empire—which never really took coherent shape, have dealt with the role which drug-smuggling, arms-smuggling, aggressive war, regime-changes, and other crimes have played in this strangest of all Empires, tied together only by an American ruling-class which exploits its fellow-citizens as much as it betrays friends and foes throughout the world.

Here is the confession of Captain Ahab from Melville's great novel, *Moby Dick*:

All my means are sane, my motive and my object mad.

This quote from Captain Ahab inspired Chapter 348, *My Ends are Mad and Now I'm Also Stupid*, which I originally published as an essay on <https://loydfueston.com/> in 2006/12 near the dawn of my blogging activities. The title tells the truth about the American leaders and their lapdogs in Europe and other parts of the world.

It's perhaps still worse than that. The leaders, and citizens, of the Western countries are not only mad and stupid but also shallow. From inside their heads, they view reality as modern children view a movie about worlds of which they have no experience or knowledge, including the world in which their parents grew up only a few decades ago; that is, their minds glide over reality as do their hearts and hands. This is why so many find it easy to break their deepest relationships, such as those with family-members and others we saw often when growing up.

Something had gone terribly wrong in the West during and after the Enlightenment and that wrongness had ripened in Puritan New England and a few other states in which Calvinism had some major influence on feelings and thoughts and modes of behavior: New York, New Jersey, Delaware, and even Pennsylvania. The Calvinists weren't different from other Christians in this matter, only more advanced and seemingly more willing to or more capable of separating their internal models of reality from the world outside of them. Nowadays, even sacramental Christians such as Catholics and Orthodox—at least those in the West—have similar strangeness in their relationships with Creation and, thus, with its Creator.

The Americans of past generations and of this generation should have paid attention to Nathaniel Hawthorne and other insightful thinkers who saw the same problems in the New England Puritan moral character as he. Alexis de Tocqueville even predicted that Americans would form a sort of society never before seen, a benevolent totalitarianism in our modern terms, because of their ability to avoid seeing even the bluntest of facts if those facts conflicted with their existing view of things; Solzhenitsyn called Americans a “uniquely evil people” because of his realization of the same when he learned of the large-scale round-ups of civilian refugees (3.5 million or so) by the American and British armies in Europe during 1946-7, which refugees were turned over to the Soviets to be used as slave labor.

The more recent American problems have developed because of serious problems in our ruling class, children of privilege and students—if that be

the right word—of the Ivy Leagues. Writing of the problems in American human being rather than of the resulting crimes and suicidal programs, these were the problems Hawthorne saw in his own Puritan ancestors and also in the Americans of his day whether they retained the Calvinist faith or had become some sort of Deist or even a variety of atheist. As our goals and motives have become even more insane than those of Captain Ahab, we have held them all the more to be holy and righteous. Even attacks on American soldiers who are part of a criminal invasion are taken as signs of evil on the part of the residents of the victim country; we dig even deeper into our own minds as we, or our soldiers or our leaders or our corporations, come under verbal or physical attack in countries where we have no business being since we weren't invited and those countries were no danger to us. Let me try again: the fact those countries resist our invasions are proof of their evil. Or so goes the story.

Oh, well, what is to be done with a people who are so decent in their own communities and so ignorant of history and so willfully selective of the knowledge they take in of ongoing events?

That erratically great Founding Father John Adams tried to warn his fellow-citizens that a ruling class would inevitably develop as men who had gained great wealth and power—by fair means or foul—would do their best to pass that wealth and power on to their descendants. As President and as a private citizen, Adams tried to get his fellow-citizens to support the development of an explicit aristocracy to establish peace and order by drawing those powerholders and wealth-holders into the open where they would receive public honor in return for constraints on their behavior. Adams knew strange things would happen if those powerholders and wealth-holders remained in the shadows. That background 'conspiracy' described as "They go to the same schools, marry each other's sisters, etc." would operate in either case, but—in modern terms—if they remained in the shadows, there would also be a variety of crimes by means of which members of the ruling class protect what is theirs or increase what is theirs in ways that hide their very existence as a class.

So it is that the peoples of Vietnam and Iraq and Pakistan and so many other countries including the United States itself are seen as existing only to provide wealth and power to the leaders of the United States, who have developed a genteel and coldblooded version of the hotblooded greed and lust of the many conquering barbarians of history. So it was that the rational exploitation of the peoples of Africa and China and Hawaii was seen as only

the sane means to the insane ends of the ancestors of the dominant group of our leaders, the so-called blue-bloods and their proteges. ‘Sane’ is of course defined in terms of the rational calculation of rates-of-return.

The interested reader might wish to read two earlier chapters:

- Chapter 685, *Dualism: JFK and the Quite Speakable and Quite Historical*, where I discuss these aspects of the American ruling class (power-elite or whatever) in a little more detail.
- Chapter 534, *It’s Not Hypocrisy, It’s Brainwashing Deeper than Orwell Foresaw*.

Again, the American people have never called their allegedly great families to account for their activities and have learned to consider some truly brutal men as being genial and friendly because of their gentle public personas—there seem to be few Americans who can detect the presence of brutality verging on outright evil. Some perspective from a detached viewpoint can be found in the articles:

- *Opium Wars* at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opium\\_Wars](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opium_Wars), and
- *First Opium War* at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First\\_Opium\\_War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Opium_War).

Americans were the beneficiaries of the first war more than the later two; in fact, some great New England families (and benefactors of some great hospitals and public libraries in New England and New York) were smuggling opium in Asia even before the American Revolution, before the British navy pulverized several Chinese port cities in response to the Chinese request (addressed to that alleged Christian, Queen Victoria) to stop the opium-smuggling operations run by British (and some American) companies and getting their opium from what were essentially slave-plantations in India—before and after the British had outlawed the West African slave-trade.

Alasdair MacIntyre wrote a powerfully insightful book about human beings titled *Dependent Rational Animals* [91]. We Americans have withdrawn inside our heads for our understanding of reality rather than learning from tradition or learning by responding to that reality or learning

by studying the experiences of those who have so responded or by learning from those who have analyzed what we know about reality to make some sense of it all. During that retreat into our necessarily inadequate selves, we of the West—with Americans leading the way and New Englanders leading their fellow-Americans from the shadows—have separated our minds from our dependency upon each other and upon any God we might pretend to worship. (That dependency takes various forms: social, economic, moral, etc.) We Americans, individuals in many cases but certainly we as a people, have learned to coldbloodedly treat others (and increasingly each other) as means to our ends. Even Americans who aren't exploitive as individuals are ready always to justify, or at least tacitly accept, exploitation of foreigners by the leaders of our societies, including well-meaning but self-serving and stupid forms of charity. Now those leaders need more than they are currently stealing from Asians and South Americans and all others; they are turning to more brutal exploitation of their fellow-citizens than we've seen since at least the *Gilded Age*—see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilded\\_Age](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilded_Age) for a short discussion of the United States during the period of—approximately—1870 to 1900.

But who needs Christ or His Father or their Spirit? We can do it all on our own. Look at all we've accomplished. We've established a New World Order, extending it even to such backward nations as Iraq and Libya and Pakistan. If only we'd not lost our godly nerves and had dropped more napalm and more explosives, we could have extended our benevolent rule to Vietnam and North Korea and to more of Latin America. If killing 2 million Vietnamese and another 2 million Cambodians, 2 million Koreans in the north, hadn't worked... We should have killed 4 million of each of those peoples. Then they would have learned to love us and appreciate us for our moral superiority.

We're working our divinized American will, even as I write, in so many countries and have even turned inward toward the regions of the United States and Europe where human being isn't so subservient to the American ruling class as it is in, for example, the city and suburbs of New York.

This is a summary of my view of these matters:

Human being in the West lives inside of its individual and communal minds. The outside world is an annoyance at best, a Satanic Realm, a Flyover Realm, or a chaos needing to be organized to the purposes of Wall St and that swamp on the Potomac

River. Choose a description from the viewpoint of your favorite ideologue, whether Gramscian snowflake or Free-Marketer destroying human communities to enrich humans of the right sort or drug-smuggling/arms-smuggling National Security gangster. The world, the mere world, doesn't correspond to the truth inside their heads. The world must be either reshaped to be true or destroyed.

# 550 Not a Deep-State But a Chaotic Battleground Where Barbarians Fight for Power and Wealth

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2502>. It was finished and uploaded on 2018/04/23.]

I'll not write too much about this issue I've addressed before, but I'll go further than before on one detail: the United States government is barely such a thing and perhaps it's leading us into a fragmentation which might lead to multiple governments of some sort or a civil war or some periods of each. To be sure, the government in Washington has pieces of a government such as the Social Security Administration and the various management agencies for national parks and forests. It has a military which seems to be more corrupt in some ways than ever before, even in the 1950s and early 1960s when some of the top officers, including some on the Joint Chiefs of Staff, seemed nearly treasonous at times—see *Operation Northwoods* at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation\\_Northwoods](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Northwoods). See also Chapter 685, *Dualism: JFK and the Quite Speakable and Quite Historical* which is a sort-of review of *JFK and the Unspeakable: Why He Died and Why It Matters* [30] by James W. Douglass. I state my objections to the overall understanding that Douglass has of these events—basically, he seems to see brutal fights for power and wealth in terms of some sort of struggle between Good and Bad; I do think there are evil men involved in these fights but sometimes those evil men might be on, say, the side of the American Republic (such as it is) and its citizens.

Unfortunately, the various gangs in the United States, centered in Washington or New York (Wall St) or the major corporate headquarter buildings have recently combined, mostly after the fact, when one gang or another has carried out some major crime—the murders of public figures, the CIA-bombing of the plane over Lockerbie (the CIA was protecting its drug-smuggling operations which seem to play a major role in keeping the bankrupt American economy supplied with enough cash to sort-of remain on its feet), the bombing of the Federal building in Oklahoma City (for what purpose??), and—of course—9/11 which was, in a limited sense, the largest and most murderous bank robbery in history.

A lot of evil men have gained power or increased their power during the slide of the West into moral and cognitive disorder. A lot of heirs to fortunes they could never rebuild or even maintain have become pirates of a sort. I don't see a well-organized army of evil men anywhere in particular but rather individual gangs of banker-thugs, politician-thugs, spook-thugs, manufacturing-thugs, police-thugs, and so on. Men of low moral character drive out men of better moral character during periods such as the one the United States entered following World War II when it was the only powerful and wealthy country standing; the other countries of the West were subjugated to American order or voluntarily took on that early version of a New World Order pushed by the globalists at the Sullivan & Cromwell law-firm (especially the Dulles brothers) and at investment firms such as Brown Brothers & Harriman (the usual suspects plus the Walkers and Bushes and all in tight cahoots with the Rockefellers); they all wished to share in the power and wealth as the US began trying to establish hegemony even as other countries began to recover from the disasters of colonialistic exploitation or the Great European War, Parts I and II. We Americans fell into the greater sin of antinomianism— see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antinomianism>, a sin on display with the often openly expressed belief that we don't have to honor our agreements or international law and can bomb freely because we are the morally upright; others have to be punished brutally for committing small-scale versions of our great sins and crimes—if they even really commit those acts.

It's all a mess, largely an American-made mess, and the current revelation that, for example, Republican-thugs might ally themselves with Democratic-thugs against members of their own party is hardly surprising in light of history. Nor is it surprising when Douglass reveals notes from J Edgar Hoover stating that the CIA had infiltrated the FBI and placed men

loyal to the Dulles gang of thugs in key positions of the FBI.

The regions of centralized power in the West are disordered and we shouldn't engage in literalistic fantasies of well-organized evil striking out into the region of light. Satan is MIA but there are plenty of men and women who are not only greedy and excessively ambitious but also desperate as their dreams of hegemony are endangered by various people and peoples who won't let us win every game on the playground.

We also shouldn't engage in literalistic fantasies that simple reforms will bring the United States or the entire West back to a state of moral and political and cultural order. It would be good to replace most of our ruling class criminals with good men or good women but the decayed state of Western Civilization would continue to encourage men with the "mentality of gangsters" to try to enter the centers of power (money-center banks and large private corporations) as they've done in the United States since its founding. ("Mentality of gangsters" is Lord Acton's phrase used during his analyses of power and corruption.)

They've entered but not because they grew particularly powerful compared to what seemed to have been more competent grandfathers. Those grandfathers included the so-called Robber Barons, drug-smugglers, and slave-traders as well as the American Protestant missionaries become imperialists against the good of those they were "saving". There was a lot of overlap of these groups and, it must be said, nearly all of those criminals came from the 'blue-blood' Calvinist families of the American states of the Northeast.

These criminals didn't destroy the United States; they were merely parasites who were like termites chewing away at a decaying foundation which wasn't even subject to inspections and maintenance. It was the 'good guys' such as Luther and Calvin, numerous popes and cardinals, Voltaire and Emerson, Lincoln and the Roosevelts and numerous British political reformers who cared not for the foundations or even drilled holes—or worse—in those foundations. Notice the lack of 'modernist' musicians and novelists and poets on the list. I'll let the reader think about the common fates of the protagonists Madame Bovary and Anna Karenina though the first was the character of Gustave Flaubert, a nihilistic sort of existentialist and a great sinner, while the second was a character of Leo Tolstoy, an unbalanced but deeply spiritual man of doubtful Christian orthodoxy, by even the loose definitions of modern times.

I think that not only the work of scientists and engineers, but also those

of musicians and writers of literary fiction and history, were constrained by rules which reflect deep respect for certain forms of honesty—largely in the sense of honoring empirical reality. Many others were not so constrained, including:

- many philosophers outside of those working in technical fields such as science, and certainly those philosophers masquerading as literary critics,
- most theologians,
- politicians and businessmen and most academic economists, and
- teachers and clergymen and those used-to-be important Americans—local journalists.

Most of the remaining order in the West is of a cultural sort, though there are few—if any—worthwhile novelists, believers or non-believers, among those published in the past two or three decades. Yet, historians have re-turned to narratives often as well-written and as engaging as the great novels. Musicians can produce music which is as disciplined as that of composers in the Classical or Romantic Eras and yet has a modern feel and draws upon more recent understandings of the possibilities of music.

On the whole, we're in trouble. I could write with tongue only partly in cheek: we're doomed. But there are enough good signs to lead me to believe we can rescue the West, bringing it back to health in only a couple generations or so, but we have to first find ourselves a new class of leaders: more knowledgeable and more respectful of empirical knowledge, more intelligent, less sociopathic, and more respectful of the traditions of the various peoples of the West.

# 551 The Real Reason for the Insane Actions of American Leaders?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2505>. It was finished and uploaded on 2018/04/26.]

The problems of the United States, and of some other countries in the West—maybe most, are deeper than are usually acknowledged. I'll start by claiming, "Crimea is more truly part of the Russian realm than California is part of the Anglo-American realm."

American leaders are ignorant, functionally stupid, and maybe innately stupid; they are the enforcers of a system which doesn't allow for important reforms inside the US if those reforms don't match the stated goals and beliefs of the mobs organized by those leaders, call the members of those mobs social justice warriors or cultural-Marxists if you will. Some of the American leaders may agree with those strange goals and irrational beliefs, but nearly all of them are dependent upon that mob to keep better men and women out of office and to move forward with projects maybe intended to consolidate the Empire and its power-center in Washington. In fact, we become less of a coherent country each month as the pace of processes of diversification and imposition of alleged social-justice tear the country apart and increase the distrust which is incompatible with such programs as national medical insurance or welfare or the other traditional programs pushed by most big-government advocates in the 20th century.

These American leaders are struggling to hold onto power though they can't deal with the domestic problems the United States faces, indeed the entire West is in trouble for similar reasons; the centrifugal forces in Scot-

land and Catalonia and northern Italy are not identical to those in California (and maybe other regions or states of the US) but they are quite similar. I don't think we're in some sort of "Small is Beautiful" phase of history—human communities of loose sorts will continue to grow from more tightly knit local communities—call it distributivism or (anti-?)federalism if you will. The proximate, though certainly not ultimate, cause of the deep fragmentation of the Western countries and regions is the incompetence of their leaders as I discussed in Chapter 550, *Not a Deep-State But a Chaotic Battleground Where Barbarians Fight for Power and Wealth*. For those who wish to get a still different perspective on this issue, see Chapter 531, *Why Does a Developed Country (the United States) Have a Gangster/Warlord Ruling Elite More Suited to a Rising Barbarian Country?*.

The underlying causes of our immediate domestic problems seem to be three from a certain perspective:

- The United States and the United Kingdom (other Western countries—???) operate under a system which I think to be, at least, something like rentier capitalism: see Michael Hudson's explanation in *>Rentier Capitalism—Veblen in the 21st century* at <http://michael-hudson.com/2016/10/rentier-capitalism-veblen-in-the-21st-century/>. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael\\_Hudson\\_\(economist\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Hudson_(economist)) for some information on *Michael Hudson*.
- The established or existing middle-class (loosely defined), which is the most important element in nearly all modern societies, has a decreasing stake in a game which seems to benefit mostly the rentiers and some clients, often imported, of public and private social agencies as well as a mob of sorts made up of some quite unimpressive members of a pseudo-progressive intelligentsia.
- There seems to be fewer possibilities each year for the children of the existing middle-class to find their own places in the middle-class or for the less prosperous workers to join the middle-class.

The second and third items in the above list can be subsumed under the first, but I find it easier to understand these ideas if they are unbundled and I assume this is true of others. If nothing else, this sort of constant

re-packaging of ideas dealing with complex aspects of reality will act against the mind's hardening into literalistic attitudes.

We have the spectacle of a ruling class with such limited understanding of their own particular problems, a still more limited understanding of the problems of others and of greater communities, as to be committing self-serving acts of a suicidal type, as if they were teenagers slashing themselves or taking handfuls of pills to “show the world I can be a responsible and freestanding adult. You should be listening to me and doing what I tell you to do.”

In fact, the ruling class of the United States and probably those of other Western countries understand something isn't working but they aggravate the problem of the incoherence in each Western country and the West as a whole, by waging war upon major blocks of their own citizens (the “deplorables”) and by bringing more alien peoples into the failing countries of the West.

Maybe we can suggest to these rulers that they look up *Asabiyyah* at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asabiyyah>. *Asabiyyah* is an Arabic word originally meaning:

social solidarity with an emphasis on unity, group consciousness and sense of shared purpose, and social cohesion.

The great Tunisian philosopher and historian *Ibn Khaldun*, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ibn\\_Khaldun](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ibn_Khaldun), abstracted and refined it to mean:

the fundamental bond of human society and the basic motive force of history.

We Americans have no such thing as *asabiyyah*. Our leaders, like unto those in Orwell's *1984*, are trying to create something like loyalty of the citizens toward themselves and the increasingly criminal American government by fighting wars against alleged enemies overseas. Matters are, of course, more complex and more complicated than this—no doubt confusing our leaders still more—but those who wish to understand need to work things out layer by layer before trying to produce a more global understanding; trying to jump to simple understandings will lead to literalism, a hardening of the brain-arteries.

The criminality of the American government is mostly restricted to gangs composed of small percentages of civil servants and appointees and

military personnel, aided and abetted by our elected representatives and external ‘forces’ on Wall St and Madison Ave and in various corporations. And public intellectuals and Hollywood filmmakers and others. A lot of people but only a small percentage of the American population. I don’t have a feel for matters in the UK, France, etc. Of course, the system works so that morally well-ordered human beings might be helping advance the causes of the criminals among us but currently concentrated in the American centers of power; for example, retired CIA officers have made it clear the criminals in that agency are a small percentage of the total workforce and likely a small percentage of covert operatives—most covert activities are criminal at some level, but sane national leaders know how to play games with ‘normal’ ways of stealing each other’s secrets and with the results of being caught.

In any case, these criminals apparently have no feel for their own country. They have no strong bonds to the country they rule—not even the military men, so far as we can tell. They are struggling to control what they don’t understand and apparently hold the strange (Roveian?) idea that they can simply move forward and do something to impose their will on the world. They don’t have to gather their breath and then learn a little about the country they rule or about Syria or the African countries subject to a stealth invasion by the American military. These leaders who know that will can overcome mind and muscle alike can just make decisions and take strong actions—for example, to kill more innocent people in Syria and to free the criminal covert operatives in the CIA to smuggle more drugs and weapons and to create more terrorist groups which seem to have ideas about reality very similar to those of the Bushes and the Clintons and Barack Obama and all those wonderful folk who’ve been in charge of the FBI and CIA in recent years.

# 552 The Future of the West Can Now Be Seen, If Only Obscurely Through a Dark Glass

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2510>. It was finished and uploaded on 2018/05/08.]

Jose Ortega y Gasset, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jose\\_Ortega\\_y\\_Gasset](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jose_Ortega_y_Gasset),

was a Spanish philosopher, and essayist. He worked during the first half of the 20th century, while Spain oscillated between monarchy, republicanism and republicanism infiltrated by communist agents, and dictatorship of a stabilizing and fascist-tinged sort. His philosophy has been characterized as a “philosophy of life” that “comprised a long-hidden beginning in a pragmatist metaphysics inspired by William James, and with a general method from a realist phenomenology imitating Edmund Husserl, which served both his proto-existentialism (prior to Martin Heidegger’s) and his realist historicism, which has been compared to both Wilhelm Dilthey and Benedetto Croce.”

Despite all that, he makes a lot of sense and is worth reading. Warning: he was one of the most insightful of the ‘pessimistic’ thinkers of the modern West. He also produced powerful and pithy and insightful quotes, such as:

We live at a time when man believes himself fabulously capable of creation, but he does not know what to create.

[Jose Ortega y Gasset, from *Brainy Quotes* at [https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/jose\\_ortega\\_y\\_gasset.](https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/jose_ortega_y_gasset.)]

This parallels one of the major themes in my writing: if Christian Civilization—the entirety of the Body of Christ—is to survive, we have to rebuild an understanding of God’s Creation in light of our small stock of revealed truths which are mostly those of the ancient Creeds or of very carefully enriched readings of the Bible from which those Creeds were drawn. This new understanding must also reflect modern knowledge which is not some ‘science’ opposed to humanism and revelation but rather knowledge of the effects of God in His Creation.

We certainly have no such understanding—outside of my writings. Otherwise, the best Christian understandings are to be found in the more open-minded Latin-Rite Catholic communities but they haven’t reacted so well as they need to do to new knowledge of human nature and what that tells us about the reality of human communities, human individual and communal morality, the possibilities of Hell (dubious in my opinion) and the world of the resurrected (the recognition of human nature along with a belief in Christian salvation seems to force something like a complex Purgatory), and so on.

To be sure, some (maybe) Christians—most effectively strong-faithed Baptists and Mormons, can bracket their beliefs to hold two worldviews: one covering their religious beliefs and one covering modern empirical knowledge. There’s much more to be said about this, especially about the ability of some religious believers to accept technology fully while not even consciously acknowledging the underlying understandings of Creation. All of this is beyond the scope of this essay and also not of the greatest interest to me. So, anyway. . .

Mainstream Christians are more than a bit confused because of their cowardly and weak-faithed intellectuals and other leaders who have adopted more and more of modern empirical understandings while trying to fit it all into an inherited worldview which was and is no more than a transitional worldview out of well-reasoned but excessively idealistic Medieval worldviews into. . . Well, we never made the transition because we never had the courage, or perhaps the good-quality thinkers, who could complete the transition by producing understandings capable of integrating quantum mechanics and evolutionary theory and modern historical knowledge into a Biblical framework. (There is much else which was and is revolutionary

in modern empirical knowledge, especially the general theory of relativity which is the first truly coherent definition and understanding of a physical universe; as such it opens many other doors being ignored by Christian thinkers.)

Without a good Christian understanding of Creation, there is no such thing as a Christian Civilization, there is no such thing as a Pilgrim Body of Christ. That brings me back to Ortega's quote: we of the West have (now diminishing) powers to create in some sense but we don't know what to create and thus we fail to create, considering our deformations of human being and other parts of Creation to be 'creative—rah, rah!'. If we were still a Christian people living in a Christian civilization, we would not know exactly what to create and there would be a healthy diversity of opinion about the set of possibilities, but we would be a more truly creative people—a people whose creative impulses and activities would make sense in terms of a coherent understanding of Creation.

Barbarism is the absence of standards to which appeal can be made. [Jose Ortega y Gasset, from *Brainy Quotes* at [https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/jose\\_ortega\\_y\\_gasset.](https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/jose_ortega_y_gasset.)]

We Americans, and others under our influence, are barbarians inhabiting the cities of a great civilization which is as if abandoned by those who truly knew and loved it, those who could maintain and protect it, those who had some chance of fixing it if things were broken, those who would defend it if under attack from inside or outside. We are left, the barbarians who are both childlike and childish and not ourselves capable of distinguishing between those two conflicting states nor the many others which provide us with many a cognitive and emotional roller-coaster ride.

We are a vulgar, badly-behaved people—good-hearted children who were never taught the basics of good manners and respect for others. We are entranced by trashy, degrading entertainment; even that which is not degrading and destructive of well-ordered human being is stupid—we, in fact, glorify ignorance and stupidity in choosing our leaders, in our jokes, and in the ways we mis-educate children both those having intellectual talents and those needing basic education to get on with their truer callings. As the West rose, sophistication grew and the well-ordered music of the Cathedral and monastery expanded also into the (truly) secular music written by the likes of Palestrina and Byrd and Bach and Hayden and Mozart and so on;

vulgarity of a different and richer sort was found in the truly wonderful folk music; we abandoned also that music since it tied us to traditions which would have constrained us.

On our way down, we have rap music and flat-toned singers moaning on about their lives of mass-market coffee shops and love affairs neither tragic nor uplifting.

On our way down, we have people texting each other at the same restaurant table or while walking down the street as part of a group.

On our way down, we have leaders—including those of Christian groups—who don't even pretend to care for or even care about the needs and desires of those for whom they bear responsibility.

Under the species of Syndicalism and Fascism there appears for the first time in Europe a type of man who does not want to give reasons or to be right, but simply shows himself resolved to impose his opinions. [Jose Ortega y Gasset, from *Brainy Quotes* at [https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/jose\\_ortega\\_y\\_gasset](https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/jose_ortega_y_gasset).]

Torn from communal structures—do we not have communal human being as well as our individual human being?, modern men find themselves missing much of their minds and hearts. Even hands don't do so well since we are creatures of habit and most habits of our ancestors were customary—communal at some level, perhaps village and perhaps continent-spanning empire.

Torn away from that communal part of our human being, we sometimes take a while to realize how badly damaged we are. We might feel some pain, even great pain, or we might live in the way of what some might call “worldly joy.” One way of relieving that pain, however temporarily, is to form opinions or to take on opinions from some talented demagogue. Most of our truth, most of our thinking, most of our healthy moral habits, come from the parts of us—our communal human being, which has been torn away. Any sense of loss is covered by shouting or shoving or shooting where we once would have thought or felt or acted in accord with the traditions of our ancestors. Those traditions would not have been perfect and often not even good, but they would have been some sort of guidance from what had helped a people to survive and to maintain their human being, individual and communal, in some sort of healthy form.

We can't directly undo the complex of problems Ortega referred to in the above quotes. We can't undo them because they are caused by a multitude of morally irresponsible decisions over recent centuries. We tore our own communal being away by turning away from our own civilization, by choosing flashy and degrading entertainment over the music and art and literature which takes an effort to understand and appreciate; we are willing to put in the effort to learn how to play a decent game of tennis but not to learn how to listen properly to either a symphony by Howard Hansen or to the earthy folk songs collected in a large number of volumes by Smithsonian. That is only a pointer to a number of ways in which we destroyed the Christian Civilization which was to be found, first and foremost, in the communal being of its members, in their thoughts and feelings and behaviors.

The future of the West is barbarism, at least for Europe and most of the Americas. The future of Australia and New Zealand might be found in a fortune cookie, so to speak; thus can they perhaps avoid that collapse into barbarism—by leaving the West.



# 553 Are the Gangsters Keeping Each Other Under Some Control?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2517>. It was finished and uploaded on 2018/05/18.]

The West has broken down into a gangster-land of sorts, with the realms of centralized governments and money-center banking collapsing into moral chaos. I've written often about this. But...

If the West is so disordered, morally and politically and so on—'morally' actually covers all human social possibilities, why don't the gangsters just take over in an open way?

Which gangsters?

The so-called Mafia is a cutthroat grouping of gangs and its history is full of wars between, say, the Genovese crime family and the Lucchese crime family. The same seems true of the various political and banking and national security gangs. The Bushes and the Clintons, the bankers at Goldman Sachs and at JP Morgan, the professional killers in the CIA (supposedly called the "jackals") and the corrupted field-agents of the DEA, cooperate but also compete. They know that they can't trust each other. They're all ruthless and have limited senses of integrity and honor. (Remember that the vast majority of human beings in those governmental and banking institutions are honest and hardworking, but remember also that the whole system forms a screen and even fortified wall behind which can operate corrupt politicians and bankers and bureaucrats and also true out-right gangsters.)

So, I suspect they have created—for how long?—a gangster ecosystem of sorts in which they keep each other under control.

I also suspect it's unstable partly because of internal forces and partly because it all stands on those protection and money laundering schemes which are the US government's debt selling operations (bonds, bills and so on) and that scheme, maintained in various ways by the US military and other government instruments of power has overgrown its criminal capacities—the world can't take more US government debt and the American taxpayers are getting suspicious (finally!) that their needs and the needs of the country as a whole aren't a high priority in Washington.

We'll step back about seven centuries to see how bad things became during a period which followed a period of great prosperity. The end of that first period (the "High Middle Ages") was showing huge wealth inequalities and the inevitable turn to methods of wealth acquisition and wealth maintenance which killed economic growth and failed to provide jobs for a growing population in Western Christian Europe circa 1300. One of the most dynamic of pre-modern economies, that of the High Middle Ages, had become a rentier economy which was failing to produce jobs, failing to increase wealth.

The gangster systems which were the aristocracies of Western, Christian Europe became increasingly unstable over the 14th century—see Barbara Tuchman's *A Distant Mirror* [135]. (The aristocrat-gangsters were tightly constrained until the per capita wealth began decreasing, the constraints were provided by various systems of aristocratic honor, of Christian morality, of competition between ecclesiastical and proto-nationalist power, and so on. They, including bishops and abbots, broke the moral order in a desperate attempt to maintain their high position in the European scheme of things.)

Let me repeat from a slightly different angle, some facts and claims I've raised and discussed before. The issue is very important and we may not have much time to prepare for the collapse of the West. Few knowledgeable and honorable analysts seem to think that collapse is more than—at the very most—two decades away. It might happen any month because the modern governmental and banking gangsters are rolling the dice to gain control over all human wealth before Russia, China, India, Iran, and other countries form, as a matter of course, a multi-polar world.

I repeat: by the end of the 13th century, which was the end of the High Middle Ages, the living conditions in Western, Christian Europe

were deteriorating rapidly—wealth had been concentrated in the hands of a small fraction of the population and they had settled in as landlords, rentiers. No proper economic risks were being taken, no wealth was being created, no jobs were being created. Few alms were available for the increasing mobs of beggars. (See Michael Hudson’s essay, *Rentier Capitalism—Veblen in the 21st century* at <http://michael-hudson.com/2016/10/rentier-capitalism-veblen-in-the-21st-century/> for an explanation of our own modern rentier economy and then use Tuchman’s book *A Distant Mirror* [135] as a good historical narrative giving concrete details of a similar period.)

Over the course of that 14th century, the population of Western, Christian Europe dropped by as much as half. By the middle of the century, the labor shortage was helping the “common folk” to regain a decent standard of living, (almost certainly) a better life-expectancy, and some measure of political power or at least consideration for their needs. Also, by the middle of the 14th century an army of Swiss peasants and bourgeois and even rich men of the local and productive variety had defeated an army of aristocratic knights—in full armor and on horseback—and various sorts of mercenary soldiers; the knights were Austrians and French and maybe others; the Swiss army was centered on pike-men carrying true combat versions of the decorative weapons carried by the Pope’s Swiss guard—nasty weapons which could behead a fully-armored knight or his horse as they charged a line of Swiss soldiers. In that same time-frame, a Portuguese army had also beaten an army of Spanish knights and their mercenaries. Note that Switzerland became independent of Austria and remains so; Portugal became independent of Spain and remains so. The secret to liberty: don’t let rentiers or other parasitical humans work their ways into your communities, local or national. We Americans failed to pay attention to the gangsters coming to dominance in our power-elites and history offers little encouragement that such creatures can be purged in any reasonable short-term.

By the end of the 14th century, the powerful and the wealthy had turned on each other to gain thrones (for one example, see *War of the Roses* at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wars\\_of\\_the\\_Roses](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wars_of_the_Roses) circa 1455 to 1487) or simply a greater share of a shrinking amount of wealth available to the aristocrats and other rentiers. (Not all aristocrats in history have been rentiers but even many families originally productive aristocrats decayed into such when they lost the will to earn their way by, for example helping their farmers to achieve higher productivity through the building of mills

and other waterworks or by other investments of money or management time or...)

The West's current stability is questionable to say the least. It will likely collapse soon into a chaotic state complete with poverty and internal violence. Our desperate power-holders and wealth-holders are at their end as extorters of cash flows—that is, the Western governments, including their militaries and schools and medical systems, as well as Western banks private and public and quasi-public, will not be able to live off government debt instruments which no one believes could ever be paid off. Those bonds, especially those of the US government, have sold well because they were safe-havens for organized crime and tax-scofflaws and were the only game in town for those countries and banks and industries which need large amounts of American dollars to buy oil or to just move goods across borders. One of the marketing campaigns of the American government for their debt instruments was: buy our bonds and use our dollars or we'll destroy your countries, kill many of you including your children, and leave you with a miserable future.

Maybe we'll just be getting what we deserve for supporting these American powerholders and wealthholders with the "mentality of gangsters." (See Chapter 690. *A Plea From Syrian Christians—Will Any Western Christians Respond?* and Chapter , *Not a Deep-State But a Chaotic Battleground Where Barbarians Fight for Power and Wealth.*)

When that collapse comes, we in the West and many others might find out what Hell is like. We might find out what, at least to an extent, our leaders did to the peoples of Vietnam, North Korea (and South Korea to some extent), Iraq, Pakistan (probably to make the border with Afghanistan safe for the heroin factories of CIA allies), Libya, Egypt, Chile, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Brazil, etc. We should remember that the US military has occupied a number of small bases in Africa and no one is telling the American peoples what that is about. I would guess it's simply part of the operating principles of the gangsters running the US government: If it doesn't work, then keep on doing it but make sure you destroy even more infrastructure and kill more human beings. People of Africa: Beware for here comes the American behemoth, not particularly smart but an awfully powerful beast.

But, as I said, the gangsters are keeping each other under control, in some ways, for now. We can only pray we won't see a Napoleon or Genghis Khan or Lenin before the US begins to dissolve into more coherent entities which can defend their local interests against centralized power.

# 554 Do Americans Have What It Takes to be a Self-governing People?—Part 1.

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2547>. It was finished and uploaded on 2018/09/03.]

Political scientists and political philosophers seem to be fundamentally irrational by way of an excessive faith in rationalistic *a priori*'s; in particular, they are almost willfully dense, on the topic of citizenry and have been since the failure, unlike physics and even mathematics, to reconsider their metaphysical assumptions by way of empirical tests—a single case or event in the real-world which contradicts an alleged absolute truth actually denies that 'truth'. The greatest of political thinkers and the ones who smell of shallowness alike assume they can settle the nature of human nature by thinking about men based on ideal thoughts and some vague body of anecdotal evidence a particular thinker has about how capable men are of participating in the government of a village or a large town or a city or a nation-state or even the strangest and most incoherent empire in history (the US).

The Greeks and other ancient thinkers as well as various thinkers from then to modern times left us radically incomplete catalogs and understandings of human political possibilities but those catalogs clearly pointed to these fundamental questions such as: "Is the common man capable of understanding the real situation in radically different human communities such as those of tribal Iraq with its nationalistic leaders, such as Saddam Hussein, trying to form a nation?" Even some with serious historical knowledge don't seem to realize Saddam wasn't in the position of a tyrant trying to

suppress a ‘liberal’ society but rather in the position of a William the Conqueror or a Henry II trying to subordinate his fellow-warlords to the needs of a nation. (And we shouldn’t assume that the movement toward modern nations was an unqualified good, but it is the movement Europe and China and India—less successfully—went through and many countries have gone through or are still going through in the so-called *Modern Age*.)

So, we have a useful ancient catalog of political structures for the purposes of setting up my discussion: monarchy, oligarchy, tyranny, democracy. We could add my favorite as the best possible, if implemented properly: a federated republic—biased toward the assumption of locally concentrated power, authority, and wealth. In any case, I won’t do the analysis here but I suggest the reader should consider these possibilities in light of what they assume about the capabilities of perhaps a specific population of ordinary citizens who might be literate or not, might have access to knowledge adequate for the decisions to be made by responsible voters or might not, and so on. I’ll leave it to the reader to think through the possible capabilities of, perhaps, a well-educated elite which members are formed to high standards of honor—monarchy or aristocracy? That reader might also wish to consider if the West, especially the US, has slipped rapidly through a sort-of populist democracy into the rarely-admired category of oligarchy? But, if that last is true, we don’t really know if the populist politicians might yet use their partial but significant control over the “mob” and the political process to subordinate the bankers.

Let me continue my cartoonish, but serious, analysis of the understanding of human nature in political science and political philosophy. My term ‘cartoonish’ is actually my refusal to take seriously scholarly analyses which analyze the history of beliefs but pay no attention to the poor grounding of many of those beliefs, and the underlying lines of thought, given what is now known about reality. As one example of a great problem, we now know that man arose inside of nature and whatever capacity he has to rise above ‘mere’ nature comes from his evolutionary history, isn’t found in equal measure in all human beings, and continues to evolve and develop. When the first “anatomically modern human beings” arose, say about 500,000 years ago or less, that line of creatures co-evolved with his tools and his communities—all that is studied by those who study human being. Those creatures were not simply early versions of modern men who hadn’t quite learned how to mine and refine metals and make metal tools, who hadn’t gotten around yet to writing books on geometry and aesthetics; those creatures weren’t

even capable of conceiving of the technology and art and social forms of small villages and wouldn't have been able to maintain simple huts or to use Neolithic (New Stone Age) tools if they'd been given to those early humans. Iron Age humans, likely including most modern sub-Saharan if they even have reached that level, would not be capable of using modern chemical plants built for them by friendly Europeans and would likely hurt themselves if left to do so; similarly, if they were living in an advanced civilization, such as the West, they wouldn't be able to deal with the abstractions of the appropriate legal or political systems and would likely act as if they were in a tribal society where justice is a matter of battles and payments between family groups or villages. This latter statement is a pretty good description of what is happening in the United States and much of Europe as the percentages of third-world peoples rise and as they and the Africans immorally and mistakenly transported to a human realm beyond the capacity of many and apparently far beyond the capacity of a good percentage of them struggle to cope with their political and social environments.

With that as a sketchy background, "cartoonish" has become "sketchy", I'll move on.

The strongest tradition of political thought in the West is what might be called 'liberalism', in a general sense.

Some liberals assert that individual human beings are made for self-governance (or not or whatever based on their 'intuitions'). This is true of modern collectivist liberals and libertarians and of any modern conservatives who advance far enough to even pretend to think. Neo-conservatives and various sorts of bomb-em liberals claim that as their goal, but we don't see many prosperous democracies, or even any countries with much in the way of order, among those which have been the beneficiaries of the wars of Neocons or the Bush Republicans or the Clinton Democrats or the Obama whatevers. But among the various sorts of liberalism favored by modern men, there are some rather optimistic versions that preach that the general citizenry could and would respond with some energy and moral responsibility to freer flows of knowledge of various sorts including at least some knowledge of history at the global level and greater knowledge of history at the local level. These liberalisms include classical liberalism and its various libertarian children, revolutionary ideologies such as the rather psychotic ones spreading across the American landscape, and the liberalism of many of the Founding Fathers which was more of a Deism for political geeks than

a coherent set of political doctrines.

Traditionally, most conservatives—at least those of intellectual temperaments—were more guarded, preferring to allow for some sort of aristocracy, natural and elected by sane processes or hereditary and selected over past generations. Such a system is imperfect, of course, but a democratically inclined republic has a chance of choosing men more intelligent and more knowledgeable than even a well-informed ordinary citizen so long as men such as John Adams or even that brilliant alcoholic Luther Martin are available rather than, say those crooks—the Dulles Brothers or other Wall Streeters who shaped American foreign policy to the profit of their law-firm’s clients. See *The Brothers: John Foster Dulles, Allen Dulles, and Their Secret World War* [82] by Stephen Kinzer for a discussion of the corruption of the Dulles brothers in this regard. See Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* or Nathaniel Hawthorne’s introduction to the original edition of *The Scarlet Letter* for an early take on the drop-off in moral and other qualities of American leaders after the generation of the Founding Fathers—who themselves had feet of clay—and the proposed explanation that those Fathers chose themselves during a time when only brave men stepped forward while Americans seemed to prefer selecting leaders who were, and are, self-serving scoundrels on the whole.

There is little evidence that wide-spread citizenry rights will lead to a body of voters who take the trouble to learn about the latest target of our moment or decade of hate, country or individual or group. There is no more evidence that such wide-spread rights will lead to citizens who even think seriously about public schools and what is needed for the future of their children and the communities in which their children live and will live. There is certainly evidence that politicians of the scoundrel variety will at least accept decay in public education and will encourage the dropping of voting requirements such as some minimal literacy—I’d be willing to support some reasonable oral display of knowledge and reasoning ability but not the continuous flow of people into and out of voting booths when they don’t even know the Constitution is the law of the land and don’t have a clue what is in that document—if they even know it exists. To be sure, Bertrand de Jouvenel (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bertrand\\_de\\_Jouvenel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bertrand_de_Jouvenel)) told us decades ago that the American political system was nothing like a self-governing democracy or republic but rather a political machine system which had kept the forms of democratic voting—I’ll not bother splitting (valid and important and thick) hairs over the difference

between a republic and democracy. There is enough of decent form in the American political system that it sort-of worked so long as:

- the major parties were putting up candidates often (sometimes?) not too objectionable,
- so long as local parties (often in alliance with the national parties) kept some sort of check on the national boys,
- so long as the American government didn't overly-extend its constitutional powers domestically or internationally,
- so long as local politicians and newspapers and maybe intellectuals of various sorts were doing their job of speaking something akin to truth to power, and
- so long as various other conditions held which no longer hold—at least in a constant way.

Look around for the battles Eugene McCarthy (soft-left) and James Buckley (soft-right) engaged in against the political establishment in the 1970s as “political reforms” were discussed and enacted. Among other claims, one or both said that those reforms were an effort to destroy the partial freedom of state or regional parties and that it was an effort to destroy all forms of corruption not under the control of the two major parties.

Americans, on the whole—including my 20-something self in the 1970s, didn't pay much attention to what was really happening. Apparently, we—if I was even paying attention—passed right over the details and noticed only the important fact that these bills had some variation of the word “reform” in their titles.

Before and after that increase in major party control of the American political process, things were also going badly even as Americans grew more obsessed with professional sports, even as popular music and literature and cinema and art decayed to a quality suited for a people themselves decaying into a barbarian childhood of sorts—see Ortega y Gasset's *Revolt of the Masses* for one entry into high-quality thought on the decay of the West, even as people became entrapped by ever-new technology—good in itself but we have to know when some need has been met and then ignore the marketplace, even as the leaders of nearly all realms of the West—religion

and culture and politics and business and education—turned against the traditions of the Christian West and the many adherents and dependents of those traditions. Of course, that inside attack on the West was allegedly for the purpose of making the world a better place but all it has brought the peoples of the world is death or mutilation, poverty to some and increased poverty to others, loss of power. . . . But some have seen an increase in their relative wealth and power though it might be that the total power and wealth of the West have decreased in the most recent decade or two; it seems likely to me that that process of impoverishment and enslavement of the many by the few will increase in the West for as much as a decade or two before the West cracks underneath its morally degenerate leadership.

Why do I speak as if some end of the West were certain?

Our leaders are desperate to continue interfering in regions of the world or individual countries where we've done little or nothing good for the peoples of those regions or countries, nothing good for the United States or its ordinary citizens; often the United States has done much harm in these regions and great harm to the limbs and lives and psyches or moral characters of our soldiers.

Coming out of Vietnam and with hints that there were problems even in the "Good War," hints that "Good War" was a bit morally ragged even for the "Good Guys," Americans proved themselves more inclined to "give it a break" than to try to learn from recent mistakes or even mistakes from decades prior. In his overview of problematic issues regarding World War II which should receive further attention from historians and philosophers and political scientists and politicians and religious leaders and so on, *No Simple Victory: World War II in Europe, 1939-1945* [27], Norman Davies, the distinguished and largely retired British historian, expert in Central and Eastern Europe and in that "Good War," tells us that Churchill and Roosevelt look good only in comparison to Hitler and Stalin—which is akin to: "Our town's gangster is a saint compared to Al Capone." I've also read in several essays by respected historians that American combat troops had good records with regard to crimes but the unbattled American occupation troops raped and stole with the worst of other country's soldiers. The death of a million or so German POWs in American camps? The missing ten million German civilians who were fled or were driven out of their homes as the Soviet armies advanced—why were they not listed in documents in the Soviet archives and are the hints valid that they had fled into American controlled regions before disappearing? The American-led over-

throw of Mosaddegh's legitimately elected government in Iran (1953) and his replacement by a nasty lapdog with a national police force reminiscent of the Gestapo? Korea and Curtis LeMay's admission his bombers killed two million people and leveled nearly every building in what is now North Korea—most of the people died in napalm bombings? Vietnam? Cambodia? Guatemala? Nicaragua? Chile? Pakistan? Iraq? Iran again? Libya? Syria? Yemen?

Why do these people not love us? Why are they so unwilling to let us take control of their countries and reshape them for the good of . . .

American people, our leaders who think it their right to rule all the Earth are committing these crimes in the name of your country and the immediate (and mostly innocent) agents of these crimes are your sons or that nice, young fellow who was in your Sunday School class. And we Catholics, I'm sure most Protestants as well, pray for our "soldiers who are working for peace around the world." That's nothing but a part of our self-deceiving, self-righteous efforts to justify our pandering to the powers of the world, powers which serve God in some way but powers we're supposed to question—in a pushy way if necessary. The Bible tells us evil men are likely to grab control of great power and wealth; sometimes, good men are corrupted when they hold great power and great wealth.

We sin every time we pray for the success of the American "quest for peace," and don't bother to even listen to the horror stories brought back by the men who'd been forced through Hell, sometimes committing crimes to stay alive and sometimes being tricked into committing crimes by planners back in Washington or Arlington, sometimes being the victims of terrible crimes.

The death-toll is tremendous—for the native populations on the ground but there has been a terrible toll of needless deaths and disablements, physical and moral and psychological, among Americans and our allies. The destruction to American freedoms, to the proper operation of our governments, to our soft-power (credibility and long-gone reputation as a country), to our individual self-respect and the respect we as individuals used to get from other peoples, to our wealth, has been great and will likely bring the United States down before long, one way or another—we can hope for something as little terrible as a breakup into more stable and coherent nations which might come together again in a century or two.

All of this has been tolerated by American citizens though there are surprisingly honest books about the crimes of our largely self-serving political

and business and intelligence(???) leaders. And sometimes military leaders. Psychopath is the term for far too many members of the American elites (and not just in politics) though perhaps many of them aren't psychiatric psychopaths so much as somewhat selfish people trained to be greatly selfish, egotistical, driven to seek wealth and power or at least an association with those who hold wealth and power. And our religious leaders have kept their mouths shut, though sometimes allowing or even encouraging open dissent against American crimes by clergy.

Criminals will be criminals. An American ruling class willing to carry out regular, large-scale international crimes—mostly war crimes—against other peoples will also be willing to carry out crimes against Americans when it suits their purposes and when they can get away with it. It might seem to some that they can almost always get away with their domestic crimes and pretty much always get away with their international crimes—in fact, it does seem that punishment comes to criminals in the American ruling class only when a competing group of criminals sees a chance to bring down a rival as a result of a domestic fight for power.

It can also be hard to understand the complex and seemingly willful (and morally culpable?) ignorance on the part of Americans when it comes to the unusual, large-scale crimes of the six or seven decades. My experience in talking openly to some people is that there are a small but significant number out there who understand the suspicious nature these crimes; there is also an overlapping number of Americans who are highly suspicious of our country's international interventions going back to at least the American invasions of the fading Spanish Empire—mostly the Philippines and Cuba. There are also technical specialists such as pilots and other flight experts (including anyone who was a aircraft carrier flight crew or a non-pilot crew member during their military service) who can tell us how unlikely it is that:

- “foreign terrorists” really took down Flight 103 over Lockerbie—see the *Time* archive for the article *Pan Am 103 Why Did They Die?* at <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,159523,00.html> where we learn US military investigators told Time reporters that the CIA blew up the plane to kill a Green Beret traveling back to Washington with information about the CIA's international drug smuggling operations in Lebanon,

- Flight 800 went down the way the US government claimed; I've heard a professional pilot and retired Air Force flight crewman deny it was possible and have read a CIA officer's account of the rumor among the high-level, sub-political officers of CIA, FBI, etc that it was shot down by accident by an inexperienced Navy pilot who was part of the training exercise taking place from a nearby carrier,
- McVeigh's van-bomb could have taken down the Federal Building in Oklahoma City—see Gore Vidal's essay in *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace: How We Got to be so Hated* [143] or talk to an honest explosives expert who trusts you—a hint which is very important also for understanding the next entry: modern-day skyscrapers,
- that the hi-jacked airplanes on 9/11 were really flown by amateurs rather than military-quality pilots or (much more likely) electronic controls, that modern building materials could be set aflame by a substance (jet-fuel) which burns at too low a temperature for materials meeting building codes even for low buildings, that there would be no claims against manufacturers and builders if that nearly impossible situation had occurred, that the first-responders who barely came out alive were imagining all the “secondary (not related to the planes) explosions” they said were occurring on lower floors—see *9/11: A Conspiracy Theory* at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yuC\\_4mGTs98](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yuC_4mGTs98) for the greatest (that is, wackiest) conspiracy theory a black-humorist or government official could imagine or read a serious article, *Ten Short Videos About Nine Eleven* at <https://digwithin.net/page/1/> which points to videos of testimony by first-responders and by nearby witnesses about explosions in lower-floors which started as the planes were hitting the buildings many floors above—some of those interviews were shown on major television networks or major local stations, or
- that *ad nauseum*.

Americans can't govern themselves. They don't even concern themselves with the crimes committed in their names, crimes which might be thus imputed to them by a God who, despite modern rumors, values justice as well as mercy. They also don't concern themselves for long with crimes committed against their communal self, crimes which greatly impact a few,

leaving the rest to just “give it a rest” and get on with their plans to take the children to DisneyWorld or to Yosemite. That ordinary life has much good in it—though I’m not an advocate of theme-parks, but it has been hollowed out and deprived of its once shaky but okay foundations. And then the next few generations.

The American Age will come to an end as do all things, and maybe very soon, but it could have been kept going a good while we as a country and citizens could have eased into an honorable role as a country among the, say, five or six most wealthy and most powerful on Earth.

From a slightly different viewpoint: Americans, perhaps like most human beings, tend to accept the facts or pseudo-facts and also opinions without checking even that which can be found in books in local libraries or in their lending partners, by reputable authors and well-established publishers. Moreover, Americans tend to forget what they might have once been told—as is true of the above-mentioned videos shown on national television in which first-responders and others testified that “secondary explosions,” that is—not caused by the planes hitting those two towers, began to occur on the lower floors of the towers about the same time the planes hit high up on the building.

There is no evidence that American citizens have bothered to acquire the knowledge necessary to do their jobs, no evidence they talk about these strange and nasty events (downing planes filled with civilians or the destruction of buildings holding more than 2500 people) with friends. I know some who think themselves skeptical for questioning if the attacks could have been stopped by, say, intelligence and police officers paying more attention to hints of terrorists in the country, but those false-skeptics don’t go any deeper. Their minds are stuck in the idealistic lines of thought they were taught in fifth grade, even the Christians who have read in the Bible (most clearly in Isaiah and Jeremiah) that powerful and wealthy men include a disproportionate number of evil men, men with the “mentality of gangsters” in the phrase of Lord Acton who started off a famous paragraph by telling us such men are almost certain to gain control of centralized power and wealth and ended that paragraph with his famous claim that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. (Thus he covered both those who were evil before gaining power and those who became evil as they held power or served those who held power.)

Americans are naive and innocent in a thoroughly unattractive and morally irresponsible way. So we can learn by paying attention to the

events of recent history and those in the preceding half-century and to the ways in which Americans failed to act the role of morally responsible adults. Those in my generation (born 1955) and the two generations before that deserve to suffer for our moral irresponsibility and cowardice but it will be mostly the next few generations which will suffer for our sins—so much for the rumors that the son doesn't pay for the sins of the father. But much of our distortion of our Christian faith, especially a sinful generation preaching that God is a God of Mercy but not a God of justice, are but efforts to justify our cowardice and sloth. We'll pay our prices as we face God and see ourselves for the self-serving cowards we are.

In the next chapter, I'll examine the possibility that most human beings aren't up to fulfilling the role of morally responsible citizen in a complex civilization or even in many lesser communities such as nations. By the time we descend to cities and towns and even families, we might discover that many more human beings are capable of fulfilling the roles of morally responsible adults.

So maybe the ordinary citizen isn't culpable but, if so, only because he's not capable of being a morally responsible adult at levels higher than family and local communities.



# 555 Do Americans Have What It Takes to be a Self-governing People?—Part 2.

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2552>. It was finished and uploaded on 2018/09/19.]

In this second part of this discussion, I'll be looking at this question from a slightly more abstract or theoretical perspective. That is, do we have reasons to believe that Americans, or the citizens of any nation or federation of nations, have the ability to be a self-governing people in the context of the immense complexity of social and economic and political and cultural relationships in the modern world. This increase in complexity is driven by:

- Pure, simple growth in population and in land under use and natural resources being exploitable.
- Increased complexity from such factors as improved knowledge of empirical reality along with the resulting technology and understandings of Creation.

Are we even capable of living up to our roles as citizens in modern, complex human communities?

Let's be blunt.

Most American citizens, most human beings alive anywhere on Earth in 2018, don't understand much about complex systems such as the sorts of political systems necessary to and proper to modern civilizations. . .

Let me stop there and point out that Saddam Hussein wasn't particularly brutal in his efforts to forge a nation compared to the likes of William the Conqueror and Henry II and Henry VIII and the other kings/warlords who created the British nations—Ireland and Scotland as well as England and Wales which was so brutally suppressed by one of their own—Henry VIII. I should add Saddam also wasn't particularly selfish in grabbing a disproportionate share of the fruits for his family and tribe and other allies. Local warlords and tribal leaders aren't often soft men and aren't ready to give up their own power or their people's independence to central authorities, not even when that central authority (government and more) leaves a good amount of power and wealth in the hands of local political and other institutions. How many Americans could even dimly ask the questions which might lead to a new perspective on a man brutal but much like the brutal men who ended such things as the personal, not law-based, laws of tribal societies in what became the West?

The above is but one example of controversial and sophisticated thinking which seems quite beyond the average citizen of the US and of nearly all countries I know anything about; it also seems beyond the typical Senator or State Department/CIA official, and so on. At the same time, a good educational system along with a properly complex (sophisticated) culture in general can plant a good worldview in the minds of many citizens—certainly the ones smart enough to understand though not smart enough and creative enough to think thoughts which are new, at least to them. And here's a sophisticated thought which would confuse many: An old thought in a new context can be as good as a new thought. Or as bad as it might have been the first time around. True thinking can't be automated.

Intelligence isn't the only issue. And lack of relatively high levels of intelligence on the part of most citizens is more a feature than a problem. Everyone has a role in life and some are given more powerful minds to serve their own needs and the needs of their communities, others are given generous hearts or drives oriented towards the good of their families or other communities, still others capable hands—that is, the skills and inclinations to turn good ideas and good 'feelings' into real-world results. Powerful minds aren't an unqualified blessing—Einstein wasn't omniscient and neither were the great inspirational leaders nor the great businessmen or politicians.

Americans are inclined to—sort of—respect famous intelligent people such as physicists who win the Nobel Prize and engineers who advance

technology or famous professors from Harvard and Yale who justify the stupid and poorly-managed wars which—sort of—meet the political and economic and psychiatric needs of the rulers of the US. There is little respect among American citizens for those who have bothered to gather information on Iraq or Iran or the families engaged in banking or politics; there is little indication that American citizens realize that, while smart people don't always think well and don't always get to the right answer, smart people think thoughts about a complex situation which aren't usually possible for most others to think; there is little realization that even a smalltown public library will have some books documenting the criminality of some American leaders from the 19th century and the stronger tendency to criminality as Wall St lawyers (such as the Dulles brothers) or investment bankers (such as the Rockefellers after moving to NYC or the Bush sub-clan of the Walkers) began to periodically and then consistently dominate international relations and then began to loot the country's pension funds, mortgage guaranty funds, and who knows what else. See the disturbing story of the \$21 trillion (as of 2018 or so) which is missing from the US government at the website of Catherine Austin Fitts: <https://missingmoney.solari.com/>. "Banana republic" isn't nearly adequate as a description of the US at this time.

High school students learn a great deal of mathematics and science and history (patterns) which were the results of the activities of great thinkers (Archimedes and Newton and the Founding Fathers); those thoughts were often great mysteries to all but the smartest people for generations as they were being absorbed into the communal mind and made accessible to those lacking in intellectual gifts. Often those so lacking in the abstract reasoning skills needed to understand, say, the so-called "Big Bang"—a phase change and not a creation event or lacking the somewhat different reasoning skills to understand the messy development of Western political systems, have quite a bit to offer in general but specifically in making decisions based upon that communal knowledge, but thinking to be independent-minded and intellectually freestanding they become pawns of demagogues and propagandists and fear-mongers.

And we are divided by our distrust of others who speak or write in complex sentences or who read too many books, of others who call us to account for our own crimes and sins or for those of leaders we support, of those who conceive great and noble projects which demand energy and sacrifices of various sorts.

The first Catholic Mass reading for 2018/09/18 makes the point:

Tuesday of the Twenty-fourth Week in Ordinary Time

Reading 1 1 Cor 12:12-14, 27-31a

Brothers and sisters: As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one Body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit.

Now the body is not a single part, but many.

Now you are Christ's Body, and individually parts of it. Some people God has designated in the Church to be, first, Apostles; second, prophets; third, teachers; then, mighty deeds; then gifts of healing, assistance, administration, and varieties of tongues. Are all Apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work mighty deeds? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? Strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts.

[Lectionary for Mass for Use in the Dioceses of the United States, second typical edition, Copyright 2001, 1998, 1997, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine.]

The above reading gives the answer to more responsible and more capable citizenship in Christian terms. This answer can be restated in terms congenial to any tradition which respects the reality of communities. If you have real communities, you'll have trusted members in each community including towns and cities and local churches who have:

- strong hearts to detect the presence of moral disorder or even outright evil as opposed to the claims of starry-eyed idealists or the corrupted powerholders and wealthholders, those strong-hearted human beings will be the true reformers;
- strong minds and a curiosity that seeks knowledge and truth to tell us what might be or is going on as opposed to the claims of powerholders and wealthholders, those strong-minded and curious human beings will produce plausible understandings of the increasingly complex events and structures of our world;
- strong hands to protect the communities against predators who would simply exploit youth or others in the community or those far more

dangerous predators who seek to control or destroy all the intermediary organizations which are the relatively local communities.

No, Americans are not a morally responsible, self-governing people and can't ever be such until we restore our families and local communities and local churches and local ethnic/social clubs and all the communities and institutions which lie between those most concrete, mostly deeply flesh-and-blood, communities and the central powers which currently are not true communities but rather institutions for exploitation of the naive, ignorant, or simply powerless by the sophisticated, knowledgeable and powerful. (Take this last comment in light of the type of sophistication and knowledge and power appropriate to corrupt human institutions, even those which have some of the characteristics of true communities—as the United States once did.)

And it's our fault as much as the fault of our exploiters. It didn't take threats to make us give up our communities. It didn't even take substantial bribes. All it took was the offering of their cultural trash—the cultural Marxists were employees and not great revolutionaries—and we grabbed at it, more and more so, as our minds and moral characters decayed over a remarkably short period. We, the citizens of the US, watched Superbowls and trashy movies—has Hollywood not yet produced a movie for pseudo-adults about any of the comic book characters I lost interest in at the age of 11 or so?—and did nothing to maintain those foundations let alone to strengthen them against the cultural and intellectual acids which are a side-product of revolutionary changes such as we've seen in the West over the recent centuries. And now the superstructures of our once-great civilization are collapsing even as our exploiters make short-term profits by alienating (stealing) the contents and building materials.



# 556 Let Venezuelans Be Venezuelans

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2604>. It was finished and uploaded on 2019/02/19.]

There are writers on the Internet, some maybe just scribblers but many are thinkers of some capacity, who criticize other peoples, including most Latin Americans, for being too dumb to handle complex, American-style economic and political systems. To be sure, many of these criticisms are quite true, though we should realize that current immigration patterns along with the dumbing-down of American culture and entertainment might soon render the US incapable of maintaining such systems; we may have already reached the point where we won't be able to fix our systems if they break as badly as they did during the financial crises of the 19th century or that of 2008 or the Great Depression of the 1930s. One warning sign is that a lot of our immigrants are coming from peoples with lower average IQs than is necessary for complex economic and political systems. Even if a lot of geniuses are present in a country, economists say that it is average IQ that correlates highly with such measures as high per-capita Gross Domestic Product and advanced technology.

Sometimes those writers, like me, believe there to be some important differences between Latin Americans, Southwestern Asians, sub-Saharan Africans, Southern Asians, East Asians, Ashkenazi Jews, Northwestern Europeans—including descendants of the colonizers of the US and Canada, and so on. By measured IQs, these peoples I've named might be ranked (highest to lowest): Ashkenazi Jews, East Asians (at least Japanese, Koreans, Vietnamese, and Han Chinese), Northwestern Europeans, Southern Asians (though there is a great variation by region and religion), Latin

Americans and Southwestern Asians (nearly a tie?), sub-Saharan Africans. From all evidence, the IQs of all those peoples are different, as are the ways the mind-personality complex is organized. The cultures are also different, reflecting their environments plus past responses of the local populations to their external environments, their own cultures, and their own mind-personality complexes which reflect the responses of past generations of those peoples.

It's all very complex and not much like the simple conceptions found (necessarily) in ancient times when abstract reasoning was evolving and was being shaped in particular cultures, when abstract reasoning was not yet applied in a fully disciplined way to the entirety of being and thus was not always shaped properly even when geniuses were producing promising ways of thinking, including tentative ways of understanding that entirety of being. It's all very complex and not much like the simple, verging on simplistic, conceptions taught (necessarily) in high-school biology and most popular books on biological evolution.

In those earlier ages, abstract reasoning was applied to what might be labeled 'metaphysics' and 'theology' and thus, despite Archimedes and a few other scientific stars, empirical science (physics and mathematics but also history and literary studies and so on) fell well behind, resulting in some serious distortion of those understandings of the entirety of being. In the past few centuries, empirical sciences generally raced ahead—with mathematics and physics even penetrating into the regions of metaphysics and (potentially) theology. By referring to theology, I mean to point to speculative efforts such as mine to understand communal being (including possibly the Holy Trinity, one God in three Persons) by use of modern differential geometry. Understanding means to accept reality, to draw concepts from even the most brutal of facts and of 'pure' understandings of regions of concrete, thing-like being, and to use those concepts for proper discussions of more abstract realms of being. For example, I've suggested—following the German philosopher, Kurt Hubner—that quantum mechanics seems more reasonable if we conjecture that relationships are primary rather than stuff. Relationships create and shape stuff rather than stuff existing first and then starting to form relationships.

It's certainly true that we human animals arose in the midst of messy processes occurring in a complex and complicated world. Multiple family-lines of humans moved into different environments and began to respond to those environments. And then new family-lines were formed in some of

those environments—creatures of Africa adapting to life on the steppes of northern Eurasia and so on. We now know this wasn't quite a one-way process even with the lines of human beings which moved out of Africa—there were some returning and breeding into African family-lines as well as, for example, males of the group named Ancient Northern Eurasians breeding with women taken from the regions of the ancestors of Han Chinese—the mixed lines forming new family-lines which became the bulk of American Indians. There are even signs of large-scale inter-breeding with 'archaic' family-lines of human beings—Neandertal and Denisovan; there is evidence in some of the genes of Southeast Asia and various Pacific islands of smaller-scale inter-breeding with some truly archaic, relatively small-brained human beings.

Even way back in the days of the African Eden, the archaic humans who were adapted to life in great savannahs of Africa were likely different at an early stage from those adapted to life in a forest setting in Africa, both being different from archaic human animals who had adapted to life in Southeast Asia or in the plains and great oak-forests of Europe. It's quite possible that higher levels of abstract reasoning began to develop in some simple way in some of those very early human populations and not in others, though those differences might have been washed away well before the major Out-of-Africa crew moved into Southwest Asia 50,000 years ago or so. Major differences in abstract reasoning probably developed even among human family-lines with significant capabilities in abstract reasoning during the periods over the previous 10,000 years or so when we can see signs of an acceleration in the development of both technology and social forms of organization—see *The 10,000 Year Explosion: How Civilization Accelerated Human Evolution* [23] by Gregory Cochran and Henry Harpending. That first happened in a few regions such as Southwest Asia—modern-day Palestine into the plains of modern-day Iran, parts of east Asia, and on the steppes of modern-day Ukraine and southern Russia. Similar developments occurred in other parts of the world.

The bottom-line in our day is that there are peoples, including those in Latin America, who have the capability of sustaining a part of a modern civilization and that part is distinct enough that they can call it their own; they don't have the capability of truly adapting to the more advanced parts of a modern civilization, Western or Chinese or Indian, or any other civilizations you might claim to exist.

Even within civilizations, there are differences in IQs and personality

characteristics. Accomplishments in science would indicate there are higher IQs in some European peoples than in others. History would indicate that a people, such as the Italians, could be intellectually dominant for centuries (the Renaissance and some centuries before that) and then drop down to lower levels later on—though some studies indicate that Italians have one of the highest average IQs of modern European peoples. Some possible reasons for such historical changes, and ways of possibly thinking about underachieving or overachieving peoples, are explored in three books I've recommended before:

- *The Genius Famine* [21],
- *At Our Wits' End: Why We're Becoming Less Intelligent* [105], and
- *A Farewell to Alms: A Brief Economic History of the World* [22].

You can also do a search on my blog, *Acts of Being* at <https://loydfueston.com/>, for my discussions of authors such as Jacques Barzun, Jose Ortega Y Gasset, Hermann Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Garry Wills regarding signs of decay in intelligence or literacy or moral character which could be seen in major areas of the West even before the American War Between the States. I claim that deeper understandings of human being, individual and communal, come from consideration of quantitative studies along with these more 'literary' studies.

So...

Are the Venezuelans capable of running a smaller-scale version of the United States or Germany or China? No. Nor are the Argentinians nor are the Iraqis nor are the Greeks for all their ancient accomplishments. Heck, the (Asiatic) Indians don't even seem up to the task of running a same-scale version of their own country/civilization. And the question can barely even be asked about the sub-Saharan African countries without moving into fantasy-regions of advanced African civilizations populated by comic book characters.

We should have good relationships with these countries, respecting what they can and can't do. We shouldn't colonize them nor force upon them excessively one-sided deals. Nor should we allow too much immigration into the West of the human beings from these countries who have the intellectual levels and personality characteristics to succeed in the advanced countries; that gives them opportunities but decreases the chances that

those countries will advance toward higher capabilities, or even retain their current capabilities. We should trade with them in reasonably fair ways. We should interact with them, allowing them to adopt the parts of our ways and views which they can handle and maybe use to enrich their own countries' cultures.

We should let them follow their own path, borrowing from us but not being shaped by us. We should be wise enough to realize that they can't really be 'like us', even in the good sense of developing their own more advanced ways of technology and social organization, unless they choose that sort of a path by, for example, developing cultural and social ways which give reproductive advantages to those with higher levels of abstract reasoning power and with personality characteristics which can drive them, especially their geniuses, to higher accomplishments.

They may not choose this path. I think some peoples have to do so and will do so. The alternatives may be dire, especially if large reservoirs of oil or other natural resources make them attractive to predator nations. Of course, it probably won't happen that the 'undeveloped' or 'underdeveloped' peoples will be allowed to choose their own paths forward. After all, the human race contains many aggressive and energetic men inclined to conquest or even extermination (sometimes only extermination of the males) when confronting peoples occupying valuable lands. The human race also contains a lot of self-righteous bigots who think to be doing good when they impose their ways upon other peoples—in the name of charity. Maybe that is how things are meant to be or at least how they have to be until we pass into the next world, the world of the Resurrected. But, maybe, we have a chance to advance toward that perfect world by doing a bit better by ourselves and by others in this very imperfect world.



# 557 Enabling Peace? Or Delaying War to Make it Nastier?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2621>. It was finished and uploaded on 2019/07/01.]

Early in May, I read *The Birth of Modern Belief: Faith and Judgment From the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment* [127] by Ethan H. Shagan. I thought the analysis was pretty good, but I didn't like the 'global' conclusion:

Enlightenment rationality did not devour the world in its ravenous maw, it was only a subset of the larger project to liberate human judgment. The outcome undoubtedly holds perils: the rights of subjects to formally equal beliefs on every topic from physics to philosophy, regardless of their ignorance, and the rights of subjects to sift and choose which facts to believe, even alternative facts that might seem irrational or poorly attested. But it also enables peace in a diverse society. [In his summing-up, page unrecorded before book was returned.]

There are various issues underlying the complex changes discussed by Professor Shagan. Let me present my current thoughts on this general matter—in a schematic form:

- Beliefs matter. Any human community, at any scale, will have problems if a good number of its members with voting or decision-making powers have beliefs which are not in synch with a presently plausible understanding of reality.

- Any human community, at any scale, will have problems if a good number of its members with voting or decision-making powers have beliefs which are not in synch with the present and past of that community.
- Plausible understandings are becoming ever more complex, though it seems likely that some sort of breather will take place as we deal with various problems which are building to intolerable levels, especially in Africa but also in nearly every inhabited part of the globe.
- Those plausible understandings rely upon very sophisticated knowledge, most of which can be accessed only in highly technical forms—even the best of accessible, ‘popular’ works are best used as introductions to give technical learners an overview of the landscape before they begin to travel it. I’m referring to good, technical understandings of quantum mechanics (matter and energy), general relativity (time and space), transfinite numbers (infinity including eternity), a stew of complexity and chaos theory and more (self-organizing systems and such-like), genetics and evolutionary theory (human nature including the mind which seeks understanding—at least some minds), psychology in a disciplined form (individual human nature), history of a traditional sort as well as some history run through some mathematical modeling, and perhaps more.
- If there were some way to produce a “spectrum of freedom” to correspond to both the ability to form worthwhile opinions and the willingness to put in the effort to acquire the necessary knowledge and then to contemplate it in a narrow and a contextual way, Shagan’s ‘global’ conclusion might be a good one. Such “spectrums of freedom” might have existed in various parts of Western Civilization before the Modern, Liberal project gathered steam.
- Finally, for now: Can men, or at least most men, be truly free in the context of a homogeneous mass of men? And these men in that blob are truly mass men, shaped by large-scale (even global) markets and political forces.

These preliminary thoughts, logically enough, lead to a preliminary conclusion:

In an age of complex and poorly understood problems, the opinions of some are worth more than the opinions of others.

After all, we in the United States have something akin to peace (at least for now) despite the incoherence of many lines of thought which are driving our public policies. On the other hand, the peoples of Korea and Vietnam and Iraq and Iran and Syria and various other countries have paid a big price for the low standards of knowledge and of opinions of our leaders and theirs. The problems of those peoples and the coming problems of the American peoples are being born of and nurtured by the inability and unwillingness of the American citizens to even acquire basic information about those many countries. In most cases, our leaders seem to be as ill-informed and as lacking in thinking skills as most ordinary citizens—all have been formed by American culture and that formation is reinforced by the American educational systems as well as the propaganda of the American ruling elite.



## Part VIII

### What Means It All?



## 558 Introduction: What Means It All?

In this part, I've collected essays or articles from my weblogs, *Acts of Being* at <http://loydfueston.com/> and *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* at <http://loydf.wordpress.com/>, I deal with the human response to God's purposes as we can discern them in the world's demands upon us and in God's revelations found in the Bible, especially the Gospels of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in some other limited sources of lesser authority.



## 559 Modern Decision-making: Driving Over the Cliff Backwards

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=52>. It was finished and uploaded on 2006/12/16.]

We're all liberals and individualists nowadays, even those who pretend otherwise (forget the Amish for a few minutes, please). Our views of self and society lead us to act according to a cowardly form of prudence. Let me take a quote from the 1913 Webster [140]:

Prudence supposes the value of the end to be assumed, and refers only to the adaptation of the means. It is the relation of right means for given ends. –Whewell.

In other words, true prudence comes into play only when moral decisions have been made. I think I would be well-justified in saying that this is not the order in which modern people make their behavioral decisions. Rather than deciding what is right to do and then trying to find the safest means to do what is right, and the means which might best reach that goal, we first – often implicitly – decide what options are available for moral decision-making. The available options are limited to those which maximize our chances of living safe, comfortable lives.

Pro-life Christians see that our medical systems are becoming increasingly evil but they do not consider the possible call to refuse the benefits of those medical systems. You see, pro-life Christians are also modern human beings and have to take care of their own safety and comfort first. After they go for their annual physical, buy all their prescribed drugs, visit the chiropractor a few times, and consider that surgery to relieve their carpal

tunnel pain, then they settle down to deal with their disgust with modern society, including those increasingly evil medical systems.

We feel that we have a right to be treated for our physical and mental ills despite the fact that we have to deal with the same medical establishments, government agencies, and insurers which are funding abortions and artificial reproduction and experiments on babies being grown in test-tubes.

Oh, those are evil people who are killing some unborn babies, creating fertilized eggs in laboratories, and even making test-tube babies for medical experimentation and maybe for eventually harvesting organs. We'll show them. Our Lord, Jesus Christ, and His saints showed us how to deal with such great evil. We'll reschedule our appointments with our doctors and we'll head down to Washington to march in front of the news cameras. That'll show everyone we know how to carry our crosses. Then we'll return and make new appointments.

Maybe everyone who pretends to moral integrity should make their moral decisions first? Maybe we should decide that we shouldn't accept benefits from a system which is doing great evil? Maybe Christians in particular should realize that the crucified Son of God didn't teach us to first screen our options that we might secure our comfort and safety? In the case of Christians, even a proper prudence will tell us to meet our higher calling by sacrificing our comfort and safety, that we might follow our Lord and obey His commandments. But that might lead us to a new form of martyrdom: suffering and dying when the magicians of our society can relieve our pains and ills. Surely, we Christians have passed beyond that primitive need to accept martyrdom when we can obey Pilate and also follow Christ? Surely, we modern Christians can be fully members of modern societies and then find ways to be Christians if only in the gaps of those societies.

Am I reading the Bible wrong? Or is there wrong in the thinking, or non-thinking, of all those who first nurture their careers and secure good benefit packages before they set out to protest against a materialistic and corrupt society?

I have to admit I'm inclined to utter a new version of the famous prayer of St. Augustine of Hippo:

Lord, make me willing to be your true servant whatever the cost. But you don't have to rush. Christmas is coming and then there's the Superbowl and...

I also am a modern Christian.



# 560 What is God's Covenant with Noah?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=62>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/01/18.]

Here's a definition of covenant [140] to start my discussion:

**covenant** 3. (Theol.) The promises of God as revealed in the Scriptures, conditioned on certain terms on the part of man, as obedience, repentance, faith, etc. [1913 Webster]

I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. –Gen. xvii.

[1913 Webster]

In chapter 9 of Genesis, God adds, “When the [rain]bow is in the clouds, I will look upon it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.”

As I interpret this: God is a Creator and not a meddling Deity of the sort worshiped by most Catholics and Protestants and Jews of this modern era. In Scholastic language, God is the Primary Cause (the Creator) and not a secondary cause (a super-creature like most of the gods of pagans, even the God of Plato who created from nothing but in the manner of a human workman).

We become Deists, even when we profess belief in the Holy Trinity, when we see the world as a battleground between God and Satan. God is all-powerful. He does not struggle with any of His creatures, nor does He struggle with any part of the physical universe. If Satan exists, he'd be as

powerless as us men regarding matters of salvation or denial of salvation. Only God can save, only God can bring a creature of this universe, this phase of Creation, into a new phase where development and corruption are at an end but life is richer and more complete.

The universe is part of God's Creation. It's a special part of Creation, the womb in which the companions of Jesus Christ are growing and developing. It's not the safe comfortable place that a human womb typically is, though even a biological womb can be hostile if the mother's body misdetects the embryo as a foreign growth. Miscarriages are sometimes, perhaps usually, caused by the mother's own immune system waging a war against this 'infection' in her body.

God Presumably has His reasons for creating such a world, but I can make a few observations, starting with the fact that we are part of this universe, from a wider perspective – part of the Creation of which this universe is but one phase. If God had decided to make a better universe with less sinful creatures, that would not have been this universe and those creatures wouldn't have been us.

God loved this universe before He created it. He loved each of us before we were conceived in our mother's wombs. Having shaped this universe out of the more general stuff underlying all of Creation, God promised Noah that He would respect this universe and all the living creatures in it, rattlesnakes as well as pretty little girls.

I'm most certainly not a Biblical literalist and I tend to follow the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas that revelations come to us when we align our thoughts with those God wishes us to have – He doesn't speak to us in the way of a companion sitting on a facing chair. The Son of God took on a human nature so that He could do exactly that, but He seems to have restricted His conversations – at least verifiable ones – to His own mortal life-time and a few short years afterward when He appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus.

During His Incarnation, the Son of God Himself performed no acts that need be regarded as the sort of paganistic magic which most modern people imagine miracles to be. Maybe Lourdes has occurred to point us towards this Biblical truth? The high number of extremely unlikely spontaneous cures associated with Lourdes indicates something is happening there on a regular basis, though there is no guarantee. Cures do not automatically come when you step into the waters of the pool. But a strangely high number of cures do come. Very unlikely cures. And cures subject to medical

investigation and statistical analysis.

Not a one of those verified cures is close to being impossible in the logical sense. Sometimes such cures happen when someone is on their death-bed with an advanced cancer or some neuro-muscular disorder. In fact, I'm not sure if it would be possible for an event to occur in this universe which violated the 'laws' of Creation and mostly, almost entirely, this universe has its own specific laws of the sort explorable by empirical means. The more general laws of Creation are also somewhat explorable by disciplined speculation starting from empirical knowledge and from our very small stock of revealed truths. This speculative exploration is part of my task in my various sorts of writings and I do my best to discipline my thoughts to the demands of the best available empirical knowledge subjected to the moral and theological ordering which comes from Christian revelation.

The point I wish to emphasize is that God is a Creator and it's best to think that He will respect the rules He Himself set-up when He first created, the rules He Himself re-instates with each instant that He brings all that is not Himself into fresh existence. Let me try to say this in stronger words:

In God's ongoing acts of Creation, He acts as a Creator and those acts will be manifested in those regularities we see as the rules or laws of this universe and those more general rules or laws of the greater Creation which sometimes show themselves – but mainly during the Incarnation of the Son of God, including His Resurrection. And those more general rules are that – higher-level versions of the rules we see everyday.

The Incarnation and the Resurrection don't contradict the laws our universe. Rather do they reflect the greater possibilities which can arise from that manifestation of the abstract truths which God chose for Creation, creating and manifesting those truths from which He shaped stars and spiders and human babies.

There can be no contradictions between the rules and laws of this universe and the greater truths of Creation if God is the God of Jesus Christ. Enrichment as we see greater possibilities, yes. Contradiction, no.

God respects His Creation but not in the way of a player respecting the game he has chosen to participate in. God respects His Creation in the way of a Creator who has made the board, the pieces of the game, the rules of the game, and the players.



## 561 What is Sin?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=87>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/04/05.]

Many Christians throughout history have insisted on seeing imputable guilt behind all the sins for which we are responsible. This seems wrong to me. You can be responsible for a situation, say the self-destructively rebellious state of a teenager, though you might well be free of guilt in a criminal or moral sense. Being responsible, you can incur criminal or moral guilt by not doing what you should to help that teenager, imposing controls or counseling him or getting him to a doctor or whatever. But responsibility doesn't imply you, or some mythical ancestor, caused the situation. It does likely mean that you, in some sense, share or shared that state with that teenager.

Your responsibility can come from your state and your relationships to the states of other human beings (such as that rebellious teenager) or the property you hold as a steward in God's world or political responsibilities entrusted to you as a steward. Culpability isn't necessary for responsibility. Advocates of *Original Sin* were right that we're responsible for our sinful states but they were wrong in speculating how we got into these states. They were wrong because of their felt need to find some sort of culpability as causing our responsibility. They took literalistically their own analogies drawn from human legal systems. They still could have seen they were wrong if they'd known more about the origin of the human race – it's hard to imagine an apish creature from the Neolithic Era making a decision that would bind the entire human race for all time. And yet we are bound by our responsibility for who and what we are – our inborn traits as well as the vices and virtues we turn those traits into and most certainly our conscious sins of commission or omission. After all, it's what and who we are and our

only way of getting rid of that responsibility in this mortal life is to stop being us.

Maybe my psychological make-up is unusual, but I know that I'm me and I feel responsible for being me with all my weaknesses and faults, with my history of deliberate sins and accidental misdeeds. I feel the more responsible when I look forward to the possibility of becoming a Christ-like man, God willing, after my resurrection. I disagree with the supposedly more traditional thinkers who would say I'm culpable in the sense of justice for my misdirected or mistimed desires. I disagree far more strongly with the supposedly more modern thinkers who feel we're only responsible for sins in the first-degree – those we commit with full intention and after months of planning.

The error of those supposedly more traditional thinkers did have a very serious result. The view of man that underlay their confusion of responsibility and guilt (in the sense used in a modern court of justice) fed into the modern idea that I am the conscious stream of mental and emotional activity that is most readily identified with someone I label uncertainly as 'I'. That is perhaps the continuity between the supposedly traditional and supposedly modern thinkers: that view of man as being that conscious stream of mental and emotional activity evolved into the modern, liberal idea that man is an autonomous agent. If man is responsible for his state of being, then man can surely change that state even to selecting to become a woman under the scalpel of a butcher. In any case, a man can act more modestly than seeking a change in his sex. He can enter the marketplaces to select a seemingly more pious life-style in the same way he selects a toothpaste. In fact, our very ways of developing and marketing toothpastes and then selecting them when we shift roles from marketing-widget to consumer-widget will itself eliminate a vast array of life-styles which might well be more human and humane than those available to us in the marketplaces. Certainly, it will eliminate God-centered life-styles.

Along these lines, I agree with the farmer, poet, and essayist Wendell Berry that we'd solve our ecological problems if we found ourselves moral ways to make our livings. More generally, we'd solve a host of ecological and political and social problems – perhaps even some literary and intellectual problems – if we found moral ways to organize our lives and our communities. This isn't to claim the possibilities of perfection on the part of old-fashioned families or traditional communities. We are what we are and will commit sins in those institutions just as we commit them in the

marketplaces – though the number and severity of sins might well lessen without Hollywood to teach us ways of evil. Those old-fashioned families and traditional communities aren't perfect but they are more human, in scale and in the forms of relationships between individuals.

I've been struggling with this topic for years, feeling one with the likes of St. Augustine – and Jesus – in feeling myself responsible even for the desires pushed into my head by perverse rock-and-roll lyrics, by viewings of too many centerfolds when I was young, by watching perverse movies of the sort to which even young children are nowadays exposed. I confess my age when I admit that, as a young man, I went with a group to an X-rated cinema in a seedy part of Springfield, MA to see a movie (*Flesh Gordon*) far milder than some shown on TV nowadays.

Others may have incurred conscious guilt for providing this trash – in the sense of morality if not a court of justice – but my responsibility remains. And 'me' certainly is disordered in some important ways, because of my inborn traits and also because I reflect some of the disorder of a strange society – a physically prosperous and technically advanced society populated by the barbaric children Ortega y Gasset described so well in *The Revolt of the Masses*, an often misunderstood and misread book – but that's another topic.

Still, I've found digression to be necessary in exploring paths that might lead to a better 'me' and might allow me to describe futures which might be more desirable than the ones to which we're headed as we follow our exploiters deeper into the alleys of marketplace cities bereft of sacred spaces or even natural spaces. I digress away from the paths those exploiters would prefer me to travel. Sometimes I find a better path, or at least one more interesting. Digression is probably non-productive if someone doesn't have the odd combination of ability to follow a complex line of thought and also to shift rapidly between lines of thought which is part and parcel of creative thought in philosophy or literature or physics. Digression is part of who I am and it leads to me failing to follow certain real-world responsibilities, especially in our bureaucratically stifled world but it also leads to the possibilities of new insights and also prophetic warnings based on known truths.

Let me try this tack: I don't equate myself to the conscious stream of mental activity which commits sins or crimes deliberately. This deliberation implies awareness though not necessarily full intent or any sort of planning. Perhaps I see this more clearly than many just because I'm aware of how

rapidly my stream of mental activity can shift to a new rut.

As for the Biblical position on this issue? I seem to be only following Jesus in thinking myself to be responsible for the glandular flows and visual systems in my brain that lead me to look wrongly at a woman, not just responsible for going over and talking to her while plotting to seduce her. Those glandular flows are also me even if I don't act out their urgings. Those flows must also be brought into my Christ-like state if I'm to be saved, if I'm to share the Life of God for time without end.

## 562 The Importance of the Liturgical Calendar

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=72>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/04/11.]

In this modern age, we maintain constant levels of activity and production by smoothing out or eliminating the effect of seasons. In doing this, we create various disturbances in our bodies and minds and souls – but we assume our unnatural manipulation of our schedules and life-styles to be natural just because it’s what we’re born into. As a consequence, those who have natural rhythms to their energy and alertness levels will think there is something wrong with them when they feel lethargic and a little depressed during winter. In most cases, the lower energy and alertness levels are part of our natural rhythms. Our ancestors, from whom we receive our traits and tendencies, had shorter workdays in winter and spent much time in low-key activities, such as repairing tools or clothing, and also resting or telling tales or teaching and playing with children. Farmers who follow traditional ways, such as the farmer-poet Wendell Berry will follow this sort of a schedule, lessening their physical activities in winter, perhaps to pick up a pen to write poetry or a Bible to refresh their soul.

The liturgical calendar is not something imposed upon us. Our modern schedules are imposed on us because we’ve built societies and economies which require constant high levels of activity or else they will collapse. We have not the option of satisfying our needs and some additional desires and then settling into a period of leisure, which would include not only rest but also important activities requiring lower energy or energy of a different sort – catching up on all those good books we’ve been meaning to read or making music with the children or making wooden toys for the

grandchildren. Maybe even praying or reading the Bible.

The liturgical calendar of Sacramental Christianity moves along with the natural rhythms of life, as did the calendars of ancient peoples, Hebraic and pagan, and also the calendars of modern Jews.

The calendar begins with Advent, early winter in the northern hemisphere where the Christian Church first spread from Israel. The days are short and still have not reached their shortest length. Our ancestors would have been retreating from their active outdoor lives though they would have been chopping firewood and caring for animals and maybe doing routine maintenance work on houses and barns and tools and shops. Advent is intended to be a time when we contemplate our situation and remember why it is that we need a Savior. We should live a mildly repentant life, not so extreme as Lent, and we should wait for our Savior. We certainly shouldn't take it as a period of hectic shopping nor as a period of excessive eating or drinking.

The Savior is born and we move against the cycles of nature, rejoicing and given praise to the Lord in human flesh, near the time when the days are shortest, when the sun might be threatening to leave us. We begin our celebration on the night that God and man united in the baby Jesus, conceived of the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary. We share joy and wonder and perhaps even some fear along with Mary and Joseph. No one knows when Jesus was born but the Church in early centuries chose to celebrate this birth near the winter solstice, near the time when pagans gathered to feast and worship the gods who might bring back the Sun who seemed to be disappearing. This is good and not a matter of criticism. Unlike those who see nature as an enemy to be conquered and enslaved to serve human desires, Sacramental Christians know that God Himself is present in nature – a choice He freely made in becoming our Creator. We rejoice and feast and celebrate for ten days and then return to the rhythms natural to human nature. Yes, we celebrate in parallel to the pagans for they were right to plead with the great powers to save them by preventing the Sun from dying. We plead with God to save us from our own deaths.

We move through ordinary time for a month or slightly more and then, anticipating the time that life returns to nature and eternal life is offered to men, we acknowledge that ashes we are and to ashes we will return. We enter the desert with the Lord for 40 days, fasting and praying and giving alms. Unlike the Lord, our journey is eased by those oases, Sundays, which we enter to joyfully praise God, Father and Son and Holy Spirit.

We end the journey to enter Jerusalem spreading palms and cloaks before the hooves of the Lord's humble donkey. We're in the Holy City of David, but all is not well. Jesus Christ will gather His Apostles together to humbly wash their feet and then to give them the gift of the Eucharist in the way He celebrated the Passover feast with them. They don't understand but the Lord Himself will soon enough be the Paschal lamb, He who is offered up for the redemption of the world. Nor do they understand that they had just been ordained as the first priests of a Church not yet founded. Jesus leads the Apostles out to the Garden of Gethsemane and begins to pray so hard that His blood oozes out His pores. Meanwhile, the Apostles have already betrayed their Lord and have already cast dishonor upon their priesthood. Filled with wine and food, they have fallen asleep.

Judas Iscariot enters the Garden with a company of soldiers sent by the High Priest. Identifying the Lamb with a kiss, Judas turns His Master over to those soldiers and Jesus begins His ordeal. At this point, most Christian traditions watch Jesus from a distance, partly to acknowledge our cowardice and confusion and partly out of respect for the Lord and also for human nature. Our modern obsession with the details of the sufferings of our Lord is one with our perverse taste in entertainment. We're but one step away from funeral orations that give gory details of Grandma's death agonies. I'll say no more here as Jesus is dying in the sight of His mother, some other women loyal to Him, and the Beloved Disciple.

Just before the death of our Lord, we wonder at one of His most important acts, one ignored by many who claim He didn't found His Church.

When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. John 19:26-27

The priests have a Church to serve but it's the Virgin Mary who's the first Christian, both mother and older sister first to the Apostles and then to all who accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Even as Jesus dies, we're left in the disturbing position of having much to rejoice over.

Church or no Church, Holy Friday is another sorrowful day. We fast to greater standards, as we did on Ash Wednesday. No Mass is celebrated, no Eucharistic Rite, for the Lord Himself seems to be gone. Yet, we attend

the Supper of the Lord's Passion and receive Holy Communion. Hoping. Waiting.

And Holy Saturday comes. We're still hoping and still waiting. So far as we know, the Lord Jesus Christ lies in His tomb. It's all over. All the promise of His mission, all the messianic dreams, seem lost. Yet, we hope. We wait.

The day ends. Darkness comes upon us and surely this is the end. We know that God has abandoned us... But no, we're gathered with all the others who fasted and prayed and gave alms, all the others who were too weak in faith to remain with the Lord as He prayed to the Father, too concerned about satisfying the spirit of our age to even stand at the foot of His cross. We're gathered for the Easter Vigil Mass and suddenly a voice begins to speak:

Dear friends in Christ,  
on this most holy night,  
when our Lord Jesus Christ passed from death to life,  
the Church invites her children throughout the world  
to come together in vigil and prayer.

Can it be true that Jesus has risen from the grave? Is our hope fulfilled? How can that be? Didn't we see as much suffering on the news reports as we saw during the darkest days of Lent? Don't we still feel weak and disordered, longing to be true friends and children of God and yet not really wanting that until we've tasted more sinful pleasures? Secretly we pray with the ever insightful St. Augustine: Lord, let me be continent, but not just yet.

But maybe the risen Christ is at work in us?

Maybe. We can only hope.

And we can peer between the bodies of our fellow-worshippers to see a priest from the line of Melchizedek, a man who received his holy orders down through the ages from the Apostles themselves, and he's blessing a large candle which he then lights. Soon, a deacon and altar servers are helping the priest to spread the light through the church, lighting the candle of one weak and frail man who then lights the candle of the neighboring weak and frail woman. A voice rings out singing the Exultet.

Rejoice, heavenly powers! Sing, choirs of angels!  
Exult, all creation around God's throne!

Jesus Christ, our King is risen!  
 Sound the trumpet of salvation!

We're proclaiming joy for the Lord has risen from His grave. Death has been conquered and we can share in the victory so easily. All we have to do is to turn to the Lord, pay attention to Jesus Christ and listen to His word, receive His Body and His Blood in Holy Communion. He'll do the rest. He'll supply the strength and the faith which is beyond our capacity.

We go to our rest that night, joyful for all that God has given us and we wake up to Easter Sunday. We enter the Easter Octave, celebrating the Resurrection of the Lord in a more intense way through the Second Sunday in Easter. Those of us who pray the Liturgy of the Hours will use the Easter Sunday prayers through that Second Sunday. Yet, Easter goes on past the Octave for five more Sundays and all the weekdays in between. Near the end of that period, we'll watch in wonder as the Lord Jesus Christ ascends to His Father. How sad we mortals are to lose Him and yet we're reminded that the Lord will send us an Advocate, a divine Helper. On sixth Sunday of Easter, we'll hear that promise in the reading from the Gospel of St. John [John 14:23–29:

Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; yet the word you hear is not mine but that of the Father who sent me.

I have told you this while I am with you. The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. . .

On the Eighth Sunday of Easter, Pentecost Sunday, we stand with the Apostles and many other disciples. Along with them, we receive the Holy Spirit.

We now enter an extended period of ordinary time punctuated by a few major Solemnities. Is it coincidence that this extended period of ordinary time occurs during the long growing season in the northern hemisphere where Christianity first took hold? Of course not. God demands a share of our time and our wealth but He wishes us to be able to make a living and to take care of our day-to-day responsibilities. After all, we've got to

grow grain and grapes that we might have some for offering up in sacrifice in the Eucharistic Rite. The world belongs to its Creator and the rhythms of the world are ones He established for us and for the other creatures. We violate those rhythms, those patterns of the seasons, at great risk to our minds and souls and moral natures. We have our role to play in our own salvation and that role is one in a world where God's grace doesn't destroy nature and its rhythms but rather perfects it.

## 563 What is Redemption?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=90>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/04/26.]

We know Christ redeemed us, but what does that mean? The usual answer is: Christ paid for our sins on the cross including our original sin. A gruesome scene arises in the imagination of Christ being tormented by every sin I ever committed but most of all by the original sin we're all said to bear because of the unfaithfulness of our ancestors Adam and Eve.

We clearly are in states of sin or – more generally – disorder. We clearly need to be rescued from this state if we are to be saved by any definition. But what is sin? We've mucked up the concept by reading Biblical stories in the light of a modern idea of sin as being very similar to culpable crime in the sense of modern jurisprudence but that is arguably a misinterpretation we inherited from some of the Fathers of Christianity, many of them lawyers. We need to repent and do what we can to let God cleanse us of the effects of specific transgressions, but that only takes us to the foot of cross. A bridge into eternal life seems to be anchored there, but what is that bridge? It takes us from death into eternal life, but what does that really mean?

The concept of redemption might be our key to understanding salvation, but we have to first remember that the claim that our natural and moral sufferings must be due to some great primeval transgression – the rebellion of our ancestors Adam and Eve – was a human speculation of early Christian thinkers. This assumption might be due to the legalistic nature of just and admirable societies. Everyone could see that terrible things happened if punishment were not tied strictly to the crime. Surely, we'd not have to suffer disease and famine, war and poverty, unless we'd done something for which we were morally culpable. And the redemptive act of our Lord Jesus Christ becomes an act of atonement for specific crimes, including the Big

One committed by Adam and Eve.

Now we know more about our ancestors, we know that those knuckle-draggers couldn't have possibly committed any act of rebellion of the sorts which could shake the spiritual and metaphysical foundations of this world. In fact, I don't think Caligula, Hitler, and Charles Manson could combine to do such – the Creator and His work are a bit sturdier than that. A more plausible reading of the book of Genesis indicates its Hebraic authors were telling us that the awakening from a state of animal sin into a state of human, self-aware sin brings both the culpability for our misdeeds and also the possibility of a struggle towards a better fate than life in a paradise which is such only to animalistic men and women. Eden was not remotely like Heaven – Adam and Eve visited with God but didn't live in a true or constant awareness of His Presence. They weren't His companions in the same way that the resurrected will be.

We also know that most of those knuckle-draggers and all their human ancestors have endured some serious suffering if only the trauma of a normal birth. It would seem that God created a world in which disease and famine, war and poverty are disturbingly natural. We are what we are, apes with weak and frail moral natures, and we are that by the will of the Creator.

The Lord Jesus Christ redeemed us by His death on the cross, but from what did He redeem us? Let's start by asking: What does the Bible say about redemption? One entire book of the Old Testament, though short, is devoted to redemption – the book of Ruth. Remarkably, Ruth – though needing redemption – is one of the most admirable characters in the Bible. She's not a criminal. She's not a fallen woman in the way of the Israelites (and the Jews and Christians to follow) – see the prophet Hosea though many books of the Old Testament speak of various forms of idolatry as prostitution.

Ruth is a good woman who sacrifices much to take care of her mother-in-law after Ruth's husband has died. The two women return to Judah and, then, Boaz, a relative of Ruth's husband, comes to admire her, redeeming the land of Ruth's husband – and also Ruth and her mother-in-law. Those laws of Israel which led to this redemption are interesting but not of issue here, except to note that they had nothing to do with redeeming criminals. Ruth is redeemed from a bad situation which was not her responsibility. In her case, she was in that particular bad situation because of her moral courage, her faithfulness to her mother-in-law.

This opens the possibility that Christ redeemed us from a situation

which isn't our fault. This doesn't mean I deny we're sinners. I try, and usually fail, to confess at least once a month and, while I sometimes struggle to come up with many specific sins – being a spiritual neophyte – I do have a strong sense of my character defects and general tendency towards various sinful behaviors and attitudes. While I feel a responsibility to do what I can to correct those problems, or rather – to respond properly as God corrects those problems, I don't think those problems are what keep me from salvation. By this I mean that if I were to correct those problems, I would be some sort of baptized virtuous pagan, still headed towards the grave. Moreover – but this is an idea difficult to state in terms of language distorted to the needs of modern liberal individualism: we are responsible for who we are even though it was God who made us. I might well be trying to deal with the proper way to say that over the remaining years of my life.

This we know:

Christ redeemed us from death, a death which is our natural fate in the world created by God and created in this particular form.

Christ suffered as He did, freely and out of love for us, to offer us a bridge to eternal life, to help us escape the fate that He and His Father and Their Spirit had ordained for us when they created this particular world. We should remember that we are embedded in this world in the deepest possible way – we're not characters just passing through this world the way an actor passes across a stage. We're made of the stuff which is the stuff of this world and we're shaped by our responses to this world, especially our responses to our fellow human beings. We're also shaped by our responses more directly to God, but I'll leave that aside in this entry.

There are many Christians, including Luther and his followers, who've had the intuition that we can't do anything to save ourselves, but they missed the target completely in trying to understand why this is so. We are called to works by God and we should offer up works in gratitude just for our mortal lives, but we can't earn salvation just because a righteous man is still a member of a unique species of ape – a mortal creature by his very nature. The point that Luther missed, but St. Augustine saw, is that it's very unlikely but possible that an ordinary man could escape the chains of sin. It's even more likely when we talk specifically about women with strong maternal instincts – there are many who've sacrificed themselves and

poured out love in the way of the Virgin Mary herself. The Virgin Mary had a sort of guarantee of sinlessness but that came because she had a share of divine life from her very conception. Her immaculate conception was not a scouring of original sin as much as it was a promise of a purer and truer sort of life; God would watch over her in a special way.

It isn't pious to define Mary's uniqueness in terms of her freedom from sin, it's a sign that we're not fully free of the errors of those labeled as white sepulchers by the Lord Jesus Christ. It was the indwelling of God that made Mary immaculate in human terms. But Mary's unique path of salvation raises a big question. Why it was that the Son of God had to suffer so to offer us eternal life as His companions? Couldn't God have made us suited to that greater life from our conception as He did to the Mother of God, Mary who bore Christ in her holy womb? It's not likely that there is an explanation to be built as if a mathematical proof. Most attempts at explanations, even those by great theologians and saints, have sadly compromised God's all-powerfulness. Some have proposed atonement theories which, in the manner of a Deist, bind God to rules which are somehow greater than the Almighty. Some have proposed semi-manichaeistic theologies in which fallen angels are somehow powerful enough to take things away from God.

Read carefully this hard truth:

If God is all-powerful and all-knowing, then the world was created for the purpose of Christ rescuing us by His suffering, death on the cross, and resurrection.

This is clearly a falsehood if God is all-powerful and all-knowing:

God created a world inhabited by men who were truly God-centered and filled with grace. Those men fell and then God had to scramble for a way to save them.

Moreover, God in His chosen role of Creator is bound only by truths which He created, that is, truths manifested in Creation. The Son of God was not bound to atone for our sins because of some transcendental rule of justice which binds even God. Still, even the speculation of atonement, when developed by a master like St. Anselm, seemed to claim that Christ's death on the cross was an improvised method of saving men who fell despite God's best efforts.

Rather than starting from some abstract truths to explain Christ's death on the cross, we should look for a true story, a morally ordered narrative. I think it's hard for us to see just because we modern liberal creatures have so much trouble seeing the moral purposefulness which is inherent in the very telling of a story, especially that giant story which God is telling – His world. Rather than seeing the world as being morally well-ordered, though that order is fully visible only to God, we tend to see chaos which can only be disciplined by the proper political policies and the proper forms of economic organization.

I've said elsewhere that we're products of this world and wouldn't have been us if God had chosen to make a better world with better creatures. I won't argue this in detail here but think of it this way: we're not just processors of experiences but rather are shaped by those particular experiences and the memories they leave in us. There's more to it than this but the words are hard to find. I struggle to form a coherent concept in my mind, knowing from experience the error of those who believe a human language is transparent and capable of expressing all truths. The language we modern Christians inherited from our liberal ancestors isn't adequate for speaking the truths of God nor those of God's Creation. Our language isn't adequate for theology or philosophy or science. Our language has been reshaped so that it keeps our minds from dealing with the truths of human nature and of our relationship to Creation and of our relationship to our Creator. Our language is appropriate for textbook learning and for justifying ourselves in court.

Our ideas of sin and redemption, even those of Christian theologians who read the Fathers, are shaped by the needs of our modern bureaucratic systems including our systems of jurisprudence. There's much good in those systems, however much we deformed them under the delusion that our major goal is to be safe and comfortable. Even when we imagine those systems in their better forms, their concepts don't match up with Biblical ideas of crime/sin or of redemption, nor do they allow us to readily move towards concepts which can handle the modern empirical knowledge about God's Creation – genes and evolution and matter/energy which are frozen forms of some strange stuff which we can't even yet describe mathematically.

So we must move on from a conceptual framework which is near collapse. This is one of the reasons for young people drifting away from Christianity. They don't have well-formed minds because of their upbringing, but they have normal raw intelligence and – at some level – they often sus-

pect they're being taught untruths about some matters in their Christian instruction. Their suspicions are verified every time they see a TV documentary about the evolution of man and those suspicions are reinforced by the ideologically distorted versions of evolution, of science and mathematics and all other subjects, which they hear in the public-school classrooms. What happens in modern classrooms is little different from what happened in the classrooms of public schools in those Lutheran immigrant communities in O. E. Rolvaag's classic novel, *Peder Victorious*, where thoughts of God were systematically replaced by thoughts of Abraham Lincoln. Now, the idea of a saint is being replaced by the image of a violent ape who's incapable of controlling his sexual urges.

The problem is still worse than that in the sense that evolutionary theories free of ideological distortions are still in conflict with Christian speculations about human nature and even about God's actions as Creator. The Catholic Church and several main-line Protestant churches endorse the teaching of evolution in the school systems but apparently neither the theologians nor the spiritual leaders realize that their views of human nature and of sin and of redemption are not consistent with evolution but are rather consistent with the anti-evolutionary teachings of the so-called Fundamentalists. This is easily seen by an intelligent reading of *The City of God* by St. Augustine of Hippo and also other similar works of the Fathers of the Church. Their knowledge of science and history was such that they interpreted the story of Adam and Eve in a way similar to the interpretation of the modern-day Biblical Literalists.<sup>1</sup> Those interpretations were plausible in terms of their empirical knowledge and also their general outlook which was biased greatly towards interpreting the Creator in terms of human systems of justice. Whatever the merits of the great moral theologians of recent centuries, few have seen the need to update the anthropological theories which underly Christian moral teachings.

Those teachings are no longer plausible because our view of God the Creator doesn't allow us to restrict Him to that role of a human-style Judge.

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<sup>1</sup>As I've noted elsewhere, the situation is worse when we read *The City of God* with a little alertness and intelligence. St. Augustine considered the possibility that the human race had risen from a lower race, rejected it, and went on to what is now considered the only possible understanding of the story of Adam and Eve. If he had had the courage to suggest human beings were fully members of the animal kingdom and had emerged from a non-human species, could he have developed or supported the theory of original sin? I think not.

Our empirical knowledge has not only shown us a vast universe, without a Heaven or Hell, it has also forced us to see time and space as creatures – an insight also found in the letters of St. Paul. We have expanded our views of the nature of infinity and eternity, yet theology and philosophy students are taught ‘proofs’ of God’s existence which depend upon invalid understandings of infinity which the Fathers took from the pre-Christian Greeks.

The bones found in the sands of Africa are not to be feared and they’re not to be denied. They’re empirical facts from God’s world. They’re evidence of past chapters of the story which the Almighty is telling.

And so I return to my claim that our sins, while important, are a lesser matter than our natures. We were first shaped by God as members of a certain species of ape, shaped in such a way that we could conjecture the existence of a Creator and even hear His word. This is all within the context of our ability to hold the memories and develop the concepts which allow us to tell true stories, morally-ordered narratives. The Son of God took on a human nature and came to offer us His friendship. This is to say that, as a true man, He was able to perceive His environments in such a way that He could imagine a plausible version of the story His Father is telling – the world. And the Son suffered, died, and rose from the grave to conquer death for our sakes, but also for the sake of God. The instant before His conception in the holy womb of Mary, the Son understood the story fully – including the need for Him to learn discipline as a man, to suffer, die, and rise from the grave. At some time during His development as a human being, He was able to see and understand the story which is the world well enough that His mission began.

The rest of us can develop to a state where we can also see and understand a plausible version of God’s story, but our story is far from complete and most certainly doesn’t include an awareness that we are God. In fact, our version of that story should include an awareness of our own mortality, of the giftedness and contingent nature of our existence even from one second to the next. Death is the fate of all mortal animals which have evolved on earth. Modern physics teaches us that it is nearly certain that some sort of death is the fate of the universe as a whole. It might be a great implosion or it might be a whimper in which all fades away to a state of absolute quiet. But we’re mortal and so is our universe. Creaturely existence is a gift from one second to the next.

Our Creator made us this way. And the Father sent the Son to suffer,

die, and rise from the grave to save those who belong to the Son. And He knew this outside of time and space. Given God's omniscience and all-powerfulness, it's not wrong to say that He created the universe in order that our Lord Jesus Christ might die on the cross. His death in human flesh, and ours, weren't brought upon us by the rebellious ancestors of mankind. We aren't capable of surprising God, aren't capable of forcing Him to change His plans. Jesus redeemed us from the death which He, along with His Father and their Spirit, had given us in first giving us mortal life.

And, yet, we have too restricted an idea of sin, certainly of responsibility. If we were created mortal, we are yet responsible for that just because that is part of our nature. We are as responsible for our mortality as we are for our thoughts and our actions. It's part of us and we can't deny responsibility without denying ourselves just as we can't deny our responsibility for seeking the easy way because that also is part of the nature of an animal which has to conserve energy for the times when it's really needed. But responsibility is not culpability and sin is far more than those acts or attitudes or thoughts for which we would be responsible by the rules of a human system of justice.

It's possible I may yet conclude that a man's willingness to take responsibility for his own self as created by God is one of the signs that he is on his way to becoming a true person, a Christ-like human being.

We are crippled in thinking these matters through by the great reshaping of modern languages to suit the needs of the liberal marketplaces, commercial and political. And judicial as well.

# 564 Christian Misuse of the Concept of ‘Person’

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=87>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/08/16.]

Trinitarian Christians believe this of Jesus Christ:

He was true God and true man. He was the Son of God, true God and true man in one divine Person.

We modern human beings have created a problem. The term ‘person’ in traditional Christian thought was defined vaguely but constrained by our need to speak our beliefs about Jesus Christ. We now claim that each human being is a person at conception. Before confusing ourselves and our children, we Christians should ask ourselves:

Was Jesus of Nazareth a human person at conception?

If we say, “Yes,” we cast into doubt our belief that He was a divine Person. If we say, “No,” while saying all the rest of us are human persons at conception, then we deny that the Lord Jesus Christ is true man. We deny He is truly one of us and we cast into doubt the reality of our salvation.

Some will counter it’s important to have a way of defining a human person as having from conception a special dignity. Some will say we need a way to speak of human beings as being exceptional, set apart from other species in the animal kingdom. We need to fight all those who would abort babies and would clone human beings. In a simple but accurate sentence:

We need a way to argue against the powerful trend in the modern West to cast aside Christian beliefs and to use defenseless human beings as means to the ends of the powerful.

This is true, but when we speak as if we can demonstrate, or assume, the absolute value of human life within the realm of natural reasoning, we degrade revealed truths into mere products of human natural reasoning. In my various writings, I've advocated that we be willing to re-examine many of the speculative beliefs of Christianity, even the belief that life after death is secured by an immortal soul. We should be willing to creatively analyze modern empirical knowledge by use of disciplined human reasoning. Those processes are one process of updating our Christian understanding of Creation rather than being a 'holy' process and a 'profane' process.

But there are truths which Christians must defend, even unto martyrdom:

- The Almighty is Father and Son and Holy Spirit, three Persons in one God; and
- Our Lord Jesus Christ is the incarnate Son of God, who took up a human nature, becoming true man while remaining true God.

We need a word to mean what 'person' means in the traditional creeds of Christianity and it's pure silliness to use 'person' in the modern sense for supposedly practical reasons. In theory, we could invent a new word to mean what 'person' once meant but it's more likely that a continued corruption of that so-important word will be a factor in the ongoing erosion of Christian belief even in the minds and hearts of those who pray and attend worship service faithfully. We are all in danger of becoming Unitarians of some sort.

# 565 Why are Human Beings of Greater Worth than Chimpanzees or Rattlesnakes?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=88>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/08/17.]

In Chapter 564, *Christian Misuse of the Term 'Person'*, I spoke of the need for Christians to give higher priority to revealed truths even at the cost of eliminating some arguments which seem of practical value in protecting human life. That leaves open the question given in the title of this entry. Why, indeed, is human life of greater worth than the lives of other sorts of biological creatures?

Let me seemingly divert to a question which turns out to be the same:

Why did Jesus Christ, the Son of God, accept baptism?

Surely, He didn't need to be baptized. He bore our sins but was Himself free of all sin. The second antiphon for the Morning Prayer, (Liturgy of the Hours – modern Roman Catholic version) on the *Solemnity of the Baptism of the Lord* tells us what occurred when the sinless Lord of Creation entered those waters to be baptized by one of His own creatures:

Springs of water were made holy as Christ revealed his glory to the world. Draw water from the fountain of the Savior, for Christ our God has hallowed all creation.

Water is good in its natural qualities. It refreshes and cleans. It's all-important to life on earth because it irrigates so effectively, bringing in nutrients and carrying away wastes.

It's fitting that the Lord chose such a substance to play a role in baptism, a rite in which we're cleansed as we move towards salvation. But we must remember that water as a natural substance isn't the source of the grace which can lead us to salvation. That grace is in the waters of baptism, when united with the proper words – I baptize you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit – because that grace flows **out** of the Lord Jesus Christ and **into** the waters of the world and that flow of grace began when the Son of God let His human body be baptized with water.

Human beings, in and of themselves, are a particular species of physical animal. In a moral sense, we're not so high above our fellow-animals as some would think. For example, we have our instincts which make us reluctant to kill other human beings but wolves have stronger instincts against killing members of their own species. (See *On Killing* by Lt. Col. Dave Grossman for a fascinating and frightening discussion of this entire issue.)

We men are morally superior to other animals in our ability to abstract from our moral instincts and to produce moral systems of thought and behavior. This general ability to think abstractly and the consequent ability to raise ourselves above our environments, vaguely seeing the possibilities of a Creation and a Creator, is probably the reason we can please God as companions, here and in the world of the resurrected. This is a fascinating, important, and terribly complex issue which arises in many efforts to make sense of Christian revelations and empirical knowledge as part of the same story. It's important that we Christians learn how to deal with this issue if we are to spread the Good News in this third millennium after the birth of our Lord, but that larger issue is the work of a number of lifetimes and beyond the scope of this posting.

Our Creator decided to offer us that chance to be His companions on the other side of our graves and that offer was made in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Human life became qualitatively different from other forms of life when the Son of God took on human flesh, being born as the defenseless human baby who was named Jesus by His mother, Mary, and His foster father, Joseph.

The Incarnation didn't happen because human flesh was already divinized and somehow worthy of providing the stuff of a creaturely nature for Christ. It was Christ who made human nature holy in some sense by becoming one of us, just as He made the waters of the earth holy and suitable for our baptisms.

Getting back to the value of human life, this is the situation of men

without Christ:

Men tend to place a high value, but far from any absolute value  
on the lives of other human beings.

The Romans of the Republic had a harsh moral and legal code, though they tended to follow those codes far more faithfully than modern Christians follow their professed beliefs. Historians have written that those Romans knew that abortion was murder but those hardheaded and virtuous pagans could handle hard cases without feeling the need to justify themselves. They were willing to break their own laws or moral beliefs if there seemed to be a strong practical reason to kill a baby in the womb or to kill a misbehaving adult who was a threat to the clan, but they didn't feel a need to turn a crime into a social good in order to justify themselves. I repeat:

Men tend to place a high value, but far from any absolute value  
on the lives of other human beings.

That is about as good as it gets on the basis of our natural instincts and our natural reasoning. We have to understand that the non-Christians of our society aren't being deliberately thickheaded or evil when they deny that all human life, all that might be human life when we don't know for sure, has absolute value. For centuries, we of the West have fooled ourselves. We collaborated with the modern Deists and other sorts of pagans in trying to keep what was good in the Christian West by deriving revealed truths through processes of natural reasoning increasingly tied to pre-modern and nonviable understandings of nature, of empirical reality. We continued to worship as Christians on Sunday while paganizing our political and social systems, even our basic moral codes, on the other six days of the week.

Some of the moral catastrophes of the modern West are due to the fact that we aren't a mixture of Christians and pagans as so many believe. We're a mixture of Christians and pagans and paganized Christians. The third group probably is dominant in the modern West in a variety of ways. Those paganized Christians deal poorly with the hard case morality which arises naturally in pagan societies and they feel the need to feel justified and saved in the way of their Christian ancestors. They can't just murder human babies in cases where there is some true hardship. They have to turn the murder of human babies into a social and moral good just because of

the moral attitudes they inherited from their Christian ancestors, attitudes now severed from Christian belief. Now, we have some more honest sorts of pagans, not necessarily of the virtuous sort, who bluntly deny any absolute moral rules and claim the right to use one human being as means to meet the ends or needs of another human being.

We got to this point because so many well-intentioned Christians joined in the efforts modern pagan thinkers to retain the moral beliefs of Christianity while getting rid of the Person of Christ. The absoluteness of Christian morality which comes from the Incarnation was dangerously and weakly justified on natural grounds and – again – those natural grounds are drawn from pre-modern understandings of empirical reality.

The inevitable has happened. Nature herself doesn't give us any reason to believe human beings are so much different from other animals as we imagine. The fraudulent effort to turn some of the revealed truths of Christianity into products of natural human reasoning failed and those who see absolute value in human life now engage in ridiculous and childish arguments with those who are willing to see other human beings as means to their ends.

Human life has absolute value right from conception.  
Does not.  
It does.  
Does not.

It's time to start with the core of revealed truths and the huge and largely unorganized piles of modern empirical knowledge and first learn how to tell the story of Christ and His brethren in a way that makes sense of both. Once we have a plausible version of the story being told by God, the story which is our world, we can begin to live once more as Christians no matter the cost we have to pay to be true to our Savior. Then maybe we can return to the Christian vocation of spreading the Good News of Christ.

# 566 Visiting a Monastic Community

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=92>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/08/28.]

Seventeen years ago <sup>1</sup>, I'd made my break with the corporate world, forced by a bit of willful incompetence in my last position to be sure. Barely escaping bankruptcy because of a drop in real estate values, I'd moved up to Petersham, MA, renting a small apartment in an antique farmhouse owned by a young couple. I chose to rent that apartment because it was a 5 to 10 minute walk from there to the brother-sister Benedictine communities of St. Mary's Monastery and the Priory of St. Scholastica. I'd been visiting those communities on occasional weekends for a year or so.

After moving to Petersham, I participated in the prayer and worship of those Benedictine communities as a lay visitor. I attended Lauds some days (at 6:00AM or so), Vespers most days (at 6PM or so), and daily Mass often. I also attended Sunday Mass at St. Mary's rather than going to one of the parish churches in Athol – there was a mission church in Petersham with no resident priest and a limited Mass schedule.

When I had to leave Petersham, I fell away from the practice of my Catholic faith for nearly nine years. About five years ago, I began my slow return to practice of my faith and have now become very active in my parish.

A few years back, I returned for a visit to St. Mary's, attending Mass with a friend but that was more of a field trip and included a long hike through the Harvard University forest a little down the road from St.

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<sup>1</sup>As of the time this was written in 2007.

Mary's. I was too confident I remembered the trails and got us badly lost.

About a month ago, I went up with some other friends and had a very unusual experience. The Superior is a Visitor for the Subiaco Congregation of the Benedictines and goes to 'inspect' monasteries in various places around this globe but most of the monks stay put most of the time. After all, they even take a vow of stability. Yet, my friends and I arrived to find that all but one of the monks had left for a visit to a relatively new monastery of their congregation that was near Chicago. A parish priest came in and celebrated a very nice Mass but it was a regular new Mass in English. We'd gone up to see that new Mass celebrated with Gregorian chant in Latin. But we didn't give up. We returned for Vespers just about a week ago as I write. And we stayed for Compline.

Vespers or Evening Prayer (6PM for about 20 minutes) was a challenge because I'd been away from Latin long enough that the words in chanted psalms blurred into one long sound. By Compline or Night Prayer (8PM), I'd already adjusted so that I could follow along, chanting some of the psalm with the monks.

Between Vespers and Compline, we had some time to 'soak in the atmosphere' and I went for a walk with the superior, Fr. Anselm, an Englishman formed as a monk at Plusgarden Abbey in northern Scotland. When St. Mary's was first starting up, the Abbot and other monks at Plusgarden had generously stepped in to sponsor the new monastery and to help that institution get up and running. Fr. Anselm had come over to help Fr. Cyril, the founder of St. Mary's, and remained to try to keep the monastery going when Fr. Cyril was killed in a car crash while returning from giving a parish mission. Eventually, Fr. Bede, a Scotsman from Plusgarden joined St. Mary's as well. Now, that is – as of 2007, they have another three who are priests as well as being under permanent vows and two who are under permanent vows as brothers.

It was a wonderful time. A short period of peace, comparable to the most consoling times of prayer or worship. Even walking around, I felt the deep peace which comes from hours of prayer and worship each and every day. I was in a truly holy place. It's not that God is there and not in an ordinary Christian church. It's not that the monks are necessarily saints, though I suspect most of the monks I've known are well ahead of the pack in that regard. Some have been true friends of God in an unqualified way. Most certainly, it's not the case that you escape the world by entering a

monastery, though it can provide a temporary escape for those who visit for a day or a week.

The world follows monks into the cloister though a monastery does what it can to provide special insulation for those in the early stages of spiritual formation as monks. But the world follows men, and women, into their cloister, sometimes in an intense and painful way. Some monks and nuns are holy in a quiet way unrecognized by those outside their cloister and, undoubtedly, there have been some whose sanctity wasn't fully appreciated even by those in the same cloister. Others become renown for their sanctity and find themselves counseling special friends or even strangers who find their way to the cloister thinking a holy man or a holy woman will give them special words of wisdom or perhaps provide a direct channel to speak to God.

The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects.  
[James 5:16]

But monks part of this world of turmoil. Just like the rest of us. They don't pray because they're holy so much as they pray to become holy, but even a true holiness will bring no end to the troubles we endure in this vale of tears. The founder of St. Mary's, Fr. Cyril, radiated a peace so profound as to give the impression he had a foot in Heaven, but he'd had to persevere through some very hard times to gain that peace. And he had a sleeping disorder, which probably led to his fatal car accident. To the end, he was also bearing the troubles of all those who came to him for solace and counseling. They were many, apparently not all Catholic and not even all Christian. And I heard rumors they didn't keep to banker's hours when they visited Fr. Cyril.

I would recommend a visit to St. Mary's Monastery and the sister community of the Priory of St. Scholastica if you'd like to see liturgies done in the traditions of St. Benedict and would also like to feel a bit of the peace which can come when even mortal men and women devote their lives to prayer and worship. There may be some out there who would like to explore a vocation in a place of prayer which keeps to a very traditional practice of the Rule of St. Benedict without cultivating a reactionary or self-righteous spirit.

You can find more information for *St. Mary's Monastery* on the web at <http://stmarysmonastery.org> and for *Priory of St. Scholastica* on the web at <http://petershampriory.org>.

# 567 Praising God by Understanding His Creation

In my writings, I try to use the entire spectrum of human knowledge to construct what I call a worldview. In this worldview, I extend the Biblical perspective to view the entire universe of this age after Einstein as a narrative. God is telling a story in which a surprisingly important part takes place on an insignificant ball of dust circling a rather ordinary star which itself is part of a complex of galaxies streaming towards something called the Great Attractor, a gravitational center of a large group of groups of galaxies. And the story continues to grow and develop.

More importantly, when this narrative is seen as such, it's morally ordered, as all narratives are. Even when it comes to historical events which were far from well-determined, we can only tell the story of the modern British people by way of a Shakespearean 'fiction' that a nation was in formation, in a purposeful way, in those centuries after the conquest by the Normans, the Normans' bureaucratic rationalization of England and Wales, and the integration of Normans into the culture of the Angles. In the great play by the Bard, Henry V is seen as conscious of the larger movements of which he was part – and some participants in history have been surprisingly aware of the greater state of affairs. But it's not necessary that purpose be served consciously. It is necessary that we realize a mere recitation of facts under the pretense that there's no order in this world is meaningless and a sheer waste of time and effort. In any case, the world is a world, that is, it has a purpose revealed to us in the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ – though obscurely to our creaturely minds.

Theodicies, efforts to justify God by explaining why children suffer, are not the only symptoms of our modern spiritual illness. We also bring our own preconceptions to our thoughts which necessarily contain much in the

way of speculation – for example, speculation as to the way in which God will realize His promise to resurrect those who belong to His Son. Most of our preconceptions are traditional in the bad sense, that is, they embody outmoded empirical knowledge and no-longer plausible human speculations which corrupt the truth. They didn't corrupt the truth in the centuries when they seemed to truly reflect the contingent truths of Creation, but now our youth can see star maps which show no Heaven above us, cross-sections of the earth which show no Hell below us. Where is Heaven? Atheists can tell our children where Heaven isn't.

Why don't we consider it important to understand something about the Heaven which is somehow part of the same Creation as this universe? Why do we repeat ancient stories developed in the days when Heaven lay beyond the orbit of the moon? Why do we fill children's heads, and our own heads, with stories in which talking lions and magical rings are supposedly appropriate to the task of understanding the triune God and the incarnate Son of God? Why do we lead them to believe that black holes and genetic relationships between humans and gorillas can be ignored as if this were some sort of false Creation? Did God intend to create Middle-Earth and somehow the Almighty botched the job?

Our children know something about quantum strangeness and viruses and, consequently, know that the traditional stories to make sense of Christianity are lies in some way. Why do we consider folklore about angels and demons and immortal souls to be so important that we insist on teaching it to our children when science has constricted the possible domains of such entities to small and unimportant regions? Isn't the world that God actually created of some importance that we should learn to accept and even love it? It's not a sign of true piety or even mental or spiritual health to value pagan myths over the stories which could be built out of the materials of the world God chose to create. But we won't build those stories until we have the faith and the courage and the imagination to deal with empirical realities in light of Christian truths.

I've tried to purge myself of any preconceptions and most certainly those which rely on our ignorance about specific empirical questions. I don't rely on gaps in empirical knowledge, assuming that there's something called a 'soul' which will remain beyond scientific discovery and understanding – as one example. Consequently, it doesn't bother me that there is an increasingly complete list connecting types of human thoughts or feelings to bodily states or bodily actions. I find it interesting and not upsetting

that scientists have done brain-scans of human beings as they were having out-of-body experiences or near-death experiences. It turns out that those experiences are caused by disturbances to brain systems that regulate our sense of awareness of our own bodies, our sense of our own selves, our bodily location in time and space and the location of our hands and feet relative to our bodies. Those who believe we're born with some sort of immortal souls which can exist apart from our bodies should be seriously upset by that recent discovery that our sense of self is constructed in a manner loosely analogous to a computer simulation. More accurately, we're characters in a story and we develop along with that story.

I prefer to take the world as it presents itself and then to praise God for that world as well as to praise Him for His promises of salvation to those who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. Part of my way of praising God is to tell a human version of the story which is this world. I wish others would join in trying to tell this story in a way that respects modern empirical knowledge.

To my way of thinking, it's good, very good, that I live in an era when empirical knowledge has piled up, waiting for the story-telling efforts of those with courage and living imaginations. It's bad that few Christian leaders and thinkers even seem to be aware of the need for this sort of courage and imagination.

I praise God when I attend Mass and when I pray. I praise God when I help friends raise money to go on an overseas mission. Maybe I'll one day praise God by going on a mission to Jamaica or to the Appalachians or by participating in a mission to my own neighbors. I praise God by visiting some elderly shut-ins down the street – not even a painful duty since they can share their wisdom and stories, funny or interesting or both. I praise God when I try to make sense of mathematics or physics or evolutionary biology and to teach others that all of this is a story being told by the all-powerful God of Jesus Christ.

I'm unified in the sense that I don't have to drop one set of attitudes or beliefs when I leave Mass and go home to read a book on the evolution of the human brain. Undoubtedly, my understanding of Creation is incomplete and defective but I've done my best to honor and praise God in His freely chosen role of Creator as well as my best to honor and praise God in His transcendence.



## 568 Where is God?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=96>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/09/08.]

A seemingly silly question. Any child could tell you that God is in Heaven just as many pagans could have told you that Zeus is on Mt. Olympus. Actually, it's not clear that either the child or the pagan would have a well-formed idea or image corresponding to those words, but they would have their standard answers and that's not bad so long as those standard answers are those appropriate for a child not yet capable of understanding deeper answers and that's not bad for a pagan or anyone else so long as the standard answer is consistent with the overall views of a coherent culture.

In particular, a child or a pre-Einsteinian human being (yes, even Newton) will have a view of physical reality tied to naive perceptions of space and time and matter. Energy and fields were different in seeming magical to even the most rational of physicists prior to an understanding of the relationship between matter and energy and fields. Measuring instruments and precise mathematical equations can be instruments of superstition. Superstitions of a sort have in fact grown in modern times though having been with us always: we think to find some sort of 'theory of everything' not realizing that we would then be left with the difficult task of understanding the elements of any such theory.

To understand is to accept reality and to have a way of viewing it as a coherent whole. Modern physics, especially the cosmological models derived from Einstein's general theory of relativity, and modern mathematics, including geometries and logics and theories of randomness, have cast doubts upon the absoluteness or transcendental nature of any of our scientific or logical or mathematical truths. Time and space are not necessary, though they are necessary for the existence of life as we know it.

But, we all tend to think as if the necessary truths of our sort of existence are necessary truths in an absolute sense. If we wish to talk to God, we literalize that action in our imagination, thinking ourselves to be facing God and talking to Him as if He were a human companion. Of course, a Christian believes it's possible to speak with the Son of God in this way and we believe that Jesus Christ is true God as well as true man, but we quickly get ourselves into trouble this way because the Son of God is not only facing us in His human body but also inside of us, bringing us into being and energizing us each instant that we exist.

The God of Jesus Christ is present in this world of time and space. In fact, He's deeper inside of us than we ourselves can reach, as St. Augustine of Hippo pointed out. Going back into the Hebrew Testament, He is the God who declared His own name to be I-am, a name hard to understand because we are tempted to interpret it in terms of an unbalanced existentialist theology that disdains creaturely substance, but we are equally tempted to think that Moses was merely told that God has necessary being and is the only entity which is truly immortal. The Father of the Gods in the higher forms of paganism could have also claimed such as he sat on his throne.

Elijah learned that God is more a whisper than a clap of thunder, more a whisper than a wind or earthquake which can shatter rocks or mountains. He is most certainly far beyond a rock or mountain, except for the most limited of metaphoric statements. I can conjecture that God is quiet as a whisper because He is pure existence and isn't a pagan god of divine substance who yells out thunder and treads earthquakes. Thunder and earthquakes are His creatures. As is a whisper but the comparison of God to a whisper should make us stop and think. What sort of Being is the Creator if He can be compared to a whisper.

It was St. Thomas Aquinas who forged the language for speaking of God as His own Act-of-being and also the source of the acts-of-being of all the things or bits of space and time or even many (all?) of the truths of Creation. I've claimed elsewhere that ultimately there are only two sorts of knowledge: knowledge of God in His Triune Self and knowledge of Creation. The second sort of knowledge, of Creation, is really knowledge of God as Creator, knowledge of God in His contingent, free-will decisions. In a sense, we creatures in our pride or humility disappear except in our true natures as being objects of God's love.

So why does this all matter? And where is God?

Elijah gave us as good a hint as he could given the language and the

metaphors and the level of scientific knowledge and metaphysical speculation which was his cultural inheritance: God is a lot like a whisper. The Almighty is like a whisper. He's like a whisper because He underlies all that is. He is His own cause of being and also the cause of being of all that is not Him.

God's being is a totally different order of being than created being which is substance. We assume all being is substantial and have no good ways to talk about God or even about the acts-of-being, the divine acts of love, which are us as we come to be.

God is pure existence. God is His own Act-of-being, the Supreme Act-of-being. And He is the agent in the acts-of-being for all else that exists besides Him.

We can't deal with the concept of an order of being that is pure existence, an explosion of being which didn't begin and won't end. And so we tend to think of God as something of a Super-creature who occupies a particular point in time and space.

So, where is God? It's safest to say that God is everywhere because no thing and no region of time or space could exist but for God continually creating it by acts-of-being. And, yet, it's often hard for us to see God in ourselves, in our neighbor, in a poisonous snake, or in the humblest of weeds.

God is like a whisper. I have a little card printed by an outfit called *Hermitage Designs* which shows pine trees in the foreground, rugged mountains in the misty distance, and also has a printed message: Nothing in all Creation is so like God as silence.

But we know God is also present in words of praise or songs of praise we offer up to Him. He's present in Mozart's *Requiem Mass* and also in a dirge from the mountain folk of Appalachians. Can He possibly be present even at concerts of rap music? Was He with those numerous jazz and rock musicians who destroyed their bodies with heroin or alcohol? Was He in their music?

I fear too many, even too many devout believers, push this away. This isn't just an academic question. It isn't even a question for those who would push our theological and philosophical discourse forward, or perhaps pull it forward so that the Christian Good News can be ever fresh and ever stated in words understandable to the men in each age. The Gospel is always true but always needs to be restated in terms which make the most sense to each age.

This is primarily a spiritual question: Where is God? It's a question to ask when you're at the bedside of a child dying of leukemia and a question to ask when you have to start taking your mother for walks because she needs to walk to relieve the pain but she's likely to fall or to get lost no more than a few blocks from home.

It's too easy to say, "God is with that child and also with the parents and grandparents. He suffers along with them." It's too easy to say and that allows us to avoid the effort that would shift our attitudes and our ways of thought so that we can truly think of God, speak of God, act towards God, as He who truly is with that child in her suffering, with the parents in their suffering.

We should praise the God who's here with us at this very instant. We should pray to Him. We should sit quietly and let Him teach us how to think and pray along with Him. We should contemplate the mystery of God's Presence so that it becomes part of our very being, so that the pathways in our brain, the flows of hormones in our bodies, put themselves in rhythm with this God who is always with us and always in regions of our own beings that we can't even reach ourselves. We can fool ourselves but so long as we can catch ourselves occasionally speaking along with our skeptical age, so long as we catch ourselves thinking in ways that are inconsistent with God's all-powerfulness or His love for us and all that He has created, we've not completed that task.

That's the trick to much of this business of serving God, of centering our attention upon our Lord. We have to put in the time and effort to reshape our very bodies, our human beings, to His ways, to His truths, some of those truths being the more complete versions of the truths of this universe and some being truths which lie beyond beyond our most ambitious reach.

It takes an effort, not necessarily a strenuous effort, to re-shape our paganized minds so that we stop thinking of God in terms of a super-Zeus in a Heaven much like the top of Mt. Olympus. It takes an effort to learn how to speak in terms of a God who is beyond our comprehension. It takes an effort to think always of God being present even when we think our most evil thoughts. When that effort is no longer necessary, we'll have reached a higher state of blessedness.

## 569 Abstract Mathematics and the Real Presence

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=108>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/09/13.]

Christ is ever present in all that exists, along with His Father and their Spirit. Yet, the traditional Christian belief is that He becomes truly present in the consecrated bread and wine during a proper Eucharistic Rite. See John 6:53 for one of Christ's own rather blunt statements on the issue. Yet again, even many who claim to be Biblical Christians as well as most non-Christians, think it absurd that Catholics and Orthodox along with some other Christians believe Jesus Christ becomes truly present on the altar, His Body in the consecrated bread and His Blood in the consecrated wine. I'll try to show that the common sense philosophical beliefs that lead them to reject the words of Jesus Christ Himself aren't so common-sensical after all.

Yet, as a believer in the Real Presence, I know it's hard to accept that truth because of the inability of our minds to grasp any form of being but that of substance. And, yet, we regularly deal with truths which are not necessarily attached to substance in any way. Some of those truths, including some of those found in transfinite set theory, might be such that they can't be attached to substance as we know it. Then again, the human brain seems to be able to somehow reach such truths. (Transfinite set theory deals with various infinities, some of which are far, far larger than 'ordinary' infinity. It's interesting that St. Augustine of Hippo stated an intuition that there is at least one infinity far larger than the infinity of 1,2,3,... and that intuition came from his belief that God is far beyond even statements about infinity or eternity.)

In *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], I imaginatively followed the universe back through the ongoing expansion to reach the so-called Big Bang. I traveled through that point, unseen as yet even in the imaginations of mathematical physicists, to get to a new realm of created being. As we travel back in time, the observations of astronomers and the experimental results of particle physicists and the theories of theoretical physicists, tell us that matter and energy and fields begin to collapse towards a single form of being. For example, there was a time early in the expansion of our universe when the forms of energy generating weak nuclear force and electromagnetism were one type of energy. Go back further to times of higher density, when the universe was compressed into regions far smaller than a single atom in the current state of the universe, and other forms of energy as well as matter and fields might be plausibly conjectured to melt down into something as yet beyond explicit description.

I traveled back into that realm by assuming that this process of homogenization, of collapse into a single sort of physical entity, points back to a time when only the Primordial Universe existed. As I define *Primordial Universe*, it is a manifestation of the truths which God chose for Creation. God shaped this universe from the strange stuff of that Primordial Universe. In a way that we perhaps could never understand, this universe is embedded in that Primordial Universe. Manifested truths of the most glorious sort are all around us. We need to develop the right way to speak of the reality in its wholeness and not just of the concrete levels of reality which can be directly perceived, at least some parts of those concrete levels.

That journey back in time to the Primordial Universe is only a useful analogy provided by the universe. The true journey is into that richer form of being which is all of Creation, including the world of the resurrected.

We need to see the truth in the Thomistic claim:

Things are true;

I extended that claim:

Truths are thing-like.

The ability of a transfinite set theorist to conjecture infinities of different sizes and to understand how they relate to each other, the ability of certain mathematicians to develop abstract algebra a century before anyone could

guess it could be useful in physics (especially nuclear physics), the ability of other mathematicians to think in terms of geometries impossible in this particular universe, show us that we can see shadows of greater realities. In this, they provide us with an analogy to what happened when Jesus Christ Himself turned bread and wine into His own flesh and blood, to what happens when a Christian priest calls upon the Holy Spirit to turn the bread and wine on the altar into the flesh and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. A richer level of being into this universe makes itself known in this universe though we can see only a shadow where that richer being, or Being, presents itself to us.

We need ways to think about and speak of the processes by which human beings can deal with numbers far larger than the infinity of ordinary infinity. True it is that Cantor's original proof that the set of real numbers is larger than the infinite set of natural numbers (the non-negative integers) is so simply stated that it's often presented to sophisticated high school students. Still, how can such a thought register on a brain of flesh and blood, a brain small enough to fit in a human skull? From another angle: why is it that infinity can be reached by a reasoning process possible to a finite brain? Why are such concepts as infinity so accessible to forms of reasoning which can be used to extrapolate so easily from finite concepts by way of finite steps?

How was it that Cantor was able to prove that set of real numbers is larger than the infinite set of natural numbers? The symbols which we use for numbers in conjunction with the concept of mapping forced Cantor to realize that it was provably impossible to develop a map from natural numbers to real numbers. No matter what map you use, there are real numbers which aren't mapped. Cantor's proof is an instance of a shadow which the richer being of the Primordial Universe casts upon our universe.

Our minds can somehow sense these shadows and make sense of them, accessing realms which would seem by common sense to be well beyond the reach of finite reasoning. We access those shadows of manifested truths by disciplining and training the human mind so that it can move with the grain of the universe and then with the grain of Creation as a whole. We are made of the stuff that is manifested truths, including those truths we label 'mathematical'. Those truths are deep, deep inside of us. They are deep inside of all matter, all energy, all fields, all specks of space and time. And yet we see them by ways of shadows they cast, shadows seen and then seen more clearly as human culture develops more and better conceptual

and linguistic tools.

I try to practice metaphysics as an act of submission to reality as given to a finite man of this age, a reality which we know through a very small number of transcendental truths revealed to us by our Maker and by huge mountains of empirical knowledge not yet organized. To speak truthfully is not to speak of complex systems of truths built up in the way of a skyscraper, tiny truths playing the role of I-bars and rivets. The universe isn't a skyscraper, though we can use some useful metaphors from human technology for describing the universe and the creatures which inhabit it.

Sophisticated mathematics developed as human beings saw first that Cosmos of great pagan thinkers, a view of reality which is radically incomplete compared to the Einsteinian universe. The mathematics developed by men with a less adequate understanding of this universe was less adequate than our current mathematics. We don't develop mathematics to understand the universe. The universe teaches us mathematics when we interact with it in the right way, when we explore it and shape our minds to encapsulate that universe. The universe will even reveal to us in various ways those shadows of richer being.

As mere human symbols can be adequate for bringing into focus some shadows of mathematical truths which seem well beyond any finite mind, so can the Eucharistic Rite be a means of bringing into focus shadows of a far greater Truth, the truth of a God who inhabits His very Creation, who even sent His Son to take on human flesh. But this is shadow is real even as it enters our body because it's a shadow of our Maker and our Brother. It's a shadow He casts over some who belong to Him, a shadow He wishes to cast over all who belong to Him.

# 570 Could Adam and Eve Have Made Christ Unnecessary?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=100>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/09/29.]

The answer is: Christ's self-sacrifice was necessary to save us, to make us true companions of God. No action by any human being could have changed that fact. No action by any human being could have reduced our dependence upon the work of Jesus Christ. In the sense of needing salvation in Heaven, no possible creature could be saved by some sort of natural grace because God has to act to make that creature suited for life in a radically different phase of Creation. The Almighty has to act to purify and raise that creature to be able to share His life.

There are many who would claim to believe that we need Christ to save us and then they go on to claim the Bible tells us that Adam and Eve were created in a state of grace the same as the state of the saved who belong to Jesus Christ. Then, as the story goes, the snake seduced grace-filled Eve into an act of disobedience to God and she, in turn, brought grace-filled Adam into that state of disobedience. A careful reading of the third chapter of the book of Genesis might lead to the suspicion that we're reading the story of Adam and Eve through interpretive lenses and not simply accessing a clear and obvious understanding of that strange story.

The story of Adam and Even is presented in a mythical form and apparently borrows much of its content from the heritage the Hebrews shared with the various pagan traditions of the Near East. To treat it as if it were presented as historical fact is, among other errors, to do great injustice to the treatment of the story of Jesus Christ in the four Gospels. Some might think that the entire Bible should be raised to the level of the Gospels in the

sense of historical reliability and truth-bearing capacity, but the real effect is likely to drag the Gospels down to the level of the books of the Bible which are intended as myths or allegories which teach a lesson of some sort rather than relating historical facts which carry their own direct truth.

That story of our mythical ancestors also has an edge to it. God Himself isn't presented in the best possible light. The all-knowing Creator is presented as being surprised by actions of His creatures. He seems to be defeated, at least in the short-term, by the snake and can do no more than promise a decisive counter-attack at some vague time in the future. Moreover, God seems unreasonable in punishing Adam and Eve for not meeting expectations that might well have been beyond human capabilities.

Something is wrong with that story of Adam and Eve or perhaps something is wrong with our interpretations of that story.

Let's consider a little bit of modern empirical knowledge.

There is serious reason to believe there was no human man and woman who were the common ancestors of the human race in the way of Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis. It seems almost certain that any common ancestors of the entire human race existed well before human beings came to full moral self-awareness. The genealogies of Cain and Seth indicate the authors of *Genesis* believed, as I do, that that awakening was tied to the development of technology, including true agriculture, and the growth of the early cities. So far as I know, the earliest evidence of craftsmen gathering in community – perhaps seasonal at first – shows in layers of soil about 10,000 years old in the vicinity of Jericho. Perhaps that indicates the reason for the inordinate importance attached to that city in the Bible. Specialists have done genetic sampling of human beings from across the globe and think that our last common ancestor lived about 70,000 years ago in the vicinity of Nigeria.

The very important conflicts which underly the story of Adam and Eve – and their sons – seem to have arisen more than 50,000 years after any possible common ancestor of all humans. A specific and concrete act of rebellion by a particular human couple doesn't seem to be a plausible explanation of the sinful nature of human beings or the disorder which often arises in the world. As St. Augustine told us: we do not sin, we are sin. Yet, the particular forms of sinfulness which bother the Biblical authors involve forms of human social life which appeared with cities. The disorder in the physical world, more accurately – the struggle between order and disorder, have existed since the so-called Big Bang about 15 billion years ago, a bit

before human beings appeared.

In a potentially dangerous way, I'll speculate that those authors of *Genesis* knew that human uniqueness, the reason we have the potential to be companions to God, is tied up with our ability to abstract ourselves – so to speak – out of the concrete environments in which our species evolved. As our ancestors developed technology and the ability to live in cities, they abstracted themselves out of the grasslands and a tribal foraging life. They had the problem of reshaping to some extent their own moral natures to match the new possibilities and dangers which arose faster than they could adapt and continue to arise faster than we can adapt.

We develop technology and ways of life that reshape ourselves and our children in important ways. This reshaping is not just on the skin. As we learned at Hiroshima, as we learn when children are corrupted by modern entertainment, we can reshape ourselves to serve evil and sometimes, as Hannah Arendt told us after her studies of the Holocaust, evil is served most effectively by nice human beings who are well-adjusted to modern bureaucratic life.

What does this have to do with human sin and human salvation? In adapting ourselves so effectively to serve good or evil, we show we're capable of reshaping ourselves to the higher demands of God, demands which exceed natural morality, demands which culminate in the command: "Be perfect." Be Christ-like. Cooperate with God as He reshapes you to share His life.

The problem the authors of *Genesis* seemed to be dealing with was this:

The all-loving God was the same as the Creator who made a world which placed impossibly difficult burdens upon morally self-aware human beings. The human race seemed to be condemned by God the Creator for the crime of using the unique abilities He'd gifted to men and women. If a St. Francis is possible, then so is an Adolf Hitler. Does the possibility of St. Francis justify the sufferings of so many at the hands of Hitler?

Adam and Eve didn't rebel against God so much as they recognized the burdens of God's demands upon human moral nature. As the great Southern writer Andrew Lytle realized, man had to leave paradise to fulfill his God-given role. (See the under-appreciated novel, *The Velvet Horn*, for a rich display of Lytle's views on this issue.) But paradise wasn't what most think it to have been. It wasn't Heaven. It was the same earth Adam

and Eve later lived in. The difference was that Adam and Eve awoke and left behind their animal state of innocence, the innocence that left them fully as victims of their own human natures as those natures existed before self-awareness. Go back and read the third chapter of Genesis and see if this makes sense. Adam and Eve took up their yokes, but those yokes were yet hard and those burdens were heavy. Our ancestors were called by God to be His companions but that task is well beyond human capacity.

The traditional interpretation of the story of Adam and Eve is inconsistent with the Christian belief that we can be saved only by Christ. That traditional interpretation makes the claim our ancestors were born in a state of grace, a state of salvation, and would have remained in that state if not for an act of rebellion. Even if God had created a world and a human race better suited to perfect creaturely virtue, we would still not be suited to be the companions of God.

Only Christ can save us. Only Christ can make us Christ-like, God-like, so that we can share God's life. Life with God for time without end would be hellish for a creature not suited to share God's life.

I think that the empirical knowledge of evolutionary biology, viewed properly, is a message from God, a wake-up call. God is driving His story along in a particular way at this particular time. Evolutionary biology leads me to the speculation that we human beings have natures that allow us to be reshaped to share God's life. We're not born in in a God-like shape and we don't have long-ago ancestors who were in that shape before some fall from grace. Nor do we have the capacity to reason towards absolute truths which are binding upon God Himself. God shaped us to be reshapable as His companions and He must do the reshaping, He must tell us the greater moral truths which are the perfect and complete versions of the moral truths which have arisen in the course of evolution.

We can see this in the way that Jesus Christ astonished or shocked His followers with the *Sermon on the Mount* and with His claims that they were to eat His Flesh and drink His Blood. Many, including many who claim to be Christians, still discount the commandments to be perfect even as many refuse to accept Christ's words in instituting the Eucharistic Rite or in saying that only those who eat His body and drink His blood will be saved (Matthew 26:26–28, Mark 14:22–23, Luke 22:19–20, and especially John 6:53–58). There are many Christians who swallow camels and then strain at gnats, finding literal truth in an ancient Hebrew allegory and then denying or diluting the words of Him who they acknowledge as Lord and

God.

Adam and Eve weren't rebels who removed themselves from God's direct Presence. They were apish animals who heard God's invitation to be His companions and realized they weren't suited to such a life. There were contradictions in the human situation and those contradictions are prominently displayed in the story of Adam and Eve. The tree of knowledge was set in front of them and to eat from it was natural to human beings – it had to be done for them to realize their own natures. Having eaten that fruit, they gained self-awareness, awareness of their own nakedness, and knew sin. Sin had already been with them. They, in fact, had already been sin, but suddenly they knew that they were sin. But good or bad behavior, only a small part of the Biblical understanding of sin, is still not the point and the story is confused when it should be confused – the authors of Genesis admit their confusion and ignorance to anyone who reads with any sensitivity. The story of Adam and Eve seems to be almost a scream of frustration:

What do you want from us, Lord?

How were Adam and Eve to live forever? How were they to share the life of God? God Himself seemed unwilling to help them. God seemed to have booby-trapped His world, leading men and women to realize the potential of human nature, and then hinting at a transcendence of that nature. But He left men and women with no way to transcend their animal natures. God seemed to have played the nastiest possible joke on human beings, calling them to a life which could be seen only at a distance as well as through a glass darkly. The authors of Genesis were inspired to look at a tiny image that God was holding miles away from them – behind a smoky hunk of glass.

Only Christ could save human beings and He was free to do so or not. He was free to come when He chose.



# 571 Christianity and Privacy

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=104>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/10/19.]

Holy Father, keep them in thy name, which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. [This is the second sentence in John 17:11 [141].]

This is a very difficult verse which speaks to a theme winding its way through the New Testament, a theme related to the most fundamental beliefs of Trinitarian Christianity. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three Persons but one God. They act together, think together, love together. If we are to be one in that sense, there will be no privacy in Heaven of the sort that so many of us like so well. We will not be individuals holding our own thoughts and feelings separate from others and, yet, we'll be our own selves, just as the Father is Himself, the Son is Himself, and the Holy Spirit is Himself. They share all and act together in all They do but each one remains Himself.

Each of us will initiate and all will participate in what we start. All will complete my thoughts and feelings along with me and I will complete theirs – assuming, of course, that I'm resurrected into the Body of Christ.

And that's the key – Christ will be one of us even as He is still one of the Holy Trinity.

We'll be sharing the life of God – the only life which can allow life without end. We'll have given up so much that we consider valuable in this life, including our privacy, and we'll have that share in the life of God.

I long to share that life. I'm also scared to give up my privacy even knowing that I'll gain so much more.

I'm also curious. How can I give up my privacy and yet remain myself? How can Father and Son and Holy Spirit share all and yet each remain Himself? Do each of these questions have the same answer, or at least very similar answers? I think so. I'll bid my time until I find out.

# 572 Quantum Collapse, Consciousness, and God

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=123>. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/12/20.]

The reader might wish to refer to Chapter 156, *A Christian's view of Einstein's and Bohr's debate on the meaning of reality* 156, for some background on this general issue. I follow the philosopher Kurt Hubner (see his book *Critique of Scientific Reason*) in claiming that Einstein's position was that things have relationships with other things without any of those things being substantially changed by their interactions. Bohr's position was that relationships can bring substance into being or at least change it in deep ways. I qualify this statement by further claiming that God can change substance by either bringing the underlying stuff of things into being from nothing or by shaping things by way of relationships. We creatures have limited but real powers to shape things by way of relationships. The ultimate relationship is love and that is what 'powers' God's creative efforts. Creation came to be when God chose to actively love it. We as individuals come into being as a result of a particular love God has for us.

In *The Quantum World* [117], the physicist and Anglican priest John Polkinghorne provides an insightful and disciplined discussion of the issues involved in quantum mechanics. One particular problem is that of 'reduction of wavepackets' or quantum collapse. This reduction leads to the uncertainty and non-locality that were at issue in the debate between Bohr and Einstein on the nature of reality. Wavepackets are, from our viewpoint, a vague sort of being describable only in mathematical terms and those wavepackets reduce themselves to thing-like being for poorly understood reasons. If they didn't reduce themselves, we couldn't exist and

neither could the most basic types of matter such as electrons or photons. I'll make one more passing comment for the reader's benefit: wavepackets behave in a fully deterministic way and follow very elegant mathematical rules of development over time while uncertainty and messiness of other sorts arise when wavepackets are reduced to thing-like being. The reader who doesn't know about quantum collapse can look up "Schrodinger's Cat" in their favorite WWW search engine. Better still: get hold of a copy of Polkinghorne's book.

Quantum physicists noted that laboratory measurement under the control of a conscious scientist could cause a well-determined but 'abstract' Schrodinger wave to collapse to a particle in a particular place and having particular properties. By a leap of logic that is at least heroic and perhaps humorous, some concluded that it was consciousness that caused this collapse of abstract possibility into concrete photon in a particular spot with particular properties though no one was silly enough to suggest that the scientist's consciousness somehow joined with the laboratory instrument as it made 'contact' with the wavepacket. It's the measuring instrument and any photons it sends out which make are the proximate cause of the reduction and that situation doesn't seem so different from your average star making 'contact' with a wavepacket by sending out photons or by generating magnetic fields or whatever.

One interesting counter-argument to consciousness-based theories of quantum reduction is based on a claim of some philosophers that has seemingly been confirmed by modern brain-scientists: consciousness doesn't even directly control our own actions let alone dictate the existence of things around us. The regions of the brain associated with conscious awareness respond later than those regions which control bodily movement. It's hard to imagine how consciousness could be causing quantum reduction at the present time when consciousness is dealing with past events.

If we cause the collapse of wavepackets into thing-like being, it is by way of our physical interactions with our environments and, in that, we're no different from that laboratory instrument and that star I discussed above. (See *How Brains Make Up Their Minds* [35] by Walter J. Freeman for a good discussion of the nature of consciousness and related issues. The interested reader can also read my chapters reviewing this book, beginning with Chapter, 83 *Is Christian Morality a Natural Morality?*.)

As a side-comment, I would emphasize another possibility for consciousness which is implied by Freeman's views (and the similar views of Merleau-

Ponty and other philosophers): consciousness allows us some limited power to change our state of being so that we act in a desirable way in the future. Over the course of our lives, our conscious self can even guide us – by a slow and often painful process – into a Christ-like state. This extends the effect of consciousness into our future, but its domain of interaction with the surrounding environment would lag the collapse of wavepackets which form that environment, reshaping us for the future but after we've already acted in particular situations. Quantum reduction is faster than our conscious selves can apprehend even the most immediate parts of our environments or our own bodies.

But I also wish to quickly discuss a complex theological issue raised by Polkinghorne. He implies an error which I'm sure he, an Anglican priest, doesn't support.

On page 66, he tells us:

The dilemma of those who evoke consciousness as the basis of phenomena was succinctly stated by Ronnie Knox in his limerick on idealism:

There once was a man who said "God Must think it exceedingly odd if he finds that this tree Continues to be When there's no one about in the Quad."

An anonymous author provided an answer along lines approved by Bishop Berkeley:

Dear Sir, You astonishment's odd; I am always about in the Quad. And that's why the tree Will continue to be, Since observed by Yours faithfully, God.

Such a riposte would not, however, be available to a defender of the interpretation of quantum mechanical measurement presently under consideration, supposing him to wish to avail himself of it. Divine reduction of wavepackets would be an overkill, since it would operate everywhere and always, forcing the electron each time to go through a definite slit. The point about measurement is that it only occurs spasmodically. [The observation is in accord with the classic theological understanding of creation, which sees God as the ground and support of all that is (in our terms, the guarantor of the Schrodinger equation) but not as an object among objects (no collapse of wavepackets).

While disagreeing with this interpretation of Bishop Berkeley's philosophy, I do agree with the main point Fr. Polkinghorne is making about God being "the ground and support of all that is (in our terms, the guarantor of the Schrodinger equation) but not as an object among objects." Correct as stated, these words say too little and need to be supplemented else they might lead us to a rationalistic Deism.

The Almighty Lord is free to act in the way of a creature when He wishes. In fact, we Christians believe He spoke along with Moses and Elijah and others. We believe He intervened directly at crucial points in the history of the Israelites. Some of us believe that angelic appearances, when not religious poetry, were manifestations by which He made His Presence sensible to the eyes and ears of an embodied creature, a human being. We Christians all believe He acted to incarnate His Son in the holy womb of Mary. He still acts directly as if a super-creature. He might well be curing the lame in the waters of Lourdes. He might well be easing the pain of that poor woman lying in the ICU with tubes and wires running in and out. To do so, God might be collapsing wavepackets, though He may have other ways to directly shape things and to bring about events in this world.

We have to be careful that we not bind God to the world He created of His own free-will but we have to also be careful not to exclude God from this world. If He can create it, He can act inside of it and the Bible tells us pretty clearly He has done so on a regular basis.

(For what it's worth, I read Bishop Berkeley as claiming that God doesn't secure existence by observing things. The Almighty brings things into existence by thinking of them. While a bit confused about the difference between things and the underlying stuff of things, Berkeley was making a claim similar to my claim that things are true because they are manifestations of thoughts of God. And that claim is more or less a statement of the traditional philosophy of Christianity – methodical realism.)

# 573 Do You Believe in St. John the Baptist?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=124>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/02/02.]

Under the modern circumstances, it's not so hard to believe in Christ. And many who don't practice Christianity probably do. After all, He took all our sins upon His shoulders and opened the gates of Heaven to all. Well, maybe you can't go in if you're a serial rapist or Hitler, but He's a generous Savior indeed opening those pearly gates to nearly all.

John the Baptist is a bit rougher character. He was so impolite as to denounce some of his fellow human beings as "vipers." He seems to have often spoken harsh words even when preaching salvation from a loving God. He was not a respectable sort for a society of genial and gentled men. A more honest reading of the Bible might give us hints that Jesus wasn't so gentle as we imagine, but certainly the Lord wasn't so brutal in His behavior as was John the Baptist.

We haven't learned how to view John the Baptist through rose-colored glasses as readily as we view our tender, modernized Christ and thus I ask:

Do you believe in St. John the Baptist?

Do you believe that God can fire up a man and call him to a life of hardship and prophecy for which he'll be despised? Do you believe that God has a right to do something like that to a human being, even to you?

Do you believe that the Almighty has a right to demand that you accept a terrible death in the jaws of lions or in the flames of bonfires rather than renounce your belief in God? If you don't, it would be very hard to believe in John the Baptist, that is, to believe he was truly called by God.

If you truly believed in John the Baptist, you would be forced to suspect that maybe the gentle Christ and His kindly Father might really be willing to demand much of us and to damn us if we didn't deliver.

If John the Baptist were to return, would you listen to him or would you start looking for Herod to return so he could behead this annoying S.O.B. once again?

## 574 Proving the Existence of Zeus

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=126>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/02/06.]

Suppose you had an invisible benefactor. He doesn't make it easy on you all the time. Rather than leaving you food, he provides what you need to grow your own or forage or hunt for your own. Water has been made available though sometimes it has to be treated to be safe. Materials are provided to allow you to build adequate shelter and to make clothing that's at least good enough. Hard work is often necessary but a good life is often possible.

Can you describe the invisible benefactor? Not really. All you can do is tell of some of his specific actions. Those actions might imply certain characteristics but don't provide a true description of the benefactor's nature, even if he were a creature much like us. They don't even provide any certainty that this benefactor is an entity with personal characteristics. Moreover, and given the hardships of your life, they don't even provide any certainty this entity, personal or not, really has your best interests at heart.

Let me move to the real world and various efforts, such as Intelligent Design, to prove God exists in a rational and creaturely way, that is, by proving that God exists through His actions as Creator. We can try to make sense of the complex evidence of our environments and we can prove the existence of Zeus.

All we can prove, and prove is even too strong a word, is the existence of a powerful being who can impose his will upon this physical stuff. Even if we start out with a belief in the God of Abraham or the more fully revealed God of Jesus Christ, we can only speak of His free-will decisions as Creator

in the sense of He who shapes the stuff of our physical environments. We can't prove that there is a Creator who can make stuff from nothing. We can't prove that He's all-powerful, all-knowing, or all-loving, only that He's powerful and probably knows a lot and sometimes acts in a kindly way.

The great thinkers of Christianity have always started out with faith and moved on to understanding, though that faith can be somewhat vague at the beginning of a formal reasoning process. It might be no more than faith in a true Creator or perhaps faith only in the God described in the Bible understood in a naive way.

I believe that I might understand.

Understanding is important for sure and one reason for the decay of Christianity in the modern age is the lack of effort of Christian thinkers and leaders to make true sense of what is now known of our world in light of Christian truths. Hand-waving and vague comments that there are no conflicts between science and religion don't cut it – to put it mildly – and may even make matters worse. But efforts to understand this empirical knowledge are misguided if we think to find proofs of the existence of any sort of divine entity, let alone the God of Jesus Christ.

We have faith in God that we might understand both His revelations to us and also His world. We seek to understand the physical universe by way of empirical knowledge and then we apply our faith in attempts to understand that universe in moral and spiritual terms, to understand it as a world – that is, as a morally ordered narrative.

## 575 Was Jesus Insulting Us?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=127>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/02/14.]

Now they had forgotten to bring bread; and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. And [Jesus] cautioned them, saying, 'Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.' And they discussed it with one another, saying, 'We have no bread.' And being aware of it, Jesus said to them, 'Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes do you not see and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand. . . [Mark 8:14–19]

To the modern mind, it makes little sense to tie together hardness of heart (the spirit, so to speak) with perceptual and intellectual incompetence, perhaps willful intellectual incompetence. Certainly, Jesus wasn't making an attack upon those with congenital problems in these areas, those born blind or those born with relatively severe cases of Down's Syndrome.

The Lord was ever striving to raise His disciples to a higher level of life, of awareness, so that they could perceive the world and their Lord more clearly and think more clearly about what God has done in Creation. And we always sink down to a more passive state than Jesus wished for us, a more passive state than will be possible in the world of the resurrected.

The disciples were dense because they were not paying proper attention. We're no different than they were. We would just as soon be entertained and not be bothered by most aspects of reality unless our safety or comfort is

threatened. Even when we're under threat, we'd as soon delay our response until it's truly forced from us.

After all, life can be tough and it was more so for our ancestors. Even during ages of prosperity, healthy men and women would be worn down by the physical labor and the occasional shortages of food and the medical and dental problems. Like most living creatures on earth, human beings have learned to relax whenever life allows. We've gained enough control of our lives, through machinery and social organization, that we have gained the power to dull ourselves with pleasures, to sit and wait for something entertaining to happen before we pay attention.

Don't be frantic and always busy. Relax and enjoy yourself in the proper measure, but be alert and be always pondering in your heart what God is doing in His world, maybe right in front of you.

## 576 Visualizing Heaven

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=138>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/03/06.]

We can't visualize Heaven, that is, the world in which the resurrected will live with the Lord Jesus Christ for time without end, but we need to try just because of the sorts of creatures we are. We're flesh-and-blood creatures needing images to believe in the reality of a place or an entity, yes, even the triune God who we imagine as Father and Son and Holy Spirit as flame or dove. The Holy Spirit has, in fact, been more difficult for us to understand and relate to just because of the lack of a proper analogy from human beings.

The problem is that we are a particular sort of creature, made of flesh-and-blood, and we understand our physical human nature pretty well in terms by modern empirical knowledge. We accept that physical nature when we enter the hospital to extend our lives or when we take a troubled loved one to a psychiatrist to deal with one disturbance or another, but we Christians tend to visualize Heaven as a place in which we'll flutter about as some sort of spiritual creature with wings. And, of course, we flutter in the company of winged angels. For the most part, this is an admission that we don't consider Heaven as a real place.

Whether you regard modern empirical knowledge as an evil that has infected our views of reality or as enhancements of our views of reality, the fact remains that our modern views of reality are radically different from traditional views of reality. This is true even for those who consider high school chemistry as much a mystery as quantum mechanics. By not recognizing this, Christian leaders and teachers have turned another, truer mystery – Heaven or the world of the resurrected – into a ghostly realm. We can try to imagine realms which are mysterious and beyond direct

knowledge by using our hearts as well as our heads but Heaven has become an unreal place, beyond the human imagination even in principle.

We human beings probably couldn't live in a place so alien as to be fully beyond our imaginations even in principle. Heaven is no longer a place for us to anticipate. We try to long for Heaven but it's a ghostly longing and possible only to the extent we can separate our human selves into a piece that lives in this world and a piece that can somehow live in a realm not even imaginable to our physical selves.

The radical secularization of Christian society was made possible by this inappropriate Christian response to modern empirical knowledge and perhaps even partially caused by that response. We've split our own minds into two pieces, one that can handle the 'real' world with its practical concerns and its verifiable scientific claims and one that has faith in something we can no longer imagine in specific terms. Faith is no longer grounded in that ideal unity of the Christian which is a union of all our parts including our brains and our minds, our bodies and our souls, including our imaginative faculties. Faith is not expressed in modern terms as are the fields of knowledge we respect more. Christian philosophy and theology are typically expressed in pre-modern terms. The same is true of Christian works of visual art and literature, Christian popular song and the earthy sayings which spring out spontaneously.

We have no unified conception of God's Creation and thus no way to visualize anything that's not directly in front of us.

Why not use the old images of clouds and winged angels? Are they not drawn from the Bible? No. The Bible is surprisingly vague and even abstract on this issue of the after-life and we get hints of the reasons in the reverently strange stories of the Lord Jesus in His post-resurrection appearances. The Lord's perfected body was not subject to the constraints of flesh-and-blood bodies, the sorts of bodies which are our substance in this mortal existence. The Lord's human substance was still a body but wasn't constrained by some of the laws of this universe. And, yet, it was similar enough to a flesh-and-blood human body that the disciples, creatures of this world, could perceive Him and converse with Him. It was apparently close enough to flesh-and-blood that the Lord could eat a piece of fish.

Surely, we can have confidence that the world of the resurrected exists if our faith is founded upon the stories of He who is the first of those who rise from the grave. Surely...

But our faith is of a whole with our other thoughts and feelings, the

entirety of our beings. Even the most altruistic of us remains a particular creature in one spot and we need to look out to see our environments or the world in which they are enclosed, though we see that world only with our imaginations. We human beings have a need to be able to imagine a place, however inaccurately, for that place to take on some sort of real existence for us. In the end, we have to accept on faith that God will construct a perfected world in which live His Son and those who are part of the Body of Christ. In the meantime, while we're waiting to see if the Lord accepts us into His Body, we need a grounding for our faith that we might have a home on the other side of our graves, a test of its plausibility, if you will. Our inability to produce imaginative views of Heaven is a very bad sign. It isn't the case that our faith is in vain but it is the case that we've not properly nurtured that faith, or the mind and soul which underly a healthy faith.

We can do better though I have only very tentative ideas about what Heaven might be like. I have less than that when it comes to imagery. How am I sure we can do better? I have confidence that the human mind is the sort of entity which can encapsulate God's world, making its own the very the thoughts which God manifested as shaper of this world and even some of the more abstract thoughts He had manifested in the basic stuff of Creation which He created from nothing. This is a matter of principle. Obviously, no particular human mind could ever encapsulate the entire world.

If Creation is a rational whole, and Christians can't believe otherwise, we should be able to imagine the world of the resurrected by creatively and rationally extrapolating from this world. Else, we'll be in a state of explicitly or implicitly casting doubt upon the reality of that world of the resurrected.

To be sure, we can do that only by first imagining this world into a plausibly real existence by gaining a good understanding of this physical universe in terms of modern empirical knowledge and then imagining that universe as a world by applying the order implied by our Biblical knowledge of God's purposes as Creator. We can produce the sort of worldview and confidence that would unleash imaginative efforts in music and drama and architecture as well as in theology and philosophy but we either reject our faith and head out into the brave new world or else we fearfully try to hold onto our faith by using images at odds with the rest of our modern views and behaviors.

Do I have any advice for starting this revival of the Christian mind

and imagination? Nurture first the imagination as I recommended in the bibliographical essay at the end of my book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41]. Take this advice for yourself or give it to any students under your guidance. Read *Moby Dick* for the sheer pleasure and not as a duty. Read *Don Quixote* and *The Life and Times of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. Read *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The Violent Bear It Away*.

With a healthy imagination, a man could make better sense of modern empirical knowledge. He might even find himself capable of seeing God's world and seeing at least hints of that greater world on the far side of the grave.

# 577 The Only Sane Christian in the Modern World

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=161>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/06/13.]

Like most Christians, I believe that – if Christ chooses me – I’ll be raised from the dead into a world that might be called ‘Heaven’ where I’ll live with Jesus Christ for time without end. I’ll take this as a typical schizophrenic Christian belief. See *A Thomistic Take on Madness and Modernism* found at <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=107> for a discussion about the general madness of modern human beings, this schizophrenia “characterized by loss of contact with environment and by disintegration of personality.”

In the Bible, we’re told that Christ had risen from the grave. We’re also told that the Jesus Christ had promised to raise from the grave those He chose as His friends, but not here on earth. The Lord will resurrect His own in Heaven.

Where is this Heaven supposed to be?

The direct words of Jesus and St. Paul give few specifics for answering this question and the only exception, St. Paul’s talk of ascending through layers of heavens, leads to the concept of the cosmos developed by the great pagan thinkers. And so an answer was taken from those pagan cosmologies: the heavens, an ascending hierarchy of ever purer being, lie on the other side of the moon’s orbit. Moreover, a literalization of some Biblical allegories, such as the story of Adam and Eve, and the apocalyptic tales in such books as Daniel and Revelation gave images and concepts and words to speak of Heaven.

What is this resurrection supposed to be?

The Bible speaks of a resurrection in the body but it again gives little

for the human mind to work on other than the apparent strangeness of the resurrected body of the Lord Jesus Christ. Some of the early Fathers of the Church borrowed the concept of the soul from pagans, though it's likely they misunderstood it, especially if they had intended to borrow from Platonic thought. Plato never claimed any direct relationship between the soul he conjectured and the individual human being. (So far as I can tell, most commentators on the Bible who've taken the trouble to try to understand the body of thought in which Saul of Tarsus was educated think he meant something by 'soul' different from what modern Christians would mean. I'll leave the matter there.)

Plato would have likely agreed, for the most part, with this statement from St. Thomas Aquinas:

My soul [in Thomas the organ for thought] is not I; and if only souls are saved, I am not saved, nor is any man. [From the *Commentary to 1 Corinthians* by St. Thomas Aquinas as quoted by Hannah Arendt in *The Life of the Mind* (page 43).]

I don't know that Plato had such a clear understanding of the soul as Aquinas did and I also think Professor Arendt would have been better to say Aquinas thought the soul to be the organ for abstract thought. In any case, Aquinas clearly located most human characteristics – including our love, faith, and hope – in the physical human being. I think it also clear that Plato and Aquinas both considered the soul to be something impersonal – to speak a little bit loosely.

In any case, the soul was purer stuff and could just 'float' up to more ethereal regions when freed from the body – in much pagan thought and arguably in Buddhism where the goal is to release your self from individual existence. After this release, what remains is something more pure than that which struggles to exist in a concrete world. I'll state the obvious that St. Thomas Aquinas didn't propose any such ideas, knowing that that which struggles to exist in a concrete world is us. He felt himself forced to conjecture the accidental attachment of an impersonal soul to each human being only because he thought it necessary to explain our ability to think abstractly. Modern brain-scientists, including some who admire the general Thomistic view on the mind, would point to a lot of evidence contradicting St. Thomas. This idea of a soul, however much he realized it "is not I," was the biggest mistake Aquinas made in his teachings about human nature.

The above discussions of traditional understandings of Heaven and the possibilities of human life after death are simplistic, to be sure. A fuller discussion would require a library of books discussing both the modern empirical knowledge of the universe (as opposed to the ancient speculations of the cosmos) and the modern empirical knowledge of human nature, as well as the intellectual histories of thought on both those subjects and many related subjects. I've presented this summary only to provide some support for the plausibility of this claim:

The post-biblical but pre-modern Christian understandings of the resurrection and of Heaven (where is it?) were linked with, coherent with, even founded upon, Hellenistic theories of the cosmos and of human nature.

Those pre-modern Christians didn't have to believe in multiple realms of truth. They didn't have to shed their beliefs about Heaven when they left church because those beliefs were the same they had when looking into the sky, whether they were astronomers or educated laymen or illiterate peasants. The pre-modern ages were not really homogeneous in their beliefs, nor were the inhabitants of all places and times rational within the context of any particular set of beliefs. Admitting that, it was still true that there was a substantial body of common beliefs about the nature of created being which allowed pre-modern Christians to understand a Bible story or to recite the creed without contradicting their general beliefs about the nature of the only reality they knew – this mortal realm.

So far as I know, I'm the only Christian in the world who actually thinks of Heaven and the resurrection in terms of words and concepts which are mostly the same as, and always consistent with, the words and concepts I use to speak of modern empirical knowledge such as that of quantum mechanics and gravitational theory, transfinite set theory and randomness. I can, somewhat tongue-in-cheek at this early stage of developing this new way of thought, ask *What are the Thermodynamic Properties of Heaven?*, which is the title of Chapter 191. I even have a very rough beginning of an understanding of the Real Presence in terms of my understanding of this only part of reality we truly know – see Chapter 569, *Abstract Mathematics and the Real Presence of Jesus Christ*.

Let me put the insanity of modern Christians in terms that I've used before. In past centuries, when a parent or clergyman or a teacher spoke

of Heaven, they had a clear idea – however wrong – of where Heaven was and what it would mean for us to ascend to Heaven. Nowadays, when a child asks the appropriate questions, what answers do we have? Basically, we have answers that would lead the child to think, “Heaven doesn’t really exist but it’s a nice place.” After all, we tell that child and ourselves: “It’s not a place we can see or reach in this life but it’s also not a place we can describe in any sense.” Unless we go back to the pre-modern descriptions which the child knows to be a lie as soon as he learns that there’s no Heaven in the solar system, nor in the Milky Way, and probably not in any other galaxy.

I don’t have this problem. By simply taking modern physics seriously, I realized that this universe is but a phase of something far greater. Moreover, this universe is highly particular, shaped from something with an abstract sort of being which we wouldn’t be able to directly perceive but a disciplined human mind can grasp this sort of being, however tentatively. By a complex line of speculative reasoning, I concluded that that abstract sort of being is the manifested truths which are the foundation of this world, this universe seen in light of God’s purposes, and all other possible worlds He could shape – such as the one in which the resurrected brethren of Christ will live with Him for time without end. Heaven is simply a particular world shaped by God from the same stuff He used in shaping this particular world, but Heaven would have to be shaped in such a way that a complete order is present from the start or else order evolves in such a way that destruction and decay aren’t side-effects. I can speak of Heaven without having to pretend to enter another realm of being and without having to brush off conflicts between scientific knowledge and Christian beliefs by implausible claims of non-conflict. Of course there’s a conflict involving the beliefs of nearly all modern Christians, including Jesuit scientists, but it’s a conflict between pre-modern empirical knowledge and modern empirical knowledge, a conflict between the Christian mind and a world which doesn’t match up so well to assumptions of pre-modern ideas of being, including time and space and even mathematical truths.

# 578 What's Really at Issue in My Work?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=162>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/06/16.]

Modern human beings, and especially Christians, might misunderstand the work I'm doing. Some might think I'm some sort of champion of modern empirical knowledge for its own sake, a fan of physics and history perhaps. In fact, what's at issue is respect for God's Creation and, hence, for the Creator Himself.

You respect Creation by honoring it for what it is, not by imposing comfortable tales upon it, tales embodying knowledge once plausible but now known to be false or incomplete.

You show respect for the Creator by accepting even the hardest truths He presents to us, through His Biblical commandments or through the example of His humble Son or through the knowledge to be gathered from Creation by disciplined efforts. You accept those truths and try to make sense of them by way of hard thought.

How are we to find truth? St. Thomas Aquinas told us the human mind, that which is human thought and not some organ of thought, is shaped by responses to its environment. I've added that the human mind can shape itself by responding to even hints of a cosmos or a universe, a greater thing out there which contains all that we can know as reality in this mortal life but also being itself something. A human mind can go still further, struggling to see God's revealed purposes for Creation in the workings of galactic formation and in the workings of biological evolution and even in the workings of human history.

To turn away from this process is to turn away from the process of

perceiving and understanding the truth – however poorly we might perceive truth during this mortal life. To turn away willfully, perhaps because you don't like the effort of learning history or biology or mathematics in a disciplined way, is another way to say, “non serviam.” “I won't serve, Lord, because I prefer my own ways and would like to have my own world which can be understood in terms of myths and allegories involving great, god-like beings who bring us evil or good.” At that point, you're refusing to acknowledge that truth is to be found in that to which we respond in shaping our minds. If we respond to views of reality at odds with our best empirical knowledge, we respond to lies of a sort and shape out minds to be those of liars.

Our one way to truth is to open up to God's word and His world, shaping our minds in response to some complex and necessarily contingent understanding of the Lord's world in light of His word. It's the faith in God which is most important and specifically the faith in God as an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving Creator. It's this openness that allowed so many to see profound truths even if they didn't have an advanced physics or biology to have good understandings of what they directly perceived. Perhaps surprisingly, you can actually see far without the great Christian faith of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. Aristotle saw far with no more than his faith in the reasonableness of what exists which he expressed in terms of a God who was the result of a logical argument rather than a God who revealed Himself out of His great love for us.

Sometimes you find what you're looking for if you have enough sense to look for something that exists. It might be different than what you thought you were looking for. Then again, is the nature of being much different than was anticipated in the programs of that first mathematical physicist – Plato? Is the flow of events in this universe shaped from that being so much different from what we should have expected if we'd paid attention to the Bible rather than imposing upon it our own ideas?

To quote the physicist Niels Bohr out of context: Don't tell God what to do. That is, don't impose your own expectations upon God, or even upon a god-less Nature if that's what you believe in. Pay attention to Creation. Listen to what Creation has to say, see what Creation is made from, observe how that stuff behaves, observe the behavior of living creatures made from that stuff. See Chapter 13, *Einstein and Bohr: Don't Tell God what to do* for a short discussion of the perhaps apocryphal response by Bohr to Einstein's claim that God doesn't play dice with the world.

# 579 Pascal's Wager for Those Who Believe in a Personal and Loving God

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=180>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/08/05.]

I have mixed feelings about *Pascal's wager* (see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pascal's\\_wager](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pascal's_wager)) and wouldn't use it in an apologetic argument unless I were speaking to an intellectually sophisticated man or woman and wishing to engage in an interesting and inconclusive debate. For those who've forgotten the details and don't want to know all the details, that Wikipedia article tells us:

Pascal's Wager (or Pascal's Gambit) is a suggestion posed by the French philosopher Blaise Pascal that even though the existence of God cannot be determined through reason, a person should "wager" as though God exists, because so living has potentially everything to gain, and certainly nothing to lose.

This argument is based less upon a pure leap of faith and more upon the consequences that Pascal saw in the uncertainty of human reason. Quite properly in my opinion, some atheists – including Richard Dawkins as mentioned but not explained in the Wikipedia article – have claimed that sort of an argument can work in different directions than the one Pascal seems to have intended in his notes towards a general apologetics. Since they were just notes and since Pascal gave signs of being one of the most extraordinarily and profoundly intelligent thinkers in history, we should be cautious

in assuming we know how, or even whether, he would have used his wager in that book if he'd lived to write it.

In any case, The various aspects of the certainty and uncertainty of human knowledge need to be explored and those of good faith, if only faith in human moral integrity, need to explore matters from their perspective.

Yet, there's a way in which Pascal's wager can be extended in a direction quite uncomfortable for those who have a belief in a personal and loving God, as taught by orthodox Jews or Catholics or others with firm and specific theistic beliefs.

If you do believe in God as described by some orthodox form of Judaism or as described by some form of Christianity with strong beliefs, then it would seem your best bet would be to give yourself fully and entirely to Him. Don't just bet what matters little. Don't just push your pile of chips into the pot. Climb up on the table and sit in that pot with those chips. Put yourself fully and totally in play.

# 580 Restricting God's Thoughts to Freshman Mathematics

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=179>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/08/29.]

Those who belong to that school of thought labeled *Intelligent Design* found at [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Intelligent\\_design](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Intelligent_design) typically describe themselves as Christian, sometimes Jewish, and sometimes there is only an impression of a vaguer sort of Theism. In any case, most of these thinkers would likely claim to believe in a Creator who is an all-powerful and all-knowing God. Yet, they think to understand the Lord's work and His thoughts using what can be readily learned in less than two years of modestly difficult college work – a little calculus and some probability and statistics, a little chemistry and some astronomy and physics.

Do these thinkers imagine God's thoughts and the possibilities open to Him as a Creator to be so limited? Math is hard. Physics is hard. Philosophy and literary studies are hard. Understanding God's acts of Creation is all of that plus one hell of a lot harder. Anyone who thinks the Creator's thoughts and acts can be understood by simply applying a few equations from Probability Theory 101 is deluding himself and insulting God.



# 581 If You Sell Your Soul to the Devil, Don't Be Upset When He Comes to Collect What Belongs to Him

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, <http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=397>. It was finished and uploaded on 2009/04/03.]

Catholics and some other Christians are worried about the loss of a right by medical personnel to refuse participating in procedures which they consider wrong on moral grounds. That seems appropriate, but so does the statement [141]:

You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." Matthew 5:38

But Jesus tells us that isn't just inadequate, but fully wrong. He demanded of His followers [141]:

But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if any one would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to him who begs from you and do not refuse him who would borrow from you. Matthew 5:39-42

The followers of Christ are commanded to act in a way different from the morality of the world. We're called to live as followers of Christ, obeying His

commandments and trying to imitate His ways of speaking and behaving. Does that mean that when confronted with threats of evil from those who might be either willfully evil or merely misguided and deluded, we are to arrange for campaigns to swamp Pilate's telephones with protests and to bury the Sanhedrin's poor secretaries under mountains of post-cards asking that they respect the conscience of that poor Jesus of Nazareth?

I say this tongue-in-cheek but such campaigns of moral pressure might be appropriate, they might work, if our Pilates and our High Priests are in substantial agreement with us but prone to stray because of the temptations and pressures of power. That's not the case in 2009. Our leaders, even when they make great shows of attending Christian worship services, clearly don't feel bound by the *Sermon on the Mount*. Many clearly don't feel bound by the *Ten Commandments*. Many radiate a sense of self-righteousness as they propose and carry out programs which violate the traditional moral teachings of the West but can be presented as a compassionate response to the sufferings of those with horrible diseases or those who feel sexual urges not allowed by traditional Christian morality. Some probably are truly motivated by subjective moral urgings to try and solve those problems. Certainly, that seems true of many of the medical researchers involved in stem-cell research which might involve embryonic lines of cells and might be moving towards human cloning to produce creatures with diabetes or Lou Gehrig's Disease for experimentation, creatures which will never move beyond an embryonic stage and will never live outside of some antiseptic and glistening laboratory container. Years ago, doctors associated with Harvard Medical School made available lines of embryonic stem-cells for such experimentation and every so often announcements are made that someone has managed to engineer a line of stem-cells, maybe embryonic and maybe not, to have a certain defective gene or metabolic condition. We also have to remember that the techniques developed even in moral lines of research on adult stem-cells could be deployed rapidly to clone human beings or human-animal hybrids. In an age of moral disorder, all technologies can be deployed for questionable or downright evil purposes.

I'm willing to claim that nearly every research hospital in the United States, including probably most that were founded by Christian organizations – even Catholic religious orders, engage in activities which are in violation of at least the more demanding moral systems developed from the Sermon on the Mount and may well be in violation of the most lax interpretation of the Ten Commandments. At the very least, Catholic hos-

pitals will ship poor and uninsured patients to ‘welfare’ hospitals in the same way as for-profit corporate hospitals. Finances force them to do so, you say? Why did they reorganize their finances so that they would be in such a position? Was there no one in those hospital systems, no one in the bureaucracies of the dioceses, no one in the ranks of Catholic businessmen serving on boards of trustees, no one at all who could see that they were transforming Catholic institutions into servants of the Principalities of this world? I would conjecture similar statements could be made about all those hospitals founded by other Christian groups, some of which still bear names including terms like ‘Presbyterian’ or ‘Methodist’ in their names.

If the medical systems in the United States operate in ways that are morally objectionable to Catholics or other Christians, if the American government – duly elected by the American citizenry – increasingly subsidizes acts which Catholics and other Christians consider to be evil, why do Christians wish to participate in those systems and why do they accept money and other gifts from that government?

I’ve seen arguments that any who disengage from these increasingly evil institutions need time to do so gradually but now we see that such doctors, nurses, and others might have no place to go. If it were ever possible to aim at some sort of separation, the time has likely passed. We, and our parents, have forced us into a position where we have but two choices, suffering as did our Lord Jesus Christ or surrendering to the Principalities of the world.

In allegorical terms, Christ is being freshly crucified in these United States of America, and few Christians have picked up their crosses to march alongside their Lord. Those who take their beliefs seriously are more likely to be canvassing the crowds of those watching in confusion or horror or glee as Christ moves by under the burden of His cross. Why are those Christians canvassing the crowds? Apparently, they think to convince Pilate and the Sanhedrin to change their ways of thought and behavior. They think to convince the Principalities of the world to give up what supports their worldly power and take up with beliefs that will deny the authority of earthly rulers to dictate what is right and what is wrong.

They think the world is to be redeemed not by acts of suffering and martyrdom but rather by political processes by which we’ll somehow achieve that fantastic result of non-believers and weak believers choosing to live by

Christian moral laws. Didn't Christ give us those laws in the Sermon on the Mount? Well, yes, Christ gave us those laws in a very emotional way that provided for some of the most moving scenes in the history of Hollywood productions. I'm sometimes proud and sometimes ashamed when my subjective emotions lead me tears when I read those words of our Lord, but such emotions played no part in our Lord's own ways of showing compassion, nor in the ways of the greatest of saints, detached as they have to be when relieving spiritual or corporeal sufferings. The *Sermon on the Mount* isn't validated by those subjective feelings, warm or shivery, which they draw forth, nor were they validated by internal coherence nor by natural law reasoning but rather by His later submission to the unjust acts of His own creatures. When Christ hung on His cross, His authority to make extraordinary demands upon us were validated. If we take Christ's own actions seriously, His refusal to so much as preach to Pilate or the Sanhedrin, we are forced to believe the only way to change the behavior of non-believers and weak believers is through suffering and death, that of Christ first but that of His followers when necessary. Not all ages are filled with martyrs and not all forms of martyrdom have been the same.

Let's think seriously again about our situation in 2009. Having corrupted even knowledge of God's own Creation to our own purposes, having accepted gifts from men who value money and power above all conflicting moral demands, we wish to claim to be loyal followers of the God whose commandments we've disobeyed. We tell ourselves that it might be true that even Catholic hospitals accept money from a government which helps to kill American children in the womb and actively kills Iraqi and Pash-tun children on the ground, it might be true that even Catholic researchers accept money from government agencies or private foundations which are also paying for research into such horrors as human cloning – even human-animal hybrid cloning, but we can remain above that. We're part of the system but the evil work is being done in the lab down the hallway and we never go past that doorway into that evil place.

The Church will recover and begin to grow again when Christians are willing to suffer, even to accept painful and degrading deaths, rather than accept the gifts of an increasingly evil medical system.

Christ suffered to save us and gave us no other way to defeat evil than to suffer along with Him. Yet, even before we suffer to save others, we have to remember the simple common-sense rule:

If you don't wish the Principalities of this world to make a claim on your soul, don't accept their gifts and don't let yourself become dependent upon them.



## 582 Taking the Fresh Fruits and Giving God the Leftovers

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=466>. It was finished and uploaded on 2009/04/03.]

The point I'd like to make is a general one, but I'm mostly targeting my fellow-Christians who have the greater responsibility if they truly have the belief they claim to hold: God is the all-powerful Creator of this world. First, a poem by Emily Dickinson:

Faith is a fine invention For gentlemen who see,  
But microscopes are prudent In an emergency!

I'm not sure Emily Dickinson would agree with the fullness of the claim I'll be making but she's at least noting a certain fragmentation in our thought where faith is no longer allied to matters of 'prudence', of practical decision-making. At a more fundamental level, faith is no longer allied to our views of created being and that means faith has been separated from the mainstream of modern empirical knowledge.

Faith is a fine invention, especially when we're cheerfully singing songs of our God conquering evil and bringing a new world to existence, a world which is free of evil and corruption. On the other hand, microscopes are prudent – MRIs even more so – in an emergency. If our faith, or rather – our human statements of our faith, be in conflict with the underlying assumptions of the use of microscopes and MRIs, we can always discard that faith or hold it in abeyance when we enter regions where our worldly ills are to be ameliorated or even healed, if only for a matter of a few years.

When the life of a bishop or a priest or an evangelical minister or the most devout members of the Christian laity is at risk, they rush to a hospital

which practices medicine according to the highest of scientific standards. Then, that Christian clergyman will return to give his sermons or homilies based upon understandings of man and Creation which reflect nothing of that modern knowledge so useful to solve his medical problems and give him some comfort and some relief from pain.

When our own lives and comfort are at stake, we Christians take out the fresh food in the front of that refrigerator. Nothing but the best for our precious selves. When it comes to paying God honor and glory by understanding ourselves and the rest of His Creation, that fungus-covered, rotting stuff is good enough.

# 583 Confronting Tradition Respectfully

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=470>. It was finished and uploaded on 2009/04/07.]

There are those who passively accept what they're taught and there are those who rebel as if instinctively, denying traditional beliefs and outlooks by denying conclusions without remembering that human thought is a process. It remains a process even when dealing with truths revealed by God – which are far fewer in number than many believe. And, I should add, there are those who actually think, neither accepting passively nor rejecting by reflex. In this entry, I'm particularly concerned about how we approach the thoughts of past generations, streams in greater or lesser rivers of tradition. I'm interested in the general failure of even serious thinkers to respectfully approach the past, even when a little contemplation will reveal the likelihood that some of those ancient thinkers were smarter than us and harder of head than us. Even the lesser thinkers might have something to say to us.

And, so, I'd like to make a proposal about the attitudes we carry to the task of evaluating traditional beliefs, including older scientific theories or general viewpoints of created being, in light of our updated empirical knowledge. As a rule, we should try to put ourselves in the place of those creative thinkers who first developed the ideas underlying those beliefs and theories. They might well have had good reasons for developing systems of beliefs or theories which can now be seen as inadequate and maybe outright wrong. It's also likely that, being human, they made little mistakes along the way or simply missed opportunities to produce better systems of beliefs or thoughts. And it's also likely, that being among the serious thinkers

of their ages, they had some insights which could be carried forward into updated theories, at least in the negative form of learned lessons. But these lessons are to be learned by discovering why it was that earlier generations of theologians and philosophers filled the cosmos with angelic and demonic beings, not by a simpleminded rejection of what now seems silly in an age where science fantasy seems more attractive than baptized myths.

Many serious thinkers have always tried to understand the predecessors when trying to correct their errors or to go beyond the points earlier thinkers could reach. Einstein, while busy working on ideas at odds with the time-space assumptions of Newtonian physics, was apparently aware that Newton, for his part, was aware that some of the those metaphysical foundations of Newtonian physics were at least questionable. To be a little more accurate, Newton never elevated the foundations of his scientific and mathematical work to metaphysical principles but he would have been aware that it was going to happen in succeeding generations. And I'm sure he wished he could do better. Men, at least the vast majority of men, can't hold strong and specific ideas about their physical world while holding metaphysical ideas in suspense. Not that many are inclined to metaphysical contemplation but all men hold some assumptions about created being, even if found in the likes of astrological columns. In any case, rather than being overly critical of Newton, Einstein seems to have held the proper respect for a great scientist who did as much as he could in his day and age.

To jump to a different field of study, John Henry Newman and Jaroslav Pelikan – a more recent follower of Newman as a historian of Christian thought, have approached that topic in a direct manner both honest and respectful. For example, Professor Pelikan spoke of the core Christian doctrine of the bodily resurrection in relationship to the secondary issue of, "How?" In particular, do we have some sort of soul which is separable from the human body, surviving to be reunited with that body after resurrection? In the first volume of his history of Christian doctrine, *The Christian Tradition* [110], Professor Pelikan tells us that the great thinkers of Christianity were not in uniform favor of the idea of a separable soul. For example, St. Athanasius attacked that idea as a pagan corruption of Christian thought in the very same books for which he's generally credited with establishing more explicitly the Christian doctrine that Jesus Christ was one Person with two natures. Pelikan makes the reasonable claim, one I'd support with full heart, that our views of how God will fulfill His promises of life after death are dependent upon our assumptions about the fundamental properties of

Creation. What is time? What is space? What is matter? Are immaterial substances needed to complete the fullness of created being?

My addition to that part of the conversation would be to advocate the Thomistic principle that metaphysics uses the specific sciences. More specifically, metaphysics is disciplined by empirical reality in the same way that theoretical physics is disciplined by specific sorts of empirical evidence. Theoretical physics isn't bound by that evidence in the way of a prison. Newton and Einstein engaged in theorizing that had a distinctly free-form air to it, and so do most good physicists. Perhaps Nathaniel Hawthorne said it best when he advised us in one of his notebooks to keep our imaginations sane, but that writer certainly advocated strong and vigorous imaginations in the very way he worked.

We are to make sure that even our most abstract thoughts connect to the mundane realities of this universe.

Great thinkers of past ages have proposed speculative answers to those questions such as "What is time?", many of which answers have been rejected by modern thinkers either because of modern ideological biases or because those past answers are in conflict with modern empirical knowledge. If we are to provide answers as fruitful as possible, answers which don't just close off questions in the interests of self-serving human ideologies or the institutions which are the temples of our ideologies, we need to understand the answers we're rejecting from the past and those we're accepting from the past on the terms and in the context which correspond at least fairly well to the terms and contexts of the original thinkers. We need to understand why St. Athanasius thought the idea of a soul separable from the human body was a paganistic corruption of Christian thought while so many other fathers thought a belief in a soul separable from the body to be necessary to secure the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body. We need to understand why the young Augustine thought of 'soul' (and 'angel') as being made of some sort of matter thinner than that of our bodies but similar and then why he passed through a spiritualistic phase on his way to what Jacques Barzun has called a 'grotesque physicalism'. (In *The City of God*, he proposed that the possibility of sinlessness by human effort was supported by the story of a man he knew who had such control over his body that he could fart out a tune of sorts and also became concerned,

perhaps somewhat tongue-in-cheek, about the fate of our life-long nail- and hair-clippings relative to our resurrected bodies.)

These are not just matters of importance to those concerned with Christian doctrine but rather to all concerned with the nature of created being in general and with the Christian foundations of the West, foundations which have shaped the thought of even non-Christians who took part in the culture of the West. So it is that we need to understand why early modern thinkers, scientists and philosophers and theologians, used the undefined term 'mind' as if it were obvious that we have some sort of mystical organ which has direct access to a variety of absolute truths. Many still write and speak as if this were true, even some who are labeled and self-labeled as 'materialists'. More recent empirical research would force honest and courageous thinkers of all viewpoints to a direct and open encounter with the modern effort to understand 'mind' by understanding physical processes in the brain. I think we also need to see modern understandings of 'mind' in historical context, how did these modern ideas of 'mind' develop from earlier ideas of 'mind'.

We need to understand not only modern efforts to answer fundamental questions about created being but also the efforts leading up to ours if only because neurobiologists and philosophers, clergymen and lawyers, butchers and bakers and candle-stick makers, share a common vocabulary which comes from those efforts of our ancestors. In a very interesting book, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* [124], Richard Rorty played around with a 'neuron-based' language which would eliminate the need for language which has so much as a dualistic past, all non-objective references in our human languages. Probably a little tongue-in-cheek, he would have had us report neurological events directly, others knowing that specific such events, involving a specific group of neurons, correspond to feelings of pain or happiness or whatever. It's the sort of effort we can hope an intelligent and courageous thinker will make. Once. And then drop it to return to the more reasonable effort to ensure that our speech is sane even as we use terms and concepts which have ties to dualism and other doctrines which rest uncomfortably with modern knowledge about created being, even space and time. A clean reestablishment of knowledge in some pristine form corresponding to our current empirical evidence is both undesirable and impossible. An understanding of our intellectual heritage in light of our modern empirical knowledge, and vice versa, will likely bear much fruit.

# 584 Knowing Truth in a World Where We Perceive What is Useful

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=503>. It was finished and uploaded on 2009/05/22.]

Ten years ago, I'd read a book about the modern understanding of human color vision: *A Vision of the Brain* by Semir Zeki, a prominent neuroscientist. This book provides a summary of the history of theories of color vision. Recently, I realized this subject provides a good example of why there is no knowledge problem from a philosophical viewpoint, that is, why epistemology isn't a valid field of study – at least to a follower of the empirical methods of St. Thomas Aquinas.

Think of a bright red object, perhaps a child's ball. Put it in the direct sunlight of a July day and you see a bright red ball. Move it to the shade and you still see the same ball with the same bright red color, though it's now reflecting a very different set of light-waves. Helmholtz and one or two other great scientists of the 1800s pointed to this fact and noted it disproves the usual theories of color vision – that we perceive colors directly. As late as the 1960s by my personal experience, perhaps to this year, elementary school children were being taught that three primary colors are mixed to produce all other colors. All those colors, especially the primary ones, were treated as having objective and absolute existence.

The theory of the absolute and objective nature of colors survived despite the inconvenience of not being able to deal with that simple counter-observation that the same object reflects different light-waves under different conditions, yet we usually can see that same object as being the same

color. In the middle of the 20th century, Edwin Land, an expert in film-technology and founder of Polaroid Corp., thoroughly disproved the theory by showing that without context, without a chance to consider contrast with surrounding areas, we see no colors even when we're staring at films of the brightest of reds or oranges. When we're able to contrast one region with another, our eyes and brains work to produce a colored vision of the world by some biological equivalents of complex mathematical calculations comparing wavelengths of neighboring regions of the regions of the world around us. The resulting brain-states generate that useful and often wonderful illusion of a world of color.

Why would the blind processes of evolution produce such a marvel? Our color vision seems to be adapted to the task of allowing us to recognize the same object, say a ripe apple, under various lighting conditions. There is, thus, an immediate sense in which our color vision does help us discern truth, but the colors mislead us by seeming to present themselves as objective aspects of the world. They're actually codings of a sort, codings of some very complex aspects of reality which give us useful information as we go about our lives. Those codings are embodied objectively in brain-states but the corresponding colors can't really be found in the external world.

This entire issue helps us to see the legitimacy of epistemological considerations from a neuroscientific and physiological angle, but leads us to understand why epistemology isn't legitimate as a philosophical enterprise. In principle, we can know the objective truth which lies behind the color vision our eyes and brains produce. We can see, if only by way of formulas and visual simulations, the true wavelengths of light emitted by that bright red ball under different conditions and can even see the objective brain-states which are the objective foundation of this subjective vision of a colored world. We can also see DNA unraveling and stars exploding billions of years ago, near the beginning of this expansionary phase of the universe. We can control industrial processes by seeing the 'true' colors of hot metals being forged and we can see inside the skull of a child so the surgeon can plot out his strategy for dealing with a life-threatening epilepsy. True knowledge problems involve the acquisition of knowledge in a world which is remarkably transparent to the efforts of hard-thinking and hard-working human beings.

In Chapter 405, *Ways of Thought in the Modern West*, I discussed the views of the historian Carroll Quigley who summarized the fundamental Christian philosophy, methodical realism, in these words:

The truth unfolds in time through a communal process.

It's not easy to be truthful, especially if you raise the stakes and define 'truthful' in an active and not just a passive sense. To be truthful in a fuller sense means that you don't just sit still and try not to lie, you go out and play an active role in this communal process by which the truth unfolds. We can transcend our perceptual and cognitive limitations in many ways, attaining a more complete and less biased understanding of our world by proper use of our brains and these opposing thumbs which allow us to make some remarkable instruments. Problems of knowledge are particular, practical problems which can, at least in principle, be solved in somewhat final ways rather than being part of the open-ended understanding of created being and the story which God is telling with that created being.



## 585 Killing the Sense of Wonder

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=508>. It was finished and uploaded on 2009/05/29.]

We need to develop a healthy fear of what passes for education in the current age because that form of mental development is, in fact, little more than deformation of the pliable student into a trained monkey. To speak first of abstract thought, book-centered learning is best done by minimal years spent on basic reading skills followed by supervised – but, ideally, flexible – courses of individual reading interspersed with perhaps gatherings for discussion or problem solving and then – most importantly – writing and problem-solving exercises. In response to those who might object that such a program is best-suited to the needs of the intellectually talented, I can only ask – why torture other students and waste resources on the pretense that we can develop the higher-level intellectual talents of those students who have no such talent? Why not give those students the education they need, basic literacy skills combined with apprenticeships in law or journalism, engine-repair or computer programming? Don't force anyone but let them gravitate to what suits their inclinations and then let them gravitate elsewhere with no more demands than serious effort in return for the use of valuable resources. As it is, we have a bastardized educational system that kills enthusiasm in potential mechanical geniuses and musical geniuses as rapidly as it kills enthusiasm in potential physicists and language scholars. (We also have put ourselves in a position where it's going to be hard to finance any serious educational system for all of our youngsters, but I'll pass by that problem in this article.)

It's enthusiasm that most concerns me here. It's a sign of wonder, of a young human creature who's fascinated by numbers and symbols, by reading and writing stories, by producing wonderful sounds with that guitar

or piano, by taking apart an engine to see what the insides look like, by building walls or cooking delicious pot-pies, by caring for children or caring for horses and cows. Stop thinking of that child as a generic six year-old piece of human flesh. Stop thinking of that child as a future doctor or mother. Let him or her explore and start to show both talents and inclinations before guiding them. Don't be surprised or upset if boys and girls show different leanings and a different set of talents and don't be upset if differentiation also shows up between different ethnic groups.

Is this practical? Probably not, but we need to see some sort of clear image of paradise so we can build a better shantytown. In any case, I wish to concentrate upon that one aspect of the human being, that one admirable aspect not well-developed in our incompetently utilitarian age – the sense of wonder at what lies around us, seen and unseen. This is a sense of wonder common to Gore Vidal and Duke Ellington and Richard Feynman and Bill Elliot – the Awesome Bill from Dawsonville who never started a car engine he couldn't push and push harder. In response to the legitimate needs for mental, moral, and spiritual development, we tend to ignore that sense of wonder, in fact, to kill it that the student might be more readily molded to the needs of the educational bureaucracies and the other bureaucracies of the modern world. In other words, we don't educate so much as we try, at best, to train a higher-quality monkey. Or at least a more compliant monkey.

Provide opportunities and see which ones the child responds to. And it's likely that a given child will respond to specific opportunities with different levels of enthusiasm. And those specific responses will change as he matures. The child whose visual systems mature slowly may be late in taking to reading, but he may turn out to be a great scholar of the languages of ancient India. In the meantime, let him play with the dog and nurture his sense of wonder with walks through the woods. Avoid the stupid and cruel assumption that there's some sort of standard schedule of physical and mental development to which all children should conform.

It's that sense of wonder which is important, a sense of wonder which often starts out so poorly focused. It's that sense of wonder that might lead that child to become a truly educated human being rather than a trained monkey. What is a truly educated human being? It's what might become of that girl who bloodies her toes practicing ballet steps. It's what might become of the boy who insists on taking machines and electronic devices apart to see how they work. It's what might become of the boy who has

become obsessed with numbers and symbols at a young age. It's a good mechanic who knows how to deal with customers and suppliers as well as the historian who can talk properly at a conference or when he's negotiating entrance to the archives of a hostile government.

Some men of greater wisdom have claimed that true education has little to do with particular stocks of knowledge and is instead a developed capacity for learning. I'll broaden that claim:

True education is what results in the capacity to respond confidently and appropriately to God's Creation.

In terms of traditional Christian teachings about virtue, the opposite, the incapacity to respond confidently and appropriately to God's Creation, is the sin of sloth. In more recent centuries, sloth has been somewhat officially redefined as mere laziness or idleness, mere inactivity. In fact, many human beings who are guilty of the traditionally defined sin of sloth have busy schedules, even if many slots in those schedules involve shopping or submitting passively to being entertained. Sloth is a lack of faith in the goodness of Creation more than a mere laziness.

The opposite of sloth is a disciplined capacity to wonder. The opposite of sloth can involve hours spent staring at the stars in a clear winter sky or hours dreaming of a life lived in Colonial Massachusetts. Somewhere, Jacques Barzun pointed out that the successful creators are those who know how to properly loaf. To loaf in a sense of wonder is to learn how to align your thoughts with those of our Maker. It's to learn how to enter into His creative acts, His acts-of-being. It's also to prepare for periods of more active learning or the production of a book or the building of a plumbing system for an innovative factory, periods in which a more conventional discipline becomes necessary.

In terms of Christian salvation, I'm advocating education as a path of preparation for participation in the life of God. It's the capacity to wonder and to respond properly to the object of wonder which might make us creatures capable of enjoying life without end.



# 586 If We Can't Understand What We Shall Be, We Can't Be It

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=554>. It was finished and uploaded on 2009/07/08.]

Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. [1 John 3:2, RSV, Catholic Edition, Ignatius Press]

I was struck by this verse when I recently saw it quoted because I know that some, perhaps many, of my fellow-Christians will use verses such as this to justify pessimistic assessments about man's ability to understand. Mostly, we human beings tend to be pessimistic about those lines of thought which require great discipline, a lot of time, and a bit of sheer effort before we can make those thoughts our own. They say that mathematics is hard but so is any historical analysis or any theological speculation which is worth much.

If I'm an image of God, or a potential image of God, I can understand what I'll be and where I'll be, assuming I'm amongst those who are resurrected. That is, I can understand life after death in rational terms and I can understand what Heaven is in similar terms or else I wouldn't be suited to that life. In terms of modern empirical knowledge, we would probably need to consider what physicists have learned about the nature of matter and how it's organized – including thermodynamics, what biologists and historians and others have learned about the developmental nature of this

world – including the evolution of the human mind and the development of an individual man's mind, what mathematicians have discovered about the abstract aspects of Creation – including the way in which seemingly chaotic systems can suddenly self-organize. From these piles of poorly integrated empirical knowledge, we can construct philosophical and theological systems worthy of the name. This is what Augustine of Hippo did in laying the foundations for the Western Civilization which rose from the ruins of Roman and Hellenistic civilizations. But that took a lot of courage and faith, one hell of a lot of work, and modern Christian thinkers seem to be missing either the courage or the faith.

This is not to say that any human thinker can reach the complete truth about life after death. After all, we know that Augustine's system, and the system which Aquinas put together eight centuries later, eventually proved inadequate. Human additions to our knowledge of Creation have proved many of their speculations wrong and left many Christian beliefs unsupported – the traditional understandings have eroded.

Christians are always ready to claim, "We human beings are images of God," but seem to have no sane way of speaking about the meaning of this claim. Christians have a number of doctrines which seem to be no longer expressible in sane language. God has invited us to participate in His life and His work and that implies we have the capability and the responsibility to understand Creation. Our earlier understandings of Creation and of most Christian doctrines no longer make sense because we now know more about Creation, that is, we know more about God's acts as Creator. We're capable of higher understandings. We need to respond in our proper way to God's Creation. We need to be fearless and confident. Some participate in God's work by dancing or playing the piano, by teaching young children or caring for those who are dying. We who are called to intellectual work participate in God's work by being the pioneers in a never-ending effort to shape the human mind to encapsulate God's Creation, to share in the divine thoughts manifested as the stars in the sky or the children playing in the front yard, most importantly – as the story in which the stars and those children play a role.

Pioneers are succeeded by those who live more routine lives. Not quite 2,000 years ago, the Egyptian scientist Ptolemy invented trigonometry as part of an astronomical and astrological research project to predict and explain the movements of stars and planets. Though trigonometry still is difficult for many to deal with when presented in the classroom, I grew up

knowing men who had entered the mills after sixth grade or so and had acquired some pretty high levels of skills in trigonometry over the course of their careers as metal-workers. Double-entry bookkeeping was introduced to Europe during the Renaissance and was considered so difficult as to inspire the same sort of awe we 21st century folk feel towards quantum mechanics or general relativity. Nowadays, your corner drugstore has piles of account-books which are intended for use in that form of bookkeeping.

The older discussions of Christian beliefs are no longer tenable and few Christians have responded to the ever-present call of God's Creation – "Talk to me, explore me, wonder at me." What were once rationally defensible doctrines have become mysteries of the sort found in Christian fantasy novels. God is a rational, all-powerful Creator and not a magician who calls upon forces which exist independently of Him. If we are truly His images, or maybe it's better to say – "potentially His images", then we're not magicians nor are we intended by our Maker to be uncomprehending citizens of a world of forces beyond our understanding. We're children who are called to watch our Father and to playfully imitate His actions as He goes about His work in Creation.

If we are to live in the world of the resurrected, the same would hold. The Son of God isn't resurrecting us to put on a never-ending magical act to amuse us. He's resurrecting us to share His life, but we can't share that life if it's a mystery to us. We can share God's life only if we can truly imitate His actions as Creator, if we can think the thoughts He manifested in Creation, if we can have some hope of truly understanding this story God is telling. This understanding is a matter of principle and no particular human mind is capable of understanding so much as a flea, let alone this world, let alone the world of the resurrected. Yet, we have to realize that the human mind is the sort of entity which can shape itself to be a reflection of God's thoughts manifested in Creation. If we truly love the Creator and truly wish to be His images, then we Christians before all others are bound to respond to His world rather than to retreat into a dreamworld which is more comfortable in the short-term.



## 587 After Reading a Little of Hume on Cause-and-effect

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=572>. It was finished and uploaded on 2009/08/06.]

I've browsed lightly in Hume's *A Treatise on Human Nature* and haven't yet figured out why I'm sympathetic to his general train of thought though I'm in opposition to some of his most important conclusions. Maybe I'm in sympathy with his thinking. It's hard to say because he was trying hard to respond to empirical reality but he was somewhat entangled in language and concepts which simply assumed that, as one example that concerns me, human beings use something called a 'mind' to analyze and pass judgment upon reality. Maybe this mind is a substance or maybe just a faculty but it doesn't seem to be grounded fully in the observable human being. I haven't read any passages from Hume where he, in fact, explicitly stated any such beliefs on the 'mind', but he has written the first sections of *A Treatise on Human Nature* as if there is a real entity called the 'mind' which doesn't seem to be a bodily organ and which is capable of accessing some realm of truths independent of our concrete world. I don't think Hume's heart is in this business of viewing mind as a given, mystical entity, but what choice had he? What could he have known of the remarkable properties of the human brain, properties which seem coextensive with those human aspects which were once seen as explainable only by a mystical, supernatural 'mind' or 'soul'. What could Hume have known of the remarkable properties of the matter from which the brain is made? Empirically oriented thinkers such as Aristotle and Aquinas also backed off on this issue, positing – with one degree of certainty or another – the existence of an immaterial mind or soul because of their time-bound and well-justified belief that matter wasn't

plastic enough for abstract thinking.

Hume didn't know, and can't be blamed for not knowing, that the visual system, eyes to visual processing systems to higher level creation of a surrounding environment, is shaped in response to actual experience. There were interesting experiments done on some poor kittens when I was young. If they weren't exposed to, say, vertical lines when their visual systems were developing, they'd be blind to them all their lives. It would be sadistically comical, I guess, to watch them continually run into vertical wooden rails and they'd still not perceive them with their eyes.

This is to say that our eyes and brains don't just process experience and allow it to form ideas in some sort of generic idea-processing organ. Our organs, speaking more generally than I usually do, are shaped by our responses to our environments. Our hearts and thigh muscles are shaped to wolf-like standards of endurance if we are, for example, nomadic hunters. Our eyes and visual systems see, at least more accurately, what we've responded to during crucial periods in our development. Our bodies are manifestations of our relationships to our environments and our minds, at their best, are more or less accurate images of God's acts-of-being. You can think of acts-of-being as manifestations of God's thoughts. In those manifestations, even the most humble of things, we can perceive thoughts of God and shape our minds to be embodiments of those particular thoughts of God.

In my writings, I've been trying to speak of a new way of understanding what 'mind' and 'thinking' really mean. I've not yet figured out a good way to say clearly what this new way really is, but I'll try again. Let me present a crude diagram of the traditional view of the relationship between absolute truths, God, and Creation:

We should notice first of all that human thinkers stand outside the flux and uncertainty, at least in principle. Hume, and a few others, moved towards an empirical view that was entirely inside the third box but stayed with the big picture. Somehow, a fully empirical creature, that is an entity belonging to Creation, could judge worldly knowledge as if it had a mind which wasn't quite a creaturely entity, but... Confusion of a sort reigned, if not detected by most readers, but some modern thinkers were moving in the right direction even before historians of human thought, such as Snell or Onians began their work which showed the development of human thought in historical time, even before the neuroscientists, such as Broca and Ramon y Cajal, began their work which showed the physical foundations of the mind.

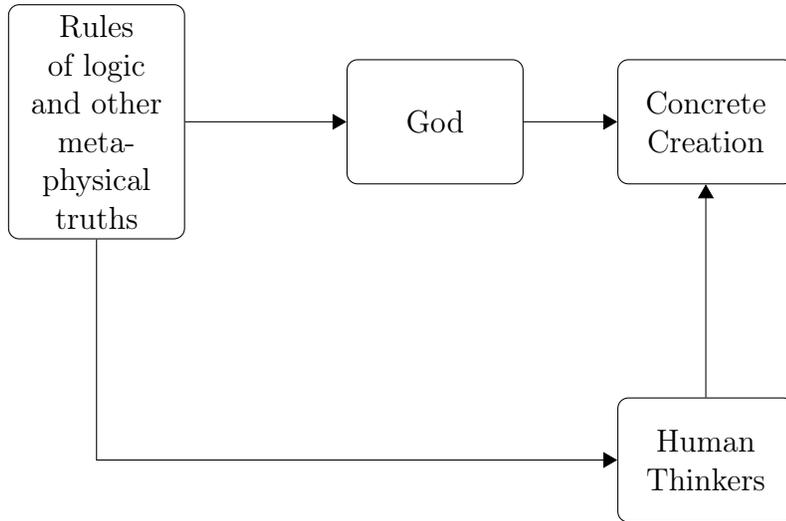


Figure 587.1: Conventional View of God and Created Being

Based upon my understanding of modern empirical knowledge and the ways in which human beings shape their minds, I'd change the above diagram to this:

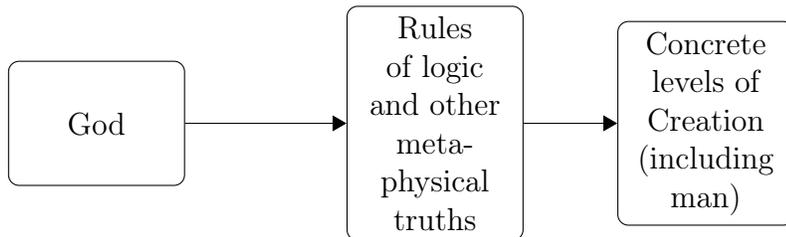


Figure 587.2: Loyd Fueston's View of God and Created Being

Moreover, I've claimed that middle box is actually a part of Creation, what I call the Primordial Universe. It's the manifested truths from which concrete worlds are created, this world and the world of the resurrected. That second box is with us in this world of the third box. We can see it clearly in the abstractions, such as the initially strange mathematics of relativity theory with its intertwining of space and time or of quantum mechanics where mathematical certainty and elegance is found in wave-

functions which then collapse to concrete electrons or photons in ways that seem so ugly under traditional ways of thought.

With these diagrams in place, let me repeat a few things I've said often in my writings so that I can indicate how all of this ties back to cause and effect. Note first that in my model, the burden for verifying reason has been taken away from the human thinker who is himself embedded in concrete creation. Thought is more or less the processes by which man learns to bring the truth in things into his mind, to encapsulate it as the thinking processes of that mind which is then capable of moving on to ever more abstract truths which I've claimed to be so thing-like that things are shaped from them. This explains the ways of modern mathematicians and physicists, and increasingly other sorts of thinkers who deal with abstractions. We don't have minds equipped with the circuitry of abstract reasoning which then simply need 'facts' to operate upon. We, most especially creative thinkers such as Einstein and Melville, are embedded in the thoughts God manifested in this world and we need to learn how to perceive those thoughts, whether manifested as the concreteness of a hunk of metal or the abstractness of the subatomic particles which give that hunk of metal its properties. We need to learn how to let our minds move along with human approximations to those concrete and abstract manifestations of the thoughts of a rational Creator.

Man is embedded in a world which seems at first to be made of concrete entities which 'obey', to some extent, abstract laws. As man has increased his knowledge of empirical reality, his best thinkers have started to work as if the abstractions are as inherent to this thing-like world as are the nails and semiconductors. The theories of relativity and of quantum mechanics deal not with abstractions which time, space, and matter obey. They are the behavior of time, space, and matter. They are also the proper thoughts of a physicist rather than being theories he processes with some sort of 'mind' which can stand in judgment upon those theories.

My ideas arise from an effort to openly and honestly respond to what we know of our world and I'm motivated by a Christian faith that the transcendental God freely and willingly took on a role as a certain sort of all-powerful and all-knowing and all-loving Creator. No matter how strange the discoveries of modern empirical knowledge might seem, they are revelations of manifested thoughts of that Creator. If matter interacts in such a way as to indicate cause-and-effect relationships, if we can develop theories about those interactions which include those relationships in a necessary way, we

aren't forming some abstract picture of concrete things so much as we are seeing abstract aspects which are part of concrete things. We are seeing the inherent behavior of thing-like being. We are seeing not abstractions in the sense of mental acts of imagination but rather abstract levels of the being from which those things are made.

I get this impression that Hume had an instinct that something like this is true but he didn't have the empirical knowledge or the abstract thinking tools to form a more coherent view uniting the concrete (billiard-balls) and the abstract (cause-and-effect relationships). Even now, in this time after Cantor and Einstein, Melville and Wallace Stevens, I'm having a great deal of trouble setting down my views on what a human mind is and how it forms, what it's relationship is to our world, but I think I'm moving a bit closer to a clear statement of my views. To do this, I'm beginning to speak a different language than those around me. I'm pretty sure that even if there are problems in my work, even if someone else finds a better way to deal with these matters, I'm speaking a childish version of a language not to be spoken in a mature form for a generation or more. At that time, richer concepts of being, including both concrete and abstract levels, will be as natural to well-educated youngsters as Darwinian ideas of life and Einsteinian ideas of time and space are now. Those richer concepts of being will, of course, include those Darwinian and Einsteinian ideas, or some more advanced and more sophisticated versions of those ideas.



## 588 What is Wisdom?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=591>. It was finished and uploaded on 2009/08/25.]

Wisdom is the fumbling substitute for perfect knowledge. [The American Story by Garet Garret, Henry Regnery Company, 1955 and made available as a pdf file on <http://lewrockwell.com/> through the generosity of Lew Rockwell and his associates.]

Ahhh, but what does it mean to know?

In the old testament, “to know your wife” meant “to be in intimate union with your wife,” including even “to have sex with your wife.” In old-fashioned language, “to engage in the marital act with your wife.” In general, the ancient Hebrews and the ancient Greeks, at least those in the line of Plato and Aristotle, used “to know” in the sense of an intimacy, a profound communion. Knowledge, to modern man, is often no more than an organized form of data of the sort which can be stored in computer memory.

Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away.

[...]

So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. [1 Corinthians 13:8 [141].]

As I understand these issues, knowledge deals with God’s world in terms of what can be learned by empirical investigation while prophecy deals with

God's revelations of His transcendent Being and also of His revelations of His purposes for Creation. Human knowledge and human prophecy in this mortal realm are both quite imperfect, but they can tend towards the perfect forms of knowledge and prophecy. Prophecy is to speak truly of God and of His love and His laws. It is a form of knowledge of God Himself and it will certainly not pass away in the world of the resurrected so much as it will be perfected. At that time, knowledge of Creation, of ourselves and others, of the meaning of time and space and matter, of morality and narrative, will be perfected. Faith and hope will have disappeared. What sense does it make to have faith that God exists when you live in the presence of His Son? What sense does it make to hope for God's mercy when you've already received it?

Each resurrected human being might still have only a tiny share in the perfected knowledge held by the Lord Jesus Christ, but it will be a share of the perfect knowledge of the Head of the Body of Christ. Wisdom, so called, will be part of our memories of things outgrown, as will be true of faith and hope.

# 589 Passing Beyond the Limitations of Scientific Materialism

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=605>. It was finished and uploaded on 2009/10/09.]

We do need to pass by the limitations of scientific materialism and to do it without falling into the temptation of dualisms which invoke hand-waving to explain immaterial phenomena. My very working method, as well as my respect for the totality of human experience and human knowledge, rejects any possibility of scientific materialism or reductionistic materialism as I've sometimes referred to that attitude. Dualism of created being fragments Creation while scientific materialism or reductionistic materialism denies meaning, and even ultimate reality, to our experiences.

I've started reading Alfred North Whitehead's *Science and the Modern World* [148], a copy of which I bought 20 years ago or so in a used-book store. I'm nearly a century late in seeing the need to pass beyond scientific materialism. Whitehead seems to have taught that the greatest philosophical need of our era is a metaphysics to replace the irrational metaphysics of scientific materialism. He considered the irrationality of this mostly implicit metaphysics of the modern era to be tied to the belief that matter has a permanence and simple location, largely the view defended by Einstein in his debate with Niels Bohr – see Chapter 13, *Einstein and Bohr: Don't Tell God what to do*. for a short discussion of Bohr's insightful (but possibly apocryphal) response to Einstein's claim: "God does not play dice". Chapter 12, *The Metaphysics of Position, Momentum, and Missed Field-goals* is a short discussion more directly in line with Whitehead's criticism

of a physics based upon the permanence and simple location of matter. See Chapter 156, *A Christian's view of Einstein's and Bohr's Debate on the meaning of reality* for my discussion, and acceptance, of the understanding of that debate reached by the German philosopher Kurt Hubner.

I don't claim to fully understand Whitehead's proposed way of thought, but it's similar in some ways to my metaphysics, Thomistic existentialism which recognizes explicitly the primacy of relationships over matter and which is updated to consider modern empirical knowledge. To the extent I understand Whitehead's tentative sketch of a more rational metaphysics than scientific materialism, I can say he was proposing an organistic view of all physical reality, proposing that evolution is a real and fundamental part of reality. Its not just a process occurring in life-forms which are just an accident occurring in a scientifically materialistic world. Whitehead proposed a metaphysics which was not only organistic but also event-based, resulting in what I would call a "smearing over time and space." It seems to be a proposal that our world is something like a narrative, as I've proposed, but my metaphysics is multi-layered, allowing for the contingency of space-time itself. This world is a narrative but is shaped from the abstract being of what I call the Primordial Universe, allowing for a great freedom in the sorts of universes which could have come into being and also somewhat forcing the need for decisions in such matters. That is, my metaphysics works more smoothly when we admit the existence of a personal God and also gives Him the absolute freedom which only the Almighty could possess or use.

Whitehead strongly desired to protect the independence of metaphysics from theology:

What is the status of the enduring stability of the order of nature? There is the summary answer, which refers nature to some greater reality standing behind it. This reality occurs in the history of thought under many names, The Absolute, Brahma, The Order of Heaven, God. The delineation of final metaphysical inputs is no part of this lecture. My point is that any summary conclusion jumping from our conviction of the existence of such an order of nature to the easy assumption that there is an ultimate reality which, in some unexplained way, is to be appealed to for the removal of perplexity, constitutes the great refusal of rationality to assert its rights. We have to search whether na-

ture does not in its very being show itself as self-explanatory.  
[page 92 of *Science and the Modern World* [148].]

I have more than a little sympathy for a program to explore and try to understand the world accessible to human perceptions or human thought before invoking a faith in a transcendent Being, but even the most rational of atheists must honestly confront a very difficult question: How do we explain the aspects of our world which can be described as contingent, particular, or random? That is, how do we explain the factual nature of created being, at least of concrete being? See Chapter 160, *Randomness as a Sign of God's Presence* for my take on the meaning of randomness and the reasons I can claim:

There's a simple summary of the situation:

Only God can make a truly random number.

And again:

Only God can act in a truly random way.

Whitehead doesn't seem so concerned with dualisms as I am, perhaps because of his desire to keep theology and metaphysics apart – though I don't know if he even considered theology to be a legitimate field of study. He certainly had respect for the Medieval Scholastics who didn't always differentiate so clearly between theology and metaphysics. I share that respect, as well as his belief that those Medieval thinkers were overly rationalistic. Whitehead also gave the *Lowell Lectures* which are the matter of *Science and the Modern World* [148] in 1925 before Godel and Kolmogorov and Chaitin and others, such as Stephen Toulmin, anticipated the factual nature of randomness. In a critique of evolutionary theory, early 1960s, Toulmin, a philosopher, noted that whenever an evolutionary thinker speaks of randomness you could substitute some complicated phrase about the interaction of two or more fully deterministic and independent systems, such as the genes of a family line and the environment(s) of that line. I think that modern science, mathematics and the evolutionary work in various physical sciences, forces us to deal with the factual nature of the universe, the particularistic or random nature. And it leads me to speculate that a proper metaphysical analysis of modern empirical knowledge, including

abstract mathematics, forces us to conjecture that “ultimate reality” which Whitehead preferred to avoid in his program for a new metaphysics.

Still, Whitehead seems to have had the same general program in mind as I have, with that major difference about the relationship between theology and metaphysics and, in fact, I would put all human knowledge into a single worldview in which metaphysics plays the role of glue, along with abstract mathematics. He shared my concerns about scientific materialism but also shares my respect for science. I find it interesting that, nearly a century ago, he saw a need to move beyond scientific materialism and, so far as I can see, little has been done to carry out such a program.

# 590 Theology, Physics, Philosophy, and Politics

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=618>. It was finished and uploaded on 2009/11/24.]

Once the thought of Plato and Aristotle had a home – the Greek city-state. Once the thought of St. Paul and St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas had a home – Western Civilization. The two situations were different because the Greek philosophers struggled to find the best way to inhabit a home built by their predecessors while the Christian Fathers and their successors built a home for Western Christianity. In both cases, there was a rooting of philosophical form in the social and political context and a weaker tie between philosophical substance and that same context – this is to say that all human thought has such a context but may also contain truths from levels of abstraction above that context. We understand Creation as best we can in each generation and such general understandings affect the way we perceive and think about the most human of efforts which are, after all, directed to some purpose in our world as we understand it.

In recent centuries, in the United States in particular, we've lived in the house while treating it as the most natural and most permanent of structures. As if we were children not knowing what our grandparents and parents had done to make our home and to put bread on the table, we accepted a warm bed as something natural and to be expected, we came to the dinner-table with no real understanding of our need to be grateful for what had been done for us, we had no need to focus our thoughts and our playtime upon our duty to someday take care of the house and to fill the pantry. Lord knows we had little reason to believe that the electrical wires and water pipes were anything but part of the natural world.

When homeowners think and act this way, they'll awake ten years into their ownership to find themselves with inadequate wiring, badly corroded water-pipes, siding that needs a lot of repairs at once, and so forth. In an extreme case, the house might need to be torn down and rebuilt from foundation up. And suppose the foundation itself has decayed? And what to do when the breadwinner realizes he has not the skills or the tools to do any such thing? Nor has he the money to pay someone else to do the work since the bank accounts inherited from Daddy and Grandma are emptied and that nice, soft office-job has disappeared.

To a Christian, that metaphoric house is a mixed mess of sorts, containing the altars attended by the priests who serve the imperfect Body of Christ forming in this mortal realm – including the Church however defined and also the workrooms and kitchens attended by farmers and merchants and politicians, the secular kingdoms and marketplaces of mankind. I'll not even try to develop that metaphor properly at this time because a muddle is likely to result, but the point is that, to a Christian, the ecclesiastical and political realms are both part of the Body of Christ and neither has complete dominance over the other though they each have some rightful authority over the other. I'll skip those problems for now and maybe get back to them some day, God willing.

The home built by much earlier generations of Western Christians and left to us has decayed so badly that substantial new construction is necessary. Christians, who failed to enrich and maintain their culture, have only themselves to blame but they're plenty ready to blame others. Far too many Christians have taken to berating the pagans for not maintaining the Christian Civilization of the West. If your plumbing started to leak in the shower, under the kitchen sink, at the outdoor spigot, would you blame your neighbor for not taking proper care of your house? Yet, when our children talk in barbaric jargon or blast out rap music, we do blame schools and movie producers and all the others who perhaps were most guilty of filling a vacuum left by the sorry descendants of Dante and Fra Angelica and Rembrandt and Milton, the vacuum sustained against the efforts of a few, such as Graham Greene or Flannery O'Connor, to bring a sophisticated Christian sensibility to the modern world. Jacques Barzun said it truly in the title to a collection of his essays: *The Culture We Deserve* [8]. I could add: *The Politics We Deserve*, *The Science We Deserve*, *The Sports We Deserve*, and so forth, but I'm sure Professor Barzun was considering all of those in his more general title.

I'll move on and produce at least some general ideas about a plausible Christian civilization which we could build using the vast resources available in the modern world, resources that Christian thinkers seem to think part only of some anti-Christian realm. For example, as I noted a number of times, those bones dug out of the sands of Africa weren't planted there by demons from Hell, they were left by hominids or ancestors to hominids which were part of a complex story. A later part of that story involves chapters on Babylon and Egypt, the Roman Empire and the succeeding Germanic empires, the accidental development of somewhat universal suffrage in the Anglo-American territories and the ongoing loss of much that was gained by those accidental developments as mediated by the best sorts of opportunists (such as George Washington and John Adams and Thomas Jefferson). Is it possible the West has decayed so badly because our human world became more complex in synch with our more complex understanding of our greater world and we didn't learn the requisite lessons?

We and our ancestors have allowed this bad situation to develop by our passiveness caused by lack of courage and by lack of faith in God as Creator. This is the sin of sloth in Medieval Christian thought. More than just pointing this out, I wish to raise a larger point: at each stage of history, serious thinkers can make interesting and important contributions to our understanding of Creation, but a failure to move on will leave even the valid insights intertwined with errors. In the case of moral nature, spectrums of behaviors were split into categories of vices and virtues which were themselves treated as the basic building blocks of human moral nature. The insights of Medieval thinkers can be lost because it's not so easy to reconcile systems of vices and virtues to the realities of the embodied human being as described by modern biology.

I'll propose a model of important aspects of this world, a model which is far from original in its pieces, but I'm aiming at a more complete worldview which covers human politics as well as theology, physics, and philosophy. At some level of abstraction, being is unified, so I can claim:

1. The components of thing-like being arise by local processes which allow the possibility of some substantial freedom.
2. In this world, certain patterns exist at a global level, including the fundamental structure of space-time. Local entities will respond to those global aspects of this world as they – so to speak – grow up into

the world. The local entities will change themselves to somewhat encapsulate what they respond to. Over time, some entities will achieve some sort of success by a combination of proper responses and luck. Other entities will fail. Over time, complex environments will also develop.

I'm trying to reach a proper level of abstraction so that I can speak of the evolution of both galaxies and gorillas and I'm trying to do it in a way that allows a coherent discussion of moral freedom – which of course leads to social and political issues. My preferred, and admittedly sparse – for now, understanding of the aspects of reality described by modern physics is a slight variation on the view expressed above:

1. Locally, we have the components of things coming into being by processes described by quantum mechanics (speaking simply for summary purposes).
2. Globally, we have the structures, space-time at the least, which force those components to respond in ways that produce simple and complex things.

As creatures of a world which is the free-will creation of an all-powerful God (theology), a world which has some fundamental aspects explorable and describable by empirical knowledge-gathering efforts of men, a world which is understandable in a quite contingent and time-bound manner by speculative thought, we would be doing well to shape our minds to encompass what we know of the Creator and His Creation and we would be doing well to also shape our ways of organizing our communities to those same two bodies of knowledge, of God in His transcendent and necessary Being and of His freely chosen acts as Creator – to see my understanding of human knowledge, download *Four Kinds of Knowledge* [43] where I explain why there are really only two kinds of knowledge.

How can I make such a claim about politics, a realm of human moral action, of human freedom? How can I claim that politics is somehow deeply tied to astrophysics? What is the sort of politics implied by my understanding of Creation?

Let me first state my claim in the form of a description of biological evolution:

1. Organisms arise by way of somatic and genetic inheritance and, in a manner of speaking propose responses to the demands of their environments. Failures occur due to luck or inadequacy of the proposal. The form of success which counts most in biological terms is to have lots of descendants, that is, those who carry your genes and not necessarily those who resulted from your own acts of reproduction.
2. Over time, family lines of organisms are shaped to the realities of a particular locality and also to the larger-scale realities of the world. Social mammals have added new levels of complexity by developing what might be called cultures, so that new responses to environments arise through community behaviors. Human beings have developed very complex cultures supplemented by technology. These advances also lead to new ways to fail.

We speak of self-organizing systems in the modern world but we should remember that a system developing from below will reach some sort of stability only by properly responding to the local environments, including the locally manifested structures of space-time in our world. Christians can place this sort of understanding in a greater context by way of an explicit recognition that we, our minds and our social relationships, are best shaped in response to the Creator's will as given in Holy Scripture and in Creation itself including our own bodies and our natural forms of interacting with our fellow humans, with other creatures, and with the non-living parts of Creation.

Such a general principle gives us little help in structuring a government, or a way of choosing leaders, but perhaps at least helps us to filter out wrongful forms of government and might help us to eliminate leaders who fail to properly respond to Creator and Creation. This is what we should expect if the world is as I claim it to be, at least from the viewpoint of a developing creature. We freely seek what is proper but we know if it truly is proper only when we test it in our environments or against what we know of the world. All existing complex entities or communities in an evolutionary world are the result of a number of generations of experience and responses, indicating the need for a proper conservatism recognizing the value of that embodied experience. At the same time, a system which is the product of any sort of historical development, Anglo-American court systems or the great white shark, needs to be open to further development

when its responses are no longer proper to its situation. Experimentation can be as important as adherence to tradition. I speak known truths, but my goal is to speak them in a way that allows human politics, in fact, all of human social and moral interaction to be discussed in terms of the created being as we know it from the best of modern knowledge.

Let me raise the political question which is primary from a Christian viewpoint: Why did the Lord Jesus Christ accept humiliation, torture, and death rather than use His divine power to conquer those who opposed Him? The first general answer I'll propose is that God's ultimate power is that of the supreme Act-of-being, He who is His own Act-of-being. This is to say, He is the source of all being, His own Being as well as that of every creature. He worked to create in the beginning and He's working still. He's not a Jovian god who conquers a creation which is possibly co-eternal with him, but rather the God of Jesus Christ who creates and sustains from a fundamental level of being which we can't even directly perceive though 2500 years of intellectual struggle from the pre-Socratics to now have allowed us to at least realize the existence of abstract forms of being.

I'll return to the question:

Why did the Lord Jesus Christ accept humiliation, torture, and death rather than use His divine power to conquer those who opposed Him?

Rather than using His power to conquer the Romans, the Lord Jesus laid down His life and then picked it up again. Having learned obedience through His suffering in human flesh, Christ reached perfection in His resurrected human body by responding freely to Creation and Creator. This is a bit strange to human perceptions since He was responding to His own Creation. He was creature, recipient of the divine gift of existence, and also Creator, giver of existence. He had created the possibility of creaturely perfection and then He achieved it.

The ultimate power is the power over being, a power denied to creatures. We must accept the world as God gives it to us but we have some freedom to participate in the creation of new things – that is, things that can be made from components already created by God. We have a little bit more freedom to shape ourselves and the things around us in response to the world as it truly is. If we fail to do so, those new things will fall out of existence or else revert to some other form. If we try to bring into being some things

or some new relationships between men which can't be generated from the basic stuff of this world, then those things or relationships will fail to come into being for even the shortest of times. If we fail to shape new things to the higher structures of this world, then they will fall out of existence. This will be true also of things that need to change in response to our dynamic world or to man's deeper understanding of this world. If we fail to change our social or political structures, or even our own thoughts, then alienation sets in and can work to destroy our minds.

The view of politics I've advanced in a very tentative form in this article is but a baby-step towards that important goal of achieving a unified understanding of created being, a goal I've argued for in various writings including that book I've made available for free download: *Four Kinds of Knowledge* [43].



# 591 The Reality of Perfection

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=624>. It was finished and uploaded on 2010/01/08.]

I've claimed that the human mind is the sort of entity capable of encapsulating the world though an individual mind isn't capable of fully understanding so much as a gnat. I've also quoted the historian Carroll Quigley about the nature of the traditional Christian philosophy of methodical realism:

The truth unfolds in time through a communal process,

or, equivalently,

The human mind forms in time through a communal process,

The individual human being who responds properly to God's Creation has started to travel a path which leads to a state of Christ-like perfection, but he travels that path as a member of a greater organism, a community. We won't reach perfection in this mortal life and it may be still more disturbing to some that we travel toward perfection as members of a rather unruly herd with some members having traits and behaviors which invite stronger descriptions than 'imperfect'. And I'm not preaching any sort of salvation-for-all creed. So far as I can see, many traveling with this herd aren't truly part of it and some stubbornly refuse to change, remaining what they were at the beginning of the journey. It's hard for me to believe that those who refuse to respond in a courageous and faith-filled manner to God's Creation could ever be happy in Heaven and I suspect that such human beings, many or few, having refused to allow God to lift them out

of their natural state as human animals will simply die a final death appropriate to animals.

The others will change at most a tiny bit in this mortal realm. Perhaps we gain a little moral and spiritual maturity as we age but some of that, and maybe most, is the result of losing the youthful energy to misbehave. Perhaps we learn a little but it's awfully hard to apply the lessons of experience during our lives and even major nations have trouble digesting the results of their own history. Few there are who can see the human condition in its greater scope as human nature develops somewhat, and our powers of narrating that development is blended in to help shape our future responses to God's world. Becoming moral individuals and moral communities is largely a matter of learning how to honestly narrate our past and to produce some sort of speculative narrative for our futures and to try to follow that narrative.

There are various Christian narratives but all have to see the same end to this mortal chapter of our story, a transition to the individual perfection of a Christ-like man and an entry into the community perfection which is the Body of Christ.

This is all well and good, at least as good as the typical Christian talk about some Heaven that remains beyond investigation, but why do I speak of the reality of any sort of perfection? Perfection seems not to be possible in this world except as a manner of speaking. This also doesn't matter to Christians because analysis of modern empirical knowledge under the assumption that we inherit a Creation, a work of an all-powerful God, points to a more reasonable view of created being as multi-leveled. The dominant pagan view was that this world was shaped from some vague sort of being they could only describe as 'chaos' or something similar. They were far from entirely wrong.

Philo was an Alexandrian Jew who was born a little before Jesus of Nazareth. Philo read the book of Genesis in light of Plato's speculative claim that the world was created from nothing by the God and Father of all – see Plato's dialog, *Timaeus*. Christians accepted Philo's reading at a time when Christian thought was being born. Since then, the tradition has been to read the first chapters of Genesis as if it were a story of a creation from nothingness. In fact, the word translated as 'create' has a meaning akin to cleave in the sense of separate. The interested reader can look up *Genesis 1 Through the Ages* [77] by Stanley Jaki, the Benedictine priest and polymath scholar who died in 2009.

The pagan idea wasn't wrong so much as it was incomplete. This world was shaped from some form of created being which is strange to our thing-based ways of thought. I'm not speaking of mystical ideas but rather those of modern mathematical physics, specifically the narratives of the birth of this universe in the events inaccurately labeled the 'Big Bang'. As we move backwards in time towards those early fractions of a second of this expanding universe, our best scientific theories speak of particular forms of matter and energy melting into a more general form of matter-energy which is a more abstract level or phase of created being. The God of Jesus Christ did create contingent being from nothing but we can't see that creation. There might be multiple phases of being on the other side of that so-called Big Bang.

In my proposed narrative of Creation, the level of created being "just on the other side of the Big Bang" is the space of states of being which Roger Penrose and other mathematicians or physicists have described in terms of 'possible universes'. Our universe is a highly particular one, a universe which seems to have nearly 0 probability of existing relative to all the set of possibilities which is that space.

As I see matters, that space of possible universes contains also that which is the world of the resurrected, the perfect and non-decaying universe from that space of possible universes which God chose to create. I could be wrong and we might have to go back several phases of God's shaping of the raw stuff of Creation before we get to the level where He 'restarts' in His creation of that perfect world of the resurrected. For now, the main point I wish to make is that it's possible for Christian thinkers to integrate modern empirical knowledge into our views of this world as being a part or phase or level or whatever of a Creation, a work of an all-powerful God who alone can create from nothingness. He created some strange stuff from nothingness, shaped this world from it, and shaped us inside this world as characters in a story He's telling. There is every reason to believe that a Creator can create a perfect world and resurrect us, re-create us, inside that world as perfected men.

I've not yet completed the development of the worldview which presents perfected men (resurrected into a Christ-like or 'spiritual' state of embodiment) and a perfected world (Heaven) as events in the entirety of the same Creation in which this moral realm exists. If I had, it would prove eventually to be as tentative and as contextually bound as the worldviews produced by St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. It's also true that

the very richness of modern empirical knowledge will force an equally rich understanding of God's Creation and I don't know that it will be possible to create a philosophical or theological system of the traditional sort. We may need to produce an open-ended narrative understanding that grows with new developments in God's story – and some sorts of developments seem to be happening awfully fast now that man is doing so much to invent powerful technologies and to explore physical and abstract levels of created being.

I've written about most of these ideas before but I have two reasons for writing again about this general issue and at this time. First of all, I'm trying to keep working on better statements and enrichments of my thoughts as already developed. I might well discover I have to reformulate some of my thoughts or might even hit on a new insight or two. In addition, I'd like to point towards a great error in the thought of modern historians and political scientists, an error which is most culpable in Christian thinkers and those non-Christians who should understand the Christian viewpoint.

So-called traditionalists and conservatives will often deny that real progress can occur in this world. This is a valid viewpoint for a pagan thinker but not a Christian. A Christian has to believe that progress is possible, at least in principle. The individual man can, at least in principle, develop towards a Christ-like state. The entire race, even including those men who will not be resurrected into Heaven, can develop towards the state which is membership in the Body of Christ. We can't achieve such a state of perfection, even in principle, in a world where decay is a fact. This is the place to point out that decay, increasing entropy, isn't a law but rather a direct world of God's choice to produce a world particular in certain ways – the world has been advancing towards a more probable state since then. This particular advance results in an increase of entropy. In other words, 'increasing entropy' isn't a fundamental property of matter and energy but rather a result of the universe starting out in a very specific state, specific in a sense still being explored by scientists.

As a summary of sorts, I'll note it remains true to a Christian thinker that:

Grace completes nature and doesn't destroy it to replace it with something else.

If what we are is the rough beginnings of a completed man – that is,

one perfected to a Christ-like state, then a healthy moral imagination can imagine moving towards that perfected state. The principle is established that what we are can be perfected into a Christ-like state. A similar though more convoluted statement can be made about human communities, families and political communities and economic communities and the Church, being rough – in fact, fragmented – beginnings of the Body of Christ.



# 592 Protecting Minds and Souls by Petrification

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfeuston.com/?p=643>. It was finished and uploaded on 2010/03/29.]

Jesus tells of a master going on a journey and entrusting a part of his treasure to some servants (3 or 10, there are multiple recorded versions). On his return, some had invested the portion entrusted to them and had made a profit. In each version, one servant had merely hidden away his share of the treasure, his talent, to keep it safe. And by doing so, he kept that talent sterile, non-productive.

There is a lesson we should have learned from those parables which would have maybe guided Christians, over the past two or more centuries, to a greater sense of moral responsibility. That is, those of us who believe in the all-powerful Creator, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, should go forth with courage and faith into the world to invest our talents in God's work. We should respond in good faith to God's Creation even – no, especially – when it gives us strong reason to reject some of our favorite human beliefs.

What happened to the Western Civilization built by St. Augustine and his successors over many centuries? It was Christian and was the home of the Christian Church and much else, Christian and Jewish and pagan. It was largely under the stewardship of Christians even when we consider the greatly disproportionate contributions of Jews and also the contributions of other non-Christians. In a word, it was ours to nurture or to lose and we lost it. Western Civilization wasn't taken from Christians by Satan or by masses of hostile pagans. We lost it and we lost it largely by petrifying the dynamic, living ways of thought given to us by the likes of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. This process of petrifying our mental and spiritual

food led to a petrification of our minds and souls.

Still more directed to the angle I'm presenting in this entry:

We Christians walked away from Western Civilization and locked ourselves in various intellectual and spiritual ghettos.

Any rational efforts to construct a story where Satan or masses of pagans took Western Civilization over by force will prove false upon careful analysis. There are no great battles between Christian defenders of Western Civilization and demon-worshiping barbarians red of tooth and claw. There are very few Christian defenders worth mentioning in the, mostly, pitiful struggle over the past two centuries or so over the understanding of our world and our appropriate responses to it. For the most part, the emptied squares of the Christian city, a city of both God and man, were occupied by unwise men who tried not to return to barbarism or paganism so much as to create Hazel Motes' *church of truth without Jesus Christ crucified* from the novel, *Wise Blood*, by Flannery O'Connor. But those who created such strange ways of thought, whether Nietzsche himself or the mindless citizens and leaders of liberal democracies that Nietzsche so despised<sup>1</sup>, were themselves victims of the moral irresponsibility of those Christians who had the duty to protect and nurture Western Civilization, or find and educate those who might be up to the task.

Because of that moral irresponsibility of Christians who walked away from their duties as stewards of Western Civilization, men of the West have come to see Creation as apart from its Creator. Western Civilization was a home for the Church, but still better: a setting and itself a character in a drama in which the story of this world was played out by the likes of Augustine of Hippo and Albert Magnus, Fra Angelico and Michelangelo, Johann Sebastian Bach and Amadeus Mozart, Isaac Newton and Carl Linnaeus, William Shakespeare and Leo Tolstoy, Alfred the Great and George Washington. These men were but children learning to imitate their Father in Heaven as He went about His work as Creator. Yet, they were children of some greatness. Certainly, they were children of promise and they created a way of thought, as time-bound as each piece of thought proved to be, which allowed men to see the increasingly transparent universe as being certain

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<sup>1</sup>We should remember that Nietzsche despised authoritarians and anti-Semites and others who've sometimes claimed him as much as he despised the mindless citizens of liberal democracies and the mindless worshipers of liberal Christianity.

aspects of a true world, unified and coherent and complete, a physical place yes but one which is a setting for a morally well-ordered story told by God.

For sure, there have been some serious Christian thinkers in recent centuries, such as the historians of theology, John Henry Newman and Jaroslav Pelikan, or the historians and philosophers of science, Pierre Duhem and Stanley Jaki. There have been some novelists, the somewhat Jansenistic Graham Greene and the Thomistic Flannery O'Connor come to mind, who've shown they can explore human nature from two radically different Christian viewpoints and produce serious literature, not pietistic nonsense but also not moral chaos. On the whole, I know of little in the way of modern Christian philosophy or theology which is so fruitful of insights as the anti-Christian writings of Nietzsche and Sartre.

The list of Christian thinkers who have responded with open hearts and open minds to God's Creation in recent centuries is frighteningly short, even if expanded to include all plausible substantial thinkers, at least those known publicly. Thinkers who did better may well have been buried in the dust-bin of history by bureaucrats and time-servers afraid of the newness with which Creation presents itself as Western Civilization developed, and often enough developed so explosively as to blow apart even those institutions which best served God.

On the whole, Christians have been in retreat from a world which had suddenly asked questions not to be found in our textbooks and our stale sermons. But what of all those who fill the catalogs of Christian publishers, Catholic or Protestant? Let me mention a few. C.S. Lewis combined some moral insight with non-Christian ideas about reality. His version of substantialist philosophy of the Neoplatonic variety is more consistent with a pagan idea of matter which co-exists eternally with God rather than a more radical idea of God as a true Creator. (To be sure, the alleged Thomist G.E.M. Anscombe wasn't so far from Lewis' viewpoint as she should have been – indicative of a deep problem with modern thinkers.) Hilaire Belloc was a second-rate mind, a high achievement indeed as there aren't that many first-rate minds. G.K. Chesterton was perhaps a third-rate mind with some worthwhile insights into the role of faith in human life. To mention a Protestant unfairly slighted: Jonathon Edwards perhaps had a first-rate mind, but one who proved the main thrust of Calvinism was a return to the higher paganism seeing human beings as not truly fit for union with God who is, Himself, seemingly not capable of descending into His Creation.

The main thrust of this highly opinionated article is: Christians have

shaped their minds to the limited environments to be found in the ghettos they built for themselves. There are libraries of books, many great, written in earlier times and written to produce systems of thought including ancient or Medieval understandings of Creation. We have enriched understandings of some aspects of that Creation and yet we haven't had the courage to revise our total understanding of Creation, to add any works to that library which show the faith and courage of Origen or Augustine. For example, our ways of understanding reality, when we think as Christians, remain bound to the understandings of time and space and matter derived by ancient, Medieval, and early-modern thinkers, not all Christians for sure. We think of ourselves as born as certain 'persons' rather than as dynamically developing entities in a story far greater than ourselves. We are defined by the overlapping developments of our bodies and our roles in that story being told by God. We are some endpoints of those developments. The greater endpoints are known only to God.

The ideal human mind is well-formed while being flexible enough to deal with new knowledge or new views. To withdraw, as a group of some sort, into an intellectual ghetto might seem the right way to protect our own minds and the minds of future generations in our group when we're under some sort of assault. It's never the right way for Christians for the simple reason that we believe that God is Creator and Sustainer of all that is. We learned the truths that emerged from the synthesis of Plato and Moses to be found in the works of Philo and we, especially Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas, made those truths still more fundamental to our systems of thought than did even the Jews who followed Philo. No one, other than perhaps me, has come up with even the beginning of a new understanding of God's Creation which properly considers the insights of Newton and Galois, Cantor and Einstein, Huxley and Watson. Nor has anyone produced a proper response to modernist streams of abstract thought other than perhaps Etienne Gilson, who had great respect for some of those streams, even some which were anti-Christian.

The world around us is God's in all senses. If we Christians can't make sense of the best knowledge of that world in terms of our faith, then we have a problem and we should work on that problem and not try to shut out the parts of God's world which don't fit conveniently into our systems of thought. I would even suggest it possible that such an attempt to shut out God's world is one form of the sin against the Holy Spirit. If we teach ourselves to be rigid in the face of inconvenient facts or events while we live

in this phase of God's Creation, what would make us think we'll magically loosen up in Heaven? In fact, I fear Heaven would be Hell to a rigid mind because such a mind would be constantly resisting God's own advances.

I came to these thoughts while thinking about occasional stories indicating that **current** religious believers might be dumber, on average, than non-believers. My speculation, for now, is that this is true but only because of the 'top end'. That is, smarter and more creative thinkers are more attracted to non-believing communities and ways of thought, at least partly because they wouldn't be allowed to use their higher intelligence and/or creativity if they were to become Christians. Some might remain or become Christians while keeping their more substantial intellectual and creative lives separate from their lives as worshipers.

I'll speak of a personal experience from 20 years ago or so, without naming the publisher or individual persons. I submitted to a Catholic publisher a novel about my spiritual conversion, years before I understood that conversion as it turned out, and the publisher wished to go with the book but his literary adviser told him he'd lose money because there's no market among American Catholics for serious literature, though the problem is more general. It's not too hard to find Catholics, or other Christians, who've read all the books of Robert Ludlum and maybe seen all the movies, but Flannery O'Connor is following Hermann Melville into some sort of an abyss.

Of course, Christians, maybe believers in general, are dumber than non-believers. Christians discourage thought and discourage the development of a living mind. They either cripple the mental workings of their children's minds or drive them out of Christianity.



# 593 Does the Christian Church Need a Home?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=651>. It was finished and uploaded on 2010/04/23.]

As Cardinal Ratzinger noted years ago, western Christians built Western Civilization as a home for the churches united to Rome. St. Augustine and St. Benedict and St. Gregory the Great laid the foundations and many others built upon those foundations. For centuries, Western Civilization was a home for the Catholic Church and then for Protestants and others as well. Etienne Gilson, the Thomistic scholar, and Joseph Ratzinger have both noted that it was Christians who failed to maintain the Church's home. Gilson gave a specific reason for this failure: Catholic intellectuals had no good answers to the modern questions raised during the Enlightenment and the bad answers given by others led to the slaughters of the French Revolution and gave men of little imagination and rigid faith an excuse to retreat into an intellectual ghetto. Christian intellectuals have generally remained in self-confinement since then.

It was new discoveries in God's Creation and the consequent changes in human societies which had created new opportunities and raised new problems. Violent men and scoundrels did no more than take advantage of the confusion caused by the failure of Western leaders and intellectuals to respond properly. If Western men were being tested by God, they seem to have flunked the tests pretty consistently, except perhaps for the scientists. Or, did we men of the West really do so badly? Maybe we can be more optimistic about the general development of human civilization and the necessarily parallel development of the human mind.

In any case, it would seem we need to build anew and to aim at con-

structing something like Western Civilization but better shaped to our newer, richer and more complex, understanding of God's Creation. There are many treasures in the rubble of the West and many more feeding book-worms and silverfish in those libraries which haven't yet replaced Austen by King or even eliminated most books in favor of video recordings of some sort. And then there are the old folk-songs and ditties of which I learned only a smattering in my childhood in the 1960s. I doubt if many born in the past three decades know so much as a song from their Scottish or Polish or French-Canadian ancestors. Even popular American folk-music, such as that of Stephan Foster or that performed by Burl Ives or Pete Seeger in the 1950s onward, isn't heard often nowadays.

I don't speak in terms of a political or military decay but rather in more general terms of the decay of concrete aspects of human life, including the musical and culinary and literary sides of our times in this mortal realm. A civilization is formed from the ground up, the foundation coming from folk-music along with sophisticated liturgical music, nursery rhymes along with odes which celebrate concrete reality and what lies behind it, stories from the old country told by Grandpa as well as those great books we were taught to hate during our high school years. We are surrounded by art and entertainment that does more damage by its lack of intelligence and lack of historical roots than by its sometime despicable moral messages. But most of the art and entertainment which seems to preach moral truths is just as despicable. The seeming moral decency of *Father Knows Best* and *Leave it to Beaver* was unfounded, smoke and mirrors under the control of wizards who just wanted to sell us products and ways of life that would replace traditional ways of life to the profit of the greedy and the ambitious.

I've consistently argued the human mind forms as we respond to our environments, a claim which may explain my observation that there are intelligent and knowledgeable human beings who don't give any strong signs of having real minds, active and probing entities. They don't respond to God's world, don't actively reach out in an effort to understand. They grow up as passive victims of modern school systems as well as passive victims of the entertainment industry. Perhaps it's always been true that the vast majority of human beings pick up their most basic attitudes and beliefs in such passive ways. If true, that would argue against the possibility of good self-government in this dynamic world, but I'll not argue that issue one way or another. It does seem true that we in the modern West have failed to exercise their own human nature in active responses to the world around

us.

We must learn to be more active and more responsible for the formation of our own minds and our own moral natures, and we must help our children to do the same. The proper way to do that is to respond to God's Creation as we best know it and understand it, the upsetting parts of science and history as well as those parts which generate material prosperity or make us feel good about ourselves. We must move forward, remembering the lessons of the past, lessons of what worked well and what didn't work very well, but we must look ahead to a future which can seem awfully frightening because there are many signs of great changes in the world of men, changes largely forced by successes in exploring and using the resources of this world.



## 594 What Can We Say About the Body of Christ?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=657>. It was finished and uploaded on 2010/05/10.]

I'm going to propose a full-blooded organic understanding of the Body of Christ. This is intended as an expansion of the teachings of St. Paul rather than a new way of thought about that Body. It would seem appropriate to expand those teachings now that we have a deep and wide knowledge of organisms, including the ways in which complex multi-celled or multi-organ organisms evolved from simple cellular organisms.

An interesting question along these lines is:

Is the Christian Church Herself but one organ in the Body of Christ?

It's better for now to be a little vague about the definition of the Church, but it's clear the Church is the center of worship and communion with Christ and, through Him, with the Father and the Holy Spirit as well. The Church is the organ in which and through which the community of Christ's chosen brethren can share the life of God. Yet, there are other human needs met by other forms of human community which overlap the human community which is the Church but are most certainly not fully subordinate to Her though subordinate in terms of moral and spiritual guidance. Those other needs, economic and artistic and political, are lesser than our need for communion with God, the very Source of our being, but they are true needs and noble in their own lesser way. In terms which might seem to contradict some of my prior discussions, there are many human needs which can be

met only by entering the marketplaces, the regions in which individuals can interact with many of the organs of which they are members.

I've written in negative terms about the marketplaces in the modern world, especially in my book *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41], but I've also written in negative terms about the Church Herself in acting strongly outside of the region of Her competence in the Galileo affair and many other cases. But the problem doesn't come so much from one organ of the Body of Christ sometimes intruding into the regions of other organs – we don't yet know how the organs are defined or their responsibilities properly delineated. The problem comes when one organ intrudes and has the power to continue its intrusion and does so when it becomes clear that it has exceeded its own authority and competence.

To diverge for just a single idea: we need geometric descriptions of individual entities which inhabit 'spaces' which have no surfaces as such. Those spaces overlap completely and yet the individual entities would retain their own identity. In the view I'm now exploring, those entities would also form organs composed of multiple individuals but those organs would be part of an entity which might well be the entirety of the world in which they exist.

I'm forced to speculate far ahead of more specific and better-formed theories just because Western Christians and all others with responsibilities for Western Civilization have failed to respond properly to the enterprises of gathering modern empirical knowledge. Those enterprises have opened new possibilities for understanding God's Creation and have also demolished old ways of understanding the nature of man, the possibilities of resurrection, and other aspects of Creation and relationships between God and His creatures. My way of looking at created being as multi-leveled, going from abstract truths to concrete being, gives ways for human thinkers to ascend to higher abstractions for both more general understanding but also for a descent back down towards particular, or concrete, being which might exist. To reach some speculative understanding of the world of the resurrected, a human thinker ascends from this realm of growth and decay to high levels of abstraction and then tries to find a path down towards a world made of stuff similar to the stuff of this world, yet that world of the resurrected would be one where growth might be possible but decay doesn't occur.

In any case, Christian thinkers are behind two centuries or more in their understanding of God's Creation. We have a lot of ground to make up.

Let me return to a more limited line of thought for now. . .

I've spoken in the past of Western Civilization as being a home which the Christian Church (in the West) built for Herself. This is a metaphor used by Joseph Ratzinger (currently Pope Benedict XVI). Cardinal Ratzinger went on to note that Christians of the West hadn't properly maintained their home. Western Civilization isn't in trouble because of invasions by pagans or Satanic agents but rather because Western Christians were morally irresponsible in their duties towards their own civilization. Pagans and others didn't invade the West. They wandered into vacated public spaces.

With that as background, I'll move to the possibility that Western Civilization wasn't so much a house as a unstable colony of human communities which could be viewed as a first try at developing the Body of Christ. Some of those organisms, individual or communal, grew into parasites or cancers prospering for a while at the expense of the earthly Body of Christ as a whole. The functions of those organs, such as governments which destroy their own underlying communities, are important but have their proper limits. The evolutionary pathways of multi-cellular organisms, such as bipedal apes, passed through similar rough spots. I imagine there were paths which dead-ended when parts of organisms began to prey on other parts. A family line of creatures which develop fatal cancers near the onset of the age of reproduction will disappear pretty quickly.

If we believe there is a forward thrust in this development of the Body of Christ, then the organism as a whole – however primitive it might be at this stage – will eliminate the diseased organs and new organs might grow in its place but maybe different sorts of organs will grow. Let's consider this a process of a presentation and selection sort – natural selection is a specific such process.

And I return to my speculative claim that the Body of Christ is made of multiple organs and the Church is the most important of those organs because it is by way of the Church that we are united with the Lord Jesus Christ and, through Him, with the Holy Trinity. Given this hypothetical understanding of the Body of Christ, God's story which is this world isn't one where a righteous Church struggles against worldly powers which serve un-Godly purposes. It's a story in which the various organs of the Body of Christ are developing in themselves even as the greater Body also develops. The Church Herself has at times begun to take on the functions of other organs, threatening to turn cancerous, but She was returned to Her proper functions and proper boundaries, as if God truly does act to discipline Her but also to save Her. There is some reason to believe she's now the most

mature of the organs in the Body of Christ – at a time when her worldly power has shrunk greatly relative to that of cancerous and parasitical political and economic organs. Yet, those organs, no matter how diseased at present, also fill important roles in the Body of Christ – they meet human needs. The question is: are those merely needs in this mortal realm or are they needs of any being truly human, even a human being living in the world of the resurrected? I'm betting that human beings have political and economic needs and those will be met in the world of the resurrected.

We have to keep in mind that individuals are also developing, as individuals, as members of various organs, and as members of the entire Body of Christ. This is one of the reasons for my current speculations. If we are to be truly saved, as our own selves, then it must be true that grace completes and perfects nature rather than overriding it in any way. Our political and economic needs are to be completed and perfected when we rise from the grave to live for time without end with the Lord Jesus Christ. We human beings naturally form communities and institutions for several of our major categories of needs. I don't see the Church as being capable of satisfying all these needs. And – to repeat – I don't see those needs as disappearing in the world of the resurrected, not if we're to remain human beings.

These sorts of speculations make it possible to discuss the Body of Christ coherently. We can speak of life after death and still sound sane but we have to adjust to speak in terms consistent with those realms of Creation we can directly perceive or can reach by the proper exercise of our all-too human minds.

This program of thought would force us Christians to work hard to grasp difficult lines of thought, to be capable of thinking of the Body of Christ as a fantastically complex organism, not the simple choir in heaven of *Amazing Grace* but rather the embodiment and realization of an awful lot that's good about human life including many things we can't quite realize in this mortal realm. Political relationships would remain as would cultural traditions – all brought to their fullness but remaining alive and growing. The implied developmental processes and the resulting complex structures might be describable by tools similar to those used by Einstein to develop his general theory of relativity – differential geometry and the closely related tensor calculus. Or those processes might be similar to those of quantum mechanics. In any case, they don't seem likely to be well described in any meaningful sense by existing modes of theological or mystical discourse.

The question I raised to start is:

Is the Church Herself but one organ in the Body of Christ?

My best speculations right now indicate this to almost certainly be the case. Moreover, the Church Herself has acted in recent centuries, especially through the Papacy, as if She is to play the role of moral and spiritual guide for the economic and political and social powers, in addition to playing Her primary role in directly communicating with God through worship and praise. The Church in recent centuries, through the Popes and through the bishops sitting in council, hasn't claimed any right to rule directly, only to play the role of conscience, a role not yet acceptable to most of the other organs of the Body of Christ.

If the Body of Christ is forming now in this mortal realm, though the process might not get close to the final result in the world of the resurrected, then it becomes possible to explore that process and to come to some significant understanding of the Body of Christ and how it develops. More than that, the effort to understand the Body would seem to be the duty of those who claim to be Christian thinkers, theologians or philosophers or historians or creative writers. Pursuing this line of thought would seem the best way forward (in fact, the way out of the ghetto built by Christian thinkers over the past 200 years or more) for Christian theology and would provide a solid foundation for those very important topics in Christian theology: the nature of the union of God and man and the Eucharist.



# 595 Abstractions in Modern Thought and Art

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=663>. It was finished and uploaded on 2010/06/28.]

I've come to the position that created being exists across a spectrum going from abstract to concrete or particular. A thing, a particularized form of being, still has its abstract being in it the way that a vase has still the raw materials of its clay and glazing. In fact, as you penetrate the stuff of that vase, you'll 'go down' to molecules and then atoms and then electrons and protons and neutrons and then various sorts of entities which behave very much like 'collapse points' of 'quantum waves'<sup>1</sup>. Fields are very abstract already though, for all we know, there might be many levels of abstraction to go before we reach the stuff of God's initial acts of creating from nothingness. Even if you find physics and mathematics to be an alien form of thought, go and browse through a serious book on modern theories of gravity or quantum mechanics or a mixed field of study such as a reliable account of the early seconds of this expansionary phase of the universe. All those equations are not so much descriptions of objects we can touch so much as they are the objects themselves, abstract and beyond direct sensing by eyes or ears or fingertips.

The thing is shaped from more abstract forms of being, just as the vase

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<sup>1</sup>I use the scare-quotes only because there is great uncertainty amongst physicists, mathematicians, philosophers, and others as to the best way to understand what happens when the fully deterministic entity described by the quantum wave disappears or something and something concrete appears, the something concrete being describable as a photon or something else. Quantum mechanics is currently both vague in its understanding and remarkably precise and accurate in its quantitative manipulations respectively

is shaped from its raw materials, and the abstract forms remain part of the thing just as the clay remains part of the vase. There are multiple levels of thing-like being within a human being – cells and then DNA and various minerals and biochemicals and then oxygen and carbon and then protons and electrons and then electroweak fields and quarks and so on to some very hypothetical levels of being of the sort studied by theoretical physicists. Once again, we explore more deeply into the stuff of a man and find fields which seem more akin to mathematical ideas than to earth and fire and wind and air.

My contention is that we should take this seriously, this spectrum of being ranging from highly abstract to highly particular. At the same time, I'd like to expand this idea beyond the aspects of being studied by mathematicians and physicists and all sorts of physical scientists and engineers.

Modern men, including Christians who are bound to pay attention to God in His acts as Creator, have been quite reluctant to do much with these richer ideas of being. We accept the medical and other technological benefits of these enriched ideas but we refuse to restate our understanding of Creation in terms which make sense in light of modern empirical knowledge. At the very least, we need to construct new narratives of Creation, of the human race, of ourselves as members of various peoples and as members of the Body of Christ, of ourselves as individuals. Many can and should play a role in this building of such narratives, including scientists outside of their 9-5 roles as reductionists, but historians and fiction-writers and poets and musicians and movie-makers and visual artists can play a special role. They can speak the truth, a truth which merges particular and concrete things which are true with abstract truths which are thing-like.

More generally, we need to move into a new phase of Western Civilization or into the start of one or more successor civilizations. There have been some who have dared to head off into regions opened up by the modern and richer understandings of created being, but its remarkable, at least to me, how little respect that effort has received in general. True it is that both the works of genius and also the obscene jokes played on collectors by Picasso are worth sometimes tens of millions of dollars at auctions, as are the works of van Gogh with his better-defined, seemingly sophisticated experiments in perception, especially color perception. Mahler and Stravinsky wrote various experimental works, often despised when first played but now part of the standard repertoire of symphonic music. The same was true of Beethoven – we forget how much he redefined music beyond the standard

understandings and we know only from sparse comments in his journals that he was engaged in a radical expansion of music at the time of his death. Literature? Well, traditional story-tellers, such as Tolstoy and George Eliot have produced great works and the best of the works of those particular authors have used traditional narrative techniques to deal with the modern world. There were also those who tried to expand the boundaries of human perception and understanding, creating narratives which take a substantial intellectual effort to follow because those narratives follow events – at least sometimes – at the abstract levels of being, perhaps by such ‘simple’ tricks as treating pieces of a concrete narration as words in a more abstract narrative. I can certainly mention in this context Cervantes (way back), Sterne, Melville, and numerous poets such as Pound and Cummings and T.S. Eliot.

Visual artists of the 19th and early 20th century seemed to be ahead of brain scientists in realizing that human vision isn’t unitary. As it turns out, our eyes deal with an object’s shape, movement, and color separately and our brains put together the more complete view of that object in a way that still baffles scientists so far as I know. (The interested reader can pursue this topic beginning with the scientific discussion in *A Vision of the Brain* [155] by Semir Zeki or the discussion by the same author from the viewpoint of a scientist interested in art that can be found in *Inner Vision: An Exploration of Art and the Brain* [156].) To cut to the point of this particular line of insight from modern empirical knowledge:

Reality is real but human perceptions of that reality are constructed.

This doesn’t mean our perceptions are false in any way. After all, our eyes and ears have been shaped to some piece of reality, however small, by responses of our ancestors over billions of years and by our own responses to our world, however small or large. We err, perhaps greatly, when we think as if our eyes were merely transparent panes of glass, letting some direct image of reality into our heads where resides a mind formed independently of the world around it.

Over time, men have moved to ever richer and more complete understandings of created being and of what I would call narrative realms in Creation, but not everyone has yet gotten the message. Every electron, every grain of sand or sand-flea, every human being or galaxy, has many components – use this term cautiously, each of those components as well as

the entity in its entirety have abstract aspects as well as concrete aspects. The things of this world are not objects separable from but describable by mathematical truths nor are they imperfect images of things existing in some realm of the Real. A thing is the node in a complex network of various sorts of abstract being joining in a particular thing. And those nodes in their turn join to form more complex and more concrete things.

At the very least, we need artistic visions which deal, perhaps playfully, with the full spectrum of aspects of created being, including those we call 'abstract'. We need van Goghs to give us new insights into human color vision, Picassos to question the way we see shapes and to even question the dimensions in which those shapes are set. I've already gone past my knowledge of painting and I want my words to be taken as suggestions optimistic as to what we can learn from those who somehow access the raw components of human vision and those who can consciously think through their own perception of colors or shapes or movements. I'm sure similar statements can be made about modern music, but I'll pass by that topic for now as my formal knowledge of music is also as slender as one would expect from a product of the American educational system. But I also believe that the greatest need we have is for poets and writers and philosophers who can speak of the entirety of being, in its more abstract and more concrete aspects.

That's the thrust of my efforts in writing creative fiction, efforts which began well before I tried my hand at theology or philosophy and, in fact, well before I could have stated my worldview in explicit terms or was even aware I'd developed such a strange beast. The world has been for me something of a marvelous mystery containing a multitude of mysteries. I had neither a reductionistic nor an occultist attitude towards these mysteries. I think that, by behavior if not by conscious thought, I had always an attitude of acceptance of reality, to the point where I wasn't aggressive enough in querying that reality in a way proper for someone with some intellectual talent and a small bent towards mathematics and physics. Yet, if I've followed a strange and slow path of intellectual development, in this country where development of the mind has not much been encouraged, I did seem to implicitly realize from a fairly young age that the problem with mysteries is not that they need to be reduced, though some mysteries can be reduced in a useful and truthful way. Nor are those mysteries to be simply accepted as occultist or as supernatural in the sense of beyond man's reach. I'm speaking here of mysteries which involve created beings and not of the

revealed mysteries of God's own Being and His transcendental life. Mysteries of Creation are, in principle, within the reach of the human mind though actual, individual human minds are too weak to grasp all of Creation and likely too weak to deal with some of the more profound mysteries of our world and the other realms of Creation.

And, yet, there's something to be done with mysteries, at least by those called to ponder them as interesting objects of study as well as sources of wonder, the more serious sorts of poets and novelists and various artists as well as philosophers and scientists of a philosophical bent. We can do what the human being has to do, well or badly, just to survive in this life: we can respond by shaping our minds to the reality which confronts us. We explore and we test and we try to find ways to speak about what we find, or think we find. In doing so, we better shape our minds that they might be able to form statements about Creation and its various processes and relationships – in ordinary words or the words or formalisms of mathematics and other specialized sciences. We tune our minds to correspond more closely to the world, to all of Creation, as we can know it during our age and within our culture.

This is to say we accept reality and shape our thoughts correspondingly rather than trying to reduce reality to rules which allegedly are given to the human mind independently of the mundane reality around us, independently of the experience which shaped the human race over the eons and individuals humans over their lifetimes. We don't live in our heads, inhabiting some sort of mental space equipped with all the tools to understand whatever it encounters. Our minds are our encapsulation of the environments around us, or the entire world, or even the entirety of Creation.

Mathematicians deal with the mystery of infinity by shaping their minds so that different sizes of infinity are part of those minds and the tools to deal with various sorts of numbers, including transfinite numbers larger than ordinary infinity, are part of the furnishings of those minds. Physicists deal with quantum mechanics not by thinking in terms of the common sense developed in our apish ancestors as they hunted mammoths or tamed wild ox; rather do they reshape their minds to correspond with the reality they confront when they explore different regions or levels of being than those our pre-modern ancestors knew about. The paradoxes of modern mathematics and physics aren't the result of conflicts between reality and some sort of pure reasoning but rather a conflict between reality and a mind shaped to an inadequate understanding of reality, an understanding not sufficiently

large and rich.

The truths of art are certainly more fuzzy than those of mathematics and the physical sciences, often more fuzzy than even the truths of history, but they are truths. The truths of art overlap with those of mathematics. After all, art speaks of created being though not necessarily of perceptible, concrete being. Then again, the same is true of mathematics and physics. We don't see by way of our eyes those abstract objects bundled with relationships which mathematicians call 'groups', but a trained mind can see them in an intellectual sense in some of the behavior of atomic particles and of the entities described by quantum mechanics, and by many other entities in Creation. I've never seen even ordinary infinity let alone any of the still larger infinities. I've never run my hands along a curvature in spacetime and can't even separate, by touch, space from the objects it holds. I can't separate my perception of colors from that of shapes and movements and hope I never can in this life – it's the sign of something going very wrong in a human visual system. It's hard to say if he had a mild problem with his visual system or simply had remarkable insight into the ways of his own eyes, optic nerves, and brain, but van Gogh showed us hints of color vision without shape and without movement and he also had some emotional and mental problems at various times of his life. His unique insights and his problems might have been tied together – problems with his brain might have allowed him to be both a great artist and also a Christian with a deep devotion bearing some resemblance to that of some of the disturbed saints of Christian history. In any case, van Gogh and Einstein both had to use well-developed imaginations to do their work. Those imaginations strayed from the beliefs of the men of their time, but strayed so that they had a richer view of created being.

The main point I'd like to drive towards is that abstractions in art are not only allowable but actually necessary if men are to explore and understand truth. I don't know enough to judge Picasso's works, but I can say this:

If there is any truth in modern theories of infinity and randomness, any in quantum mechanics and Einstein's theories of relativity, then something like Picasso's approach is necessary for artists to speak truth to modern man, though there's a sense in which there are as yet few modern men. If there is any truth to modern discoveries of the workings of the human visual system,

then van Gogh saw certain truths about the fragmentation of what is seen into color and shape and movement before scientists generally did.

I don't wish to claim van Gogh was a prophet of brain science but I do wish to claim he was speaking a truth not perceived by most other men even when he presented his work to men sure they saw the world about them in its truth and completeness. That crazy and charitable genius somehow knew something about how we construct our color-vision of the world.

This isn't to say that all abstractions in art are true, just as it's certainly not the case that all abstractions in mathematics and physics are true. Some abstractions are so false from the beginning as to be beyond consideration by rational men and others prove to be inconsistent with what's known or becomes known about Creation in all the realms and levels accessible to the human mind.

But the arts speak the truth about Creation and created being only when they deal with the completeness of that Creation and created being. This doesn't mean that all works of art, including literature, have to be exotic and difficult to understand. It does mean that modern man has a greatly expanded and enriched knowledge of Creation and created being and that knowledge is not well-contained in the forms of art and literature we've received from our ancestors. Modern empirical knowledge has added substance to our knowledge. The modern fields of empirical knowledge-gathering and analysis aren't just collections of recipes that allow pre-existing human minds to simply absorb knowledge as if it were marks on a ledger. The fact that human beings are a unique species of ape, descended from apes rather than a special creation of God or the gods, most certainly has some bearing upon our understanding of Creation and of human nature. The disconcerting facts being amassed by modern brain scientists give strong testimony that human thoughts and feelings are so tightly tied to physical events in the human body – mostly the brain – as to make talk of immaterial minds and souls far more than a bit questionable. This certainly has a bearing on our ways of speaking about human beings.

I'm going to end by referring to my novel, *A Man for Every Purpose* [37], which is the story of a man, well-educated and intelligent, who fails to properly shape his mind to his knowledge of both traditional truths and modern empirical knowledge. This novel was written five years or so before my philosophical beliefs took an explicit form but it deals with the problems

of a world where the fragmentation of knowledge of Creation into realms has resulted in human beings acting as if realms of knowledge correspond to different realms of created being.

We need to see Creation in a more unified way to restore our sanity, moral as well as cognitive.

## 596 The Never-ending Project

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=667>. It was finished and uploaded on 2010/07/26.]

I'm more often writing on some aspects of politics and the history of government which interest me and doing so in terms of my concepts of created being. I'll concentrate on American politics and will cover some interesting phenomena often seen as indicative of conspiracies. These articles will reflect both some of my reading of authoritative histories and also my take on ongoing events. I'm not putting myself forward as an expert in these fields but I'm trying to develop ways of describing and analyzing complex real-world entities which have both concrete and abstract aspects and I'm looking for interesting aspects of human moral life to provide specific descriptive problems. There seem to be a variety of such aspects to be had in studying and contemplating what seems to be an ongoing political breakdown in the modern West, and, in particular, a somewhat florid development of problems present in American politics from the founding of the United States. These problems often present themselves in the guise of conspiracies to many concerned people, because of a lack of understanding of what was possible and what actually happened in American history. To anticipate a little: when the world grows increasingly complex and most human beings insist on seeing that world in simple terms which were probably wrong to start with, reality begins to look very strange – we're looking at reality through lenses which attempt to tame that complex mess but end up distorting it all the more.

Again will I remind my readers that I consider concrete being to be shaped from more abstract forms of being but I also consider concrete entities, such as a human animal, to contain yet the various forms of abstract being which come together to form a complex concrete entity. A man is,

in a manner of speaking, frozen soul and the soul remains in all its phases even if the dominant phase of a human animal at birth is ice.

If created being comes from one set of truths manifested by God on the other side of the Big Bang – so to speak – then we can enrich our understanding of man, even in his moral and political aspects, by applying to our study of human nature what's been learned in modern physics and mathematics, as well as other fields of empirical study. But the previous sentence will produce a distorted view of my intentions in most minds just because we have the false idea that there are different, incompatible sorts of (vaguely defined) being and, separately, some forms of abstract truths which correspond to human fields of study. And so it is that I'm struggling to find good ways to talk about these issues. This struggle has quietly and contemplatively increased in recent months as I've been trying to find the time to write a summary work (possibly multiple volumes) on my worldview and also have been reformatting two ten year-old novels which deal with many of these issues. I plan to publish these novels on the Internet, perhaps one within a month or so. In fact, I've been thinking I might turn my dwindling, middle-aged energies towards works of fiction because rereading these older novels has convinced me that I worked out many of my ideas by writing the sorts of moral narratives I wish to deal with in these writings on politics.

Moral narratives are appropriate for exploring the nature of man, who is, after all, a physical creature. To my way of understanding Creation, physical creatures are (ultimately) shaped from the truths God manifested for His Creation and still 'carry' those truths in their very flesh and blood. Consequently, we can come to better understand man, and other creatures, by coming to better understand some mathematically describable aspects of created being, including that fundamental creature: spacetime. Human experience indicates that mathematics, while not capable of describing the totality of created being, is sometimes capable of leading the way towards new ways of describing that totality.

However we get to a more complete description, the various ways in which we understand men and stars have to come together in some sort of narrative of Creation and that narrative has sub-stories such as that of man responding to God's revelation as carried in the Bible and also God's revelations as carried in the workings and stuff of His Creation as accessible to the human senses and mind. If I succeed in any substantial way in this task, that success will be found in the entirety of my writings, novels as

well as books and articles on philosophical or theological matters.

What we need to provide intellectual foundations for a new phase of human civilization is to re-imagine, from the bottom-up, the meaning of Creation and the role played by human beings in Creation. I can point to a philosophical/theological work with a similar goal: *Summa Contra Gentiles* by St. Thomas Aquinas. That work was likely intended to present the beliefs of Christians to Muslim and Jewish scholars in such a way that they could see that Christian thought is consistent with the rationality of Creation as seen by the human eye and understood by the human mind. The goal of Aquinas was to show that Christian revelation could be reached in that bottom-up way, not as a lock-tight logical proof, but as a ‘proof’ in the older sense: a testing of coherence and consistency. He seems to have set out to work in the other direction, from an understanding of God developed from the Bible, in his other major work, *Summa Theologicae*.

Man is part of that Creation which is a particular work of God and reflects decisions which could have been otherwise. God could have brought into being not only a different Creation but even a different intelligent, God-seeking race in a Creation and a universe much like ours. The human race might have been an apish race with somewhat different characteristics. Speaking of just one characteristic: human beings have different tendencies towards being individuals vs. social beings. As a race, we could have had more of a leaning towards individualism or more towards social bonding; as individuals, we have a mix of inclinations of that sort. The particular range we occupy in this individual-social spectrum and the particular statistical spread of individuals over that spectrum are empirical matters. Men could have been different, in this aspect and others, but we are what we are, largely as a result of the hundreds of millions of years of evolution of living creatures on earth. More than that, we are what we are because of the characteristics of spacetime in our world, because of the properties of matter and fields, because of abstract mathematical truths, and so forth. We are creatures shaped from and shaped in response to the various sorts of being, abstract and concrete, in Creation.

There are two extremes that most thinkers fall into when they have stumbled into some vague understanding of the nature of being. Some, you might call them reductionists, think that all properties of more complex beings can be derived, in principle, by accumulating layers of more complex and complicated assemblages of the basic things – whatever they might be. Some, usually they take the form of dualists or more extreme preachers of

multiple forms of incompatible being, think that a man is so different from a puddle of the chemicals that compose his body that surely he becomes a man because something thoroughly different from physical being is accidentally attached to his flesh and blood.

Can a man be explained by understanding the various ways of assembling that puddle of chemicals? Can a man be explained by separating his bodily responses from his spiritual or moral responses?

Is there another way? Let me propose that we can build another way of viewing created being, including human nature, by borrowing three major insights from modern empirical science:

1. Concrete stuff, by which I presently mean matter and energy and fields and spacetime, seems to have been shaped from some more abstract stuff. So far as quantitative aspects of concrete being goes, this implies some serious truth in the radical version of Pythagoras' claim that stuff is made of number. Not "describable by number", but "made of number". For now, I'll only say there are more aspects to concrete being than those which can be measured or even described by qualitative mathematical methods and I'm contemplatively playing around with ways of describing the multiple 'flows' of abstract being into concrete forms but I'm not yet ready to describe a good way of viewing this 'flow'.
2. Relationships are primary and bring substances into existence. See Chapter 156, *A Christian view of Einstein's and Bohr's debate on the meaning of reality* for a short discussion of the issue. This insight might well prove to be the same as the first.
3. At the top-level, the universe can be seen as a narrative, morally well-ordered in my opinion. Moving downward, classes or species of complex entities evolve, perhaps over time-spans which are immense by human standards, and individual complex entities develop over their lifetimes. This points to the possibility that human moral relationships, including political relationships, are products of evolution and are not derivable from metaphysical systems of thought – unless those systems are constructed to include the evolutionary aspects of human relationships.

What is is. Our job as human thinkers is to accept what is, as best we can determine from the available human knowledge, and to understand what is by creating proper words and concepts and molding them into proper structures of thought. We can then follow our Creator by using those words and concepts and intellectual structures to tell proper stories in imitation of His acts-of-being or acts of creation.

Specifically, if we are to understand human moral nature, human political activities, etc., we need to take account of the three characteristics of created being I listed above – and maybe some more – and to start shaping our minds to created being as it is and not as Hobbes or Plato thought it to be, or Hamilton or Jefferson or Lincoln for that matter. The greatest of these thinkers, certainly Plato, understood much about the metaphysical problems I'm tackling though pre-modern thinkers were missing the very interesting insights to be gained from modern empirical knowledge.

This will involve a great deal of work over more than one lifetime and will, in fact, produce along the way the possibility of educated men and women in future generations who possess wide learning and deep culture in such a self-shaping way that they will be very similar to the liberal thinkers of traditional Western civilization though having a library including Einstein, Cantor, Pelikan, Kafka, and other modern thinkers who've contributed to a great, but still largely potential, enrichment of our understanding of Creation.

We should also realize that the very process of creating a greater system of knowledge from the totality of human traditional and modern knowledge will itself open up new possibilities for human moral life, including our lives as members of societies and as citizens of political communities.



# 597 Man Was Made to Glorify God

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=695>. It was finished and uploaded on 2010/09/20.]

Man was made to glorify God.

So goes the claim in an antiphon somewhere in the *Christian Book of Prayer* (one-volume version of the liturgy of hours, Catholic version).

This statement points to a great truth for sure, but we have to understand that all truths, even the greatest of truths revealed by God are spoken in human language and are interpreted by those who read or hear according not only to the meaning of individual words but according to human concepts.

What means 'made'? I'll answer from a Biblical standpoint.

God is a story-teller.

He tells a story by shaping landscapes and characters from stuff He made in a different way. We should always keep in mind that God's creation of the stuff from which He shaped this world is one sort of act-of-being and His shaping of that stuff into a particular world and into that world's stars and butterflies and used-car salesmen is another sort of act-of-being.

We have to avoid confusing the two sorts of creative act, that which brought into being from nothing the basic stuff of Creation and that which brought into being a world and its entities.

We Christians, and many others, believe God made man, but modern empirical knowledge indicates that the Almighty made man by processes corresponding to those in the Biblical narratives which describe God's shaping of the People of Israel. He made man by shaping Him through the

events of this world. We should respect the Creator and the ways in which He works and if those ways don't meet our standards, we should question our standards rather than trying to force our ideas upon the world.

As always, we should do as St. Thomas Aquinas advised [3]:

[J]ust as a disciple reaches an understanding of the teacher's wisdom by the words he hears from him, so man can reach an understanding of God's wisdom by examining the creatures He made...

This raises difficult questions, such as: was there a first human being and, if so, what were his parents? Such a question is best ignored after contemplating it for a while, but it leads to a whole series of questions about human nature and its moral aspects, about the incoherence which lies under the word 'person' as generally used. We begin to question free-will and see the need to radically revise our understanding of sin to retain the connotation of 'separation from God and His Creation' but to allow for all that we know of evolution and genetics and the brain sciences. We even need to see that some suffer that separation because of the events caused by God's chosen acts of shaping men and their environments. Over many centuries, we've been forced to see that disease is caused by microbes and nutritional deficiencies and genetic problems. We've been forced to see that volcanoes and earthquakes are caused by the same movements of the earth which give us fertile soils and harbors both useful and beautiful. Now, we're struggling against the realization that even serious sexual sins can be at least partially caused by genetic problems.

There is much effort being put into various revisions of our incomplete or impoverished understandings of Creation, but such revisions aren't good enough. We need to return to fundamentals, to realize that our Christian ancestors understood the most important of all empirical truths when they chanted, "Man was made to glorify God," – that God is the source of created being, but to also realize that they had radically inadequate or even incorrect understandings of the divine acts pointed at by the word 'made'.

Those who wish to understand why I think we should glorify God can download the short article: *Justice: The First Step Towards God* found at <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/justice.pdf>.

# 598 Reading the Bible as God's Word and not as Human Words

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=718>. It was finished and uploaded on 2010/11/05.]

What's infallible and absolutely true is what God said to Moses and St. Paul, not what they said to us and certainly not what they said to us as filtered through human interpreters and human commentators.



# 599 Flannery O'Connor Was a Pretty Good Thomistic Philosopher

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=723>. It was finished and uploaded on 2010/11/05.]

From a letter in the Library of America collection of Flannery O'Connor's works (page 953):

To see Christ as God and man is probably no more difficult today than it has always been, even if today there seem to be more reasons to doubt. For you it may be a matter of not being able to accept what you call a suspension of the laws of the flesh and the physical, but for my part I think that when I know what the laws of the flesh and the physical really are, then I will know what God is. We know them as we see them, not as God sees them. For me it is the virgin birth, the Incarnation, the resurrection which are the true laws of the flesh and the physical. Death, decay, destruction are the suspension of those laws. I am always astonished at the emphasis the Church puts on the body. It is not the soul she says that will rise but the body, glorified. I have always thought that purity was the most mysterious of the virtues, but it occurs to me that it would never have entered the human consciousness to conceive of purity if we were not to look forward to a resurrection of the body, which will be flesh and spirit united in peace, in the way they were in Christ. The resurrection of Christ seems the high point in the law of nature.

It's nice to occasionally run into a modern thinker who gives us thoughts worth commenting upon. Miss O'Connor hit the nail on the head though she bent it a little. Maybe I've bent that nail a little less. In any case, I'll assume so and will give some corrections to her wording of some good insights. Miss O'Connor does have an earthier way of expressing matters than I do. And I should acknowledge that she wrote the above passage when she was about 20 years younger than I currently am and without having enough background in modern sciences to realize how good a foundation Thomistic principles (though not all his use of those principles) can provide for understanding modern empirical knowledge. I'll move on to some specific comments about Miss O'Connor's words:

She's right that:

To see Christ as God and man is probably no more difficult today than it has always been, even if today there seem to be more reasons to doubt.

Yet, we should be careful to go from "reasons to doubt" to the difficulty of believing a hard truth. A reason to doubt is but one side of the coin. On the other side lies a question which has risen which allows for an enrichment and deepening of human knowledge. There are no guarantees our faith will survive even if we have the courage and the simple child-like curiosity to pursue that question, but we refuse to be images of God when we willfully turn away from these questions under the delusion that we protect our faith in the true God by refusing to adapt our inherited traditions to new knowledge of God's work as Creator. If we have the courage and the faith in the Creator that allows us to honestly address these reasons for doubt – not just by repeating old answers, we will find better reasons to believe than earlier generations had.

In knowing the true laws of the flesh and the physical, we don't know what God is in His transcendence, His necessary Being, but we do know what thoughts He manifested in bringing this particular Creation into being. We do know the role that God chose to play and even the limitations He voluntarily took upon Himself in order to play that specific role in a highly peculiar Creation.

I try to reserve the term 'spirit' for writing or speaking about our direct and conscious relationship to God. In place of Miss O'Connor's words, "flesh and spirit united in peace," I would write instead, something like:

“flesh resurrected in a form where it has spiritual characteristics.” Still better is my occasional claim that we can speak of body as being frozen soul. In the world of the resurrected, our bodies will be unfrozen and no longer subject to the decay found in a cooling universe.

So far as I know, Miss O’Connor read regularly in the *Summa Theologicae* of Aquinas but had no access to the work I recommend to those wishing to see his basic insights in a less systematic but easier to understand form – his *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* [3], where he gives us the following two bits of advice:

J ust as a disciple reaches an understanding of the teacher’s wisdom by the words he hears from him, so man can reach an understanding of God’s wisdom by examining the creatures He made. . .

T he wisdom which attains to God through the things of this world is not the wisdom of this world [in the sense denounced by St. Paul] but the wisdom of God. . .

Georgia farm-girl she was, but quite capable of penetrating the Medieval style of Aquinas to realize he was a better empiricist than nearly any modern scientist or historian or Biblical scholar. I would even say she’s the best I know of at teaching Thomism and a coherently empirical view of Creation to those of a more literary than technical cast of mind. At least I think she would be if, for example, Catholic teachers realized she teaches hard truths unsoftened by human sentimentality and affectations of concern about “man’s inhumanity to man” or of worries about “bad things happening to good people.” More than that, her willingness to see the comedy (classical sense and not *Three Stooges* sense) in a harsh world can appeal even to those who do enjoy studying technical knowledge.



# 600 The Promise and Comedy of Modernity

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=727>. It was finished and uploaded on 2010/11/09.]

See <http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/1345475?eng=y> for a discussion of Pope Benedict's speech on 2010/11/07 during his pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. For those who've not heard of this place, it's said by some to be the burial site of St. James the Apostle, brother of St. John the Apostle. The traditions are too recent, Medieval Age, to be considered authoritative, yet, much good and no bad to my knowledge has come from the pilgrimages to this site. It is, in fact, one of the few pilgrimage sites which would draw me if I were a world-traveler.

During that pilgrimage, Pope Benedict stopped off in Barcelona to see the "basilica of the Sagrada Família, a masterpiece by Antoni Gaudí" and to consecrate this recently completed church. As I understand it, this basilica was designed in an apparently successful effort to use what might be labeled the 'modern viewpoint' to artistically manifest Christian truths. I applaud such efforts which run parallel to my similar efforts in metaphysics and literature, and – soon enough – theology since those trained as Christian theologians seem determined to go to their graves without having the courage and faith to serve God by engaging reality in a creative, courageous, and faith-filled way.

The bloodless pagans seem dominant in the modern age. They have diverted streams of the modern projects and have ridden upon the floodwaters in a way that can perhaps be seen as tragic, though I think one reason they're so bloodless is that they're no more than ex-Christians, at

least in a cultural sense. It's a sad fate to be defined by what your ancestors were and what you don't wish to be, but men of the modern West show no real aptitude for any sort of vigorous paganism, only for non-Christianity, a sort of nullity.

As ex-Christians, they fall into the realm of Christian comedy rather than pagan tragedy – Christianity knows of tragedy only from the outside since we're always free to choose Christ and, hence, a good end. Whatever might be the case with pagans, the modern phase of the Christian comedy has become a farce, played out by those who strive to remain Christians by remaining true to traditional human encapsulations of “the book of nature, the book of sacred Scripture and the book of the liturgy” as Pope Benedict termed these forms of human knowledge of God's Creation. These Christians live behind ghetto walls refusing to look at the huge amount of material our age has added to that “book of nature” and to our understanding of at least the history of “the book of sacred Scripture” and the history of the “book of liturgy.”

If we are to rebuild a Christian civilization in the West, we don't need hand-waving claims that religion and science aren't incompatible, nor do we need more groups of poorly educated Christians discussing the Bible in self-affirming terms, nor do we need more smiles and more mobs of laymen at the altars. What we need are Christians willing to walk the walk, to expend sweat and time studying “the book of nature, the book of sacred Scripture and the book of the liturgy.” We need new understandings of Creation in the form of new thought, new art, new ways of praising God – all of which activities would be very demanding upon our soft and underdeveloped minds and moral natures. We need most of all to develop these understandings and to use them to build a new Christian civilization on top of the ruins of the civilization we've allowed to decay by our sheer laziness and moral irresponsibility.

It's a bittersweet comedy that we modern Christians are acting out, a comedy in which we're offered always a good end which lies in another world but bittersweet to our perspectives because we fail to play our roles, fail to respond properly to Creation. By not responding properly to Creation, we also fail to respond properly to God. And that will have consequences of some sort.

# 601 The False Promises of the American Dream

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=733>. It was finished and uploaded on 2010/11/10.]

We Americans should feel ashamed of the mess we've made of a potentially great country, but: Do we Americans even feel shame? Solzhenitsyn said, "No," and labeled us a uniquely evil people as he prepared to return to what was still the Soviet Union. He didn't believe we were particularly evil in the number or magnitude of our crimes, compared to other powerful peoples of the modern world, but he saw in us a self-righteousness and ability to delude ourselves that kept us pure in our own eyes even as we walked away from our crimes. This wasn't exactly a shot out of the blue, though Solzhenitsyn had himself been fooled to nearly the end of his time in the United States into thinking Americans to correspond, at least approximately, to our own high opinions of ourselves. See a relatively early article I posted: Chapter 348, *My Ends are Mad and Now I'm Also Stupid*, where the title plays off the claim of Captain Ahab in *Moby Dick*:

My means are sane, it is my ends which are mad.

In fact, Ahab, a courageous example of an American type if not all Americans, was a man at war with Creation, deserting a young wife and their baby to return to the sea, disdaining human society, striving to destroy that in nature and human society which constrained him or prevented him from being what he wished to be and from doing what he wished to do. Over-estimating his own importance in the general scheme of things, he took personally all that he suffered at the hands of nature.

As Melville saw things even before the War Between the States, there was already a streak of moral insanity in the American character, refusing to accept the world as God had made it. Cowards that we are, we don't engage in direct and open rebellion as did Captain Ahab. We act as if the world is what we wish it to be. And we were blessed and cursed by a remarkable run of successes which allowed us to act as if it were our right to be prosperous and powerful in a world made for us. The world truly is what we wish it to be and not what it was said to be by the likes of Isaiah and St. John the Baptist.

Then again, it might well be that our streak of luck has ended and we're about to suffer instead from our tendency towards moral insanity and our increasing stupidity as shown by our growing incompetence in maintaining the former pride of the United States – the American infrastructure from transportation systems to sewer systems. I'll also mention in passing our inability to win wars though we have the most expensively equipped and trained military in history. Best or most powerful military in history? The results of wars from Korea to Afghanistan indicate it's more accurate to say "most expensive" rather than "best".

And, yet, we think we are a special people of God, an exceptional people who are truly what we feel ourselves to be. I know many who are aware of their personal weakness and sinfulness and yet, in their roles as American citizens, feel themselves to be part of a nation which can do little wrong if any at all and can even reshape the world to be a realm of democracy and justice and prosperity. More generally, we don't see any need to respond to Creation, knowing in our American hearts that we're already what God intended men and women to be, knowing in our American hearts that the world is what we believe it to be, though it might need a little tweaking. For a century or more, we've talked and acted as if the American Way is the path to Heaven and this very delusion that we're already God's blessed and chosen people relieves us of the responsibility of examining our actions as a people, of responding to Creation and becoming the best we might be.

We saw what what seemed to be in our grasp, a leadership role for the United States as the core regions of Western Civilization aged and lost some energy, but we simply assumed that we were already prepared for that role as a 13 year-old might assume he's already prepared to take on the role of family head. We assumed we could lead the world into a better future by just being what we already were.

Let me back up to note a point raised by the historian Carrol Quigley in

*The Evolution of Civilizations: An Introduction to Historical Analysis* [119]:

When troubled or aging civilizations are re-energized, sometimes a revival of some sort will occur in a younger region of that civilization. Sometimes one or more of those younger regions will even mature into a center for a new phase of that decayed civilization.

The United States had grown prosperous on abundant natural resources and the various cultural resources which flowed from Europe and the American people had the opportunity and duty to take on a leadership role in reviving the West. Instead, we – as was said more than a century ago – passed directly from barbarism to decadence without ever passing through a state of civilization in between. We failed to do our duty to ourselves, to our children, to the Christian West. Most of all, we failed to do our duty to the God we claim as our Maker and King. We're unfaithful, cowardly, miserably poor servants. Not only have we Americans, as a nation, shown an excessive concern for our own safety and wealth, we've also shown a rather shocking desire to demonstrate our toughness by stomping on the faces of human beings mostly defenseless against us, at least in the short-run.

Yet, I think an unlikely event to be still possible: God may yet force Americans to develop the virtues we've chosen not to develop on our own however much we claim them. If so, it will be a painful process, probably far more painful and also more humiliating than the simple collapse into relative poverty and relative powerlessness that seems to be the fate of Americans as a people. We'll have to shed our illusions and delusions, our willful and culpable ignorance, our self-nurtured stupidity, and face up to reality, to God's Creation.

Few would believe at this time, the end of 2010, that the American people could play much of a role in God's narrative. Certainly, it would seem as if the worldly power is bound to develop anew in two regions of ancient civilization: China and India.

And so it is that Pope Benedict recently continued to swim against the tide appealing to Europeans to revive the West, to discover new ways to read "the book of nature, the book of sacred Scripture and the book of the liturgy" and to create new forms of art and music and literature and technology, new ways of living a Christian life based upon those new readings of God's thoughts as manifested in this mortal realm. I remember

reading Joseph Ratzinger's comments about the time he was elected Pope when he noted American Christians have made as big a mess of things as their brothers in Europe and he said the Church doesn't have the resources to save American Christianity. The Church, in his opinion, would have to concentrate on saving Western Civilization, the home built by the Church for herself, in Europe.

I think Pope Benedict, Joseph Ratzinger if you prefer, is right to estimate low the possibility that the American people will summon the courage, faith, and moral integrity to save this country let alone to contribute much to any revival of Western Civilization. It would seem almost impossible at this point that we Americans can form a new center for that Civilization – we threw away that chance decades ago and perhaps even by 1900. Yet. . .

I'll do my best as a child of the American region of the West, my best to provide a literature and a way of philosophical and theological thought which can be part of the foundation of a new phase of Western Civilization, perhaps a phase in which the American people mature and play a noble role in God's narrative.

# 602 Responding to Efforts to Repaganize the West

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=752>. It was finished and uploaded on 2010/12/10.]

The issue of mythology arises in this article, <http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/1345887?eng=y>, about the responses of Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), and some related thinkers, to neopaganism in modern times. The article tells us:

In [the] judgment [of a philosopher supporting polytheism], man always needs myths, and the important thing is that these myths be numerous and open to infinite variations, as in ancient mythology, unlike Judaism and Christianity, which rest on unique and incontrovertible historical events.

I'd like to make two quick points. First, I'd like to give an opinion about the true nature of myths. Secondly, I'd like to comment on the refusal of most Christian thinkers to engage God's Creation in the richer and more complex terms made possible by modern empirical knowledge.

In Chapter 588, *What is Wisdom?*, I quoted with approval Garet Garret's definition of wisdom [59]:

Wisdom is the fumbling substitute for perfect knowledge.

In a similar vein, I'll provide this definition of myth:

A myth is an obscure telling of a part of the story which is our world, sometimes deliberately obscure.

As such, myth is an oft-abused tool of metaphysics and theology. It can be a useful tool. I don't use myth in my metaphysical or theological writings but that's largely because I live during a time when the major task for philosophers and theologians is to make sense of the empirical knowledge we've gathered over the past few centuries, knowledge of God's work as Creator. Plato and Nietzsche used myths extensively and I have to say that I found Nietzsche's honest critiques of decadent Christian thought to be more useful in my journey as a Christian thinker than the writings of any modern Christian thinkers but Etienne Gilson and, maybe, Flannery O'Connor. Even Joseph Ratzinger takes the backseat to Nietzsche in insight into the problems of modern Western thought which is far too often little more than a senile version of Christian thought.

Nietzsche also provides a bridge to my second point, one related to claims made by Joseph Ratzinger and Etienne Gilson. I'll not bother to separate the contributions by those two men and me.

The Christians of the West built a home for the Christian Church and that home was called Western Civilization. In recent centuries, we haven't proven ourselves worthy successors to those builders of the first 11 or so centuries of Christianity following the collapse of the Roman Empire. But 'builders' is perhaps the wrong term. A civilization is a large complex of human communities traveling through time. As such, it can be regarded as an evolving colony of organisms. In recent centuries, we haven't proven ourselves worthy successors to those men and women who nurtured Western Civilization in the 11 or so centuries following the collapse of the Roman Empire. We've wandered off to straight and narrow and level paths which lie off the paths which Christians should be traveling. Those better and more demanding paths lead us towards the home of the Body of Christ and it is on those paths that the mortal Body of Christ will form. But those better paths lead us through dangerous and harsh regions and we prefer to travel in comfort. We prefer cheap and settled answers to responding to the puzzles which the Creator continually poses to living minds. We prefer to be citizens of nations, members of churches, seen as already fully mature and ready to run the world rather than members of a developing organism which is quite immature.

As a modern Christian thinker traveling apart from the herd, I'll be blunt about those in the mainstream. They're analogous to bleached-white sepulchers. On the outside, they display regularity in structure which speaks of rigorous thinking and well-organized libraries. Inside, they're

just dead human systems of thought incompatible with the world outside of themselves. That world is God's Creation and needs to be understood in terms of the best empirical knowledge of a specific age of men before the Bible and the Creeds can make sense to the men of that age.

Joseph Ratzinger isn't guilty of this lack of responsiveness to reality but his – in a manner of speaking – entrapment in Church duties has kept him from developing his ideas. I think his way of moving Christian thought into the modern world wasn't adequately empirical, that is – adequately respectful of God's work as Creator of a particular Creation. Yet, despite Ratzinger's reputation in some circles as being a rigid traditionalist, he wanted to move forward and would have likely at least inspired students to deal with modern empirical knowledge. See Chapter 69, *Hellenistic Metaphysics is Too Small*, for my critique of one of Pope Benedict's talks on the subject of reason in the West and its Hellenistic foundations.

We the unworthy successors of Augustine and Aquinas and Galileo should be modest in criticizing the pagans of the modern world who've attempted to make sense of this world as we Christians have remained safe and secure – or so we imagine – traveling in circles on our green pastures. If we wish to have a Christian civilization, we should put on our traveling clothes and start exploring the more dangerous paths that lead to the Body of Christ.

In any case, it seems that God is now at work destroying those pastures and forcing us to move somewhere.



# 603 Seeing What Was Always Present

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=762>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/02/05.]

When we suspect or fear that a miracle of any sort has occurred, we fool ourselves and fail to see that the miracle is nothing but an event tied closely to the always Present Whom we fail to see or to acknowledge in a proper way.

“Is nothing but...” is a funny phrase to use when talking about the Presence of God. Or is it? I’d suggest that we think strangely if we think the Creator needs to perform some sort of magic to shape the stuff of His Creation or form the relationships between entities in His Creation or to direct the events of His Creation.

I’ve started reading a collection of writings by the Jewish (Hasidic) Bible scholar and theologian Martin Buber: *On the Bible* [16]. These writings include chapters drawn from the many works of Buber – articles, studies, or lectures. The first chapter, *The Man of Today and the Jewish Bible*, asks, “the meaning [we might] find in the words that God came down in fire, to the sound of thunder and horn, to the mountain that smoked like a furnace, and spoke to His people?”

Buber proposes three possible explanations for such exotic events which are described in the Jewish Bible, also known as the Old Testament to Christians. Of course, there might be differences in the books which are included, but that’s not important for this discussion.

Buber says that the Israelites at the foot of Mount Sinai experienced a strange event – I’d even call it a theophany – which might be explained as:

- just words,

- an invasion of mortal realms by God, or
- a natural event experienced as a revelation.

I've advocated the last view in my writings and Buber seems also to prefer it. Let me elaborate on the three possibilities a little and then I'll speak a little more about my reasons for preferring that view.

- It's just words.

As Buber says, that seeming theophany could be a mere description, "figurative language used to express a 'spiritual' process[.]" In the same vein, we can speak of metaphors and allegories. I don't think the sorts of men who wrote and rewrote and redacted the Jewish Bible were likely to be so inspired by an opportunity for creative literary efforts. Nor were they likely to confuse fiction and the experience-based, if possibly distorted, stories of a people being formed by God. After all, those writers were part of that people and could see the results of often brutal historical forces.

- God might be invading our realm to show Who's the best magician of all.

It could be "the report of a *supernatural* event, one that severs the intelligible sequence of happenings we term natural by interposing something unintelligible."

Modern Christians seem predisposed to this view of God as a pagan deity who exercises dominion over a realm that lies at His feet. My fellow Catholics seem especially inclined to run around the world visiting theme-parks of a sort where the Mother of God, though not God Himself, has appeared to reaffirm our basic righteousness. We need to tune up our sinful selves, but the greatest share of the fault belongs to Satan, a view that I see as being strongly opposed to the teachings of the Biblical prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah. Could a clearheaded Christian really believe that Satan, not God, is driving history forward? I think not. I think that God is telling a story and we're trying to obstruct that great work. We feel in our hearts that we're doing as we should be doing, protecting ourselves and our understanding of God's Creation. We feel that Satan must be attacking our noble and

God-centered selves. And the Divine Magician will occasionally show Who's really Boss.

- It might be the realization that natural events are revelation.

It could be the “verbal trace of a natural event, i.e., of an event that took place in the world of the senses common to all men, and fitted into connections that the senses can perceive. But the assemblage that experienced the event experienced it as a revelation vouchsafed to them by God, and preserved it as such in the memory of generations, an enthusiastic, spontaneously formative memory. Experience undergone in this way is not self-delusion on the part of the assemblage; it is what they see, what they recognize and perceive with their reason, for natural events are the carriers of revelation, and revelation occurs when he who witnesses the event and sustains it experiences the revelation it contains.”

Of the above possibilities, the third is in line with my belief that a true revelation is an event or a moment or even a vaguely defined period of time when a prophet becomes such because his thoughts come into rhythm or synchronization with God's own thoughts. In the case of Israel gathered at the foot of Mt. Sinai, we speak of an entire people coming into rhythm or synchronization with God's own thoughts or – perhaps still more accurately – coming into synchronization with God's story, recognizing the role they were called to play and accepting that role. At least they accepted for a short while though later they rebelled, apparently thinking they deserved better from their Maker.<sup>1</sup>

We're blind to God's presence in His own Creation that lies in front of us. We go looking for brilliant flashes, which might well be real apparitions, but it's not to our credit that we need such. We're deaf to God's whispers and wish to hear the mother of His Son speak human words to admonish and encourage us. We can't think along with the thoughts God manifested in Creation and we think of too many of those thoughts as being demonic disruptions of a world intended to be some sort of Disney-managed Eden.

Blind, deaf, and stupid, we couldn't be happy in any Heaven consistent with Christian beliefs. Mark Twain once noted this to be true of Americans,

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<sup>1</sup>The story may well be more complex and less edifying than this simple rendering. In addition, the editors and redactors who lived half a millennium after the events were themselves part of the prophetic moment.

but I think it generally true of modern peoples, even most of those who seem to be orthodox Trinitarian Christians. We prepare ourselves for a resurrection into a Heaven more like DisneyWorld than the life the Apostles enjoyed with the Son of God incarnate. We'll be what we make ourselves to be and we'll need that Disney-managed Eden to be happy. Or else, we'll need to spend a lot of time in some remedial education classroom in the entry-regions of Heaven. Heaven, as vaguely hinted in the New Testament and in the writings of great Christian thinkers, is a place of communion with God, not a place where we'll continue our preferred roles as passive spectators sitting in front of epic shows or sitting in vehicles passing through thrill-rides.

Given an understanding of the evolution of life in general and of human nature in particular, we can see what's wrong. We're creatures keyed to survival and reproduction in a world that can quickly strip us of the bare essentials of life. We're creatures who are keyed to plodding efforts occasionally interrupted by dangerous situations which must be met with bursts of energy and we seek to save energy when possible, to be relatively passive and let good things come to us if possible.

And we human beings have also a strong tendency to justify ourselves. We think we deserve the best, needs and security and luxuries, and we often don't get the best, especially those of us living at times when it would seem we've turned ourselves into flimsy obstructions to God's story. It actually takes multiple generations to reach this point but some have the bad luck to live at the time when the forces of God's story start clearing out all that obstructs the story.

We need to get ourselves in rhythm, in synchronization with that story God is telling. When we do so, we'll perceive the story and He who is telling the story. We'll know we're in the presence of God and we'll be able to start moving with God, taking on our proper roles in that story and willingly living those roles.

In principle.

In fact? The moments when we have a strong sense of God's presence, as individuals or as a gathering of God-centered people, are likely to be few and far between, and maybe so dim to creaturely vision that we can't be certain.

We aren't justified in falling back to a skeptical position which denies God's presence, either denying His existence or banishing the Almighty to some conveniently far location. Creation and its Creator should be inspira-

tions for our creative literary efforts but they can't be contained in our tiny imaginations. If we are to think independently enough to be true images of God, we sometimes need to turn from God while we grow up. If we are to be true adults, we need to turn back to God. During our mortal lives, that means turning to the presence of God the Creator in His own Creation, in the things which are our fellow creatures – living and not – and in the relationships of those creatures and in the entirety of this world and of this world we can directly perceive, if only in part.

We are most certainly not justified in falling back to a childish wish for explicit acts of magic from God, perhaps a dancing sun or perhaps the magical healing of the scars and wounds of evolution and development in this world being born. God may cause such events, but we should be careful about needing such evidence and careful about rendering our faith dependent upon miracles. And we should be careful not to bet our faith on what might not be truly a sign of God's special presence.

Though there are some with a well-founded but simple faith, a properly skeptical attitude can be good. Though the Christian Church, however defined, needs sophisticated believers who can move with faith intact across the best of modern knowledge in a variety of fields, a child-like anticipation of God's acts of revealing His presence can also be good. That skeptical attitude and that child-like anticipation both need to be set into the context of a spiritually and intellectually and morally mature search for the truth, a search conducted with faith and hope and love. That search must be for the story God is telling, a story which emerges to our vision in only a very obscure manner. It must not be a search for truths to be used in a schematic way to prove or disprove God's existence nor must it be a search for a God who is oddly enough coming to rescue us from the story He Himself is telling.

Moreover, that search is a communal search, however important might be the role of occasional prophets forced to work as lone-wolves.

The truth unfolds in time through a communal process.

When the Israelites stood at the foot of Mt. Sinai, they – as a community – experienced the story God is telling in a particularly clear way. God was present to them in a way that we can rarely accept, a way we often refuse to even acknowledge. Our blindness is not entirely to the bad since we are intended to live our mundane lives and we'd not be able to do so if we were

constantly living in the burning Presence of God. In addition, we have to remember:

It's not necessarily the case that all present at one of these moments of an intense awareness of the ever-presence of God will feel that intense awareness.

There might be some who play the role of seers, not having some sort of mystical vision, but seeing exactly what is there and has always been there – the presence of God and not miraculous events. Sometimes, a community might come into synchronization with God's story in a second-hand way – by coming into synchronization with the words of a prophet or seer in their midst or – more likely – a prophet long-dead. More typically, those who are blind to God's presence will also be deaf to the words of any prophets in their midst.

## 604 The Tree of Knowledge and Narrative Openness

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/02/12.]

In an article included in *On the Bible*, Martin Buber states that a knowledge of the language and culture of ancient Hebrews tells us that the meaning of the “good and evil” related to the tree of knowledge in Eden is “adequate awareness of the opposites latent in creation.” Apparently, the phrase “good and evil” is a way of speaking about all of those opposites. In my way of speaking, the ancient Hebrews tended to speak of abstract classes in concrete terms, using examples rather than speaking of species or classes or sets as Western man learned to do from the Greeks. “Good and evil” is one easily perceivable example of that class of opposites.

Continuing with Buber’s words:

This knowledge as the primordial possession of God and same knowledge as the magical attainment of man are worlds apart in their nature. God knows the opposites of being, which stem from His own act of creation; He encompasses them, untouched by them; He is as absolutely familiar with them as He is absolutely superior to them; He has direct intercourse with them (this is obviously the original meaning of the Hebrew verb “know”: be in direct contact with), and this in their function as the opposite poles of the world’s beings. For as such He created them – we may impute this late biblical doctrine (Isaiah 45:7) to our narrator, in its elementary form. Thus He who is above all opposites has intercourse with the opposites of good and evil that are of His own making; and something of His primordial

familiarity with them He appears, as can be gathered from the words “one of us” (Genesis 3:22), to have bestowed upon the “sons of God” (Genesis 6:2) by virtue of their share in the work of creation.

This is good stuff, what I agree with and what I disagree with.

I certainly agree with Buber that the *good and evil* isn't related to any tale of a primeval fall from a time when Adam and Eve lived in some sort of transparent communion with God. In scientific terms, the ancestors of all human beings were ape-like creatures with the brain structures which could be developed to handle abstractions, perceptual and conceptual, but those capabilities can't be developed without the proper nurturing and without the individual responding properly to his environment or environments. Once the human brain had evolved to an adequate level, it took additional millenia for human beings to develop minds capable of a more profound appreciation of *good-and-evil*.

As Buber says in a restatement of his general position:

*Good-and-evil* is the *yes-and-no* to creation.

I'm inclined to go with Buber on this issue, partly because of his deep knowledge of the language of Biblical texts and languages and the underlying history and partly because his answer has a good feel to it, as if it synchronizes well with God's thoughts as I can detect them by way of my responses to Creation, including scripture. My prior thoughts were along lines that Buber says are not supported by the sense of the language: the great event was an awakening of moral self-awareness on the part of Adam and Eve, or more prosaically, an awakening of moral self-awareness on the part of the ancestors of modern human beings, perhaps an awakening which occurred over a number of generations.

I'm not ready to renounce that theory that Adam and Eve experienced an awakening of moral self-awareness, but I'm ready to demote it to a secondary meaning – I tend to think that the Bible has multiple meanings, in particular over larger sections and in still larger groupings of sections or entire books, and those meanings might emerge over time – even if they can't be strictly supported by the language and culture which might have held in the time of the events or the time of the narrator. We must start with the primary meanings, those intended by those narrators, But we must go

beyond that in order to let Biblical revelation play its proper role in shaping our minds which are our best understanding, or image, of God's Creation.

We must develop a proper worldview as I call it, dangerously I guess because of strange uses of the term 'worldview' by recent scholars or commentators in theology and maybe other fields. My worldview is an effort to see a world, unified and coherent and complete (in its own nature), where we modern human beings see realms only loosely connected to each other – if connected at all. See Chapter 577, *The Only Sane Christian in the Modern World*, for a discussion of the need for such a worldview, at least for those who believe in an all-powerful Creator.

After verifying that our knowledge is consistent with empirical reality, we can apply a test to our understanding of that knowledge, whether a theory of gravity or an understanding of the meaning of an important story in the Bible:

Does it conduce to a narrative which helps us to see our world in its necessary unity and coherence and completeness?

So, was the so-called fall of Adam and Eve actually a discovery that God alone knows being and non-being, that: "He who is above all opposites has intercourse with the opposites of good and evil that are of His own making" and that "something of His primordial familiarity with [such primordial opposites] He appears, as can be gathered from the words 'one of us' (Genesis 3:22), to have bestowed upon the 'sons of God' (Genesis 6:2) by verdure of their share in the work of creation." A mouthful, but it rings true. It rings true to this world as we meet it and try to respond to it faithfully and courageously.

There are opposites which only God can truly know, 'being' and 'non-being' provides an obvious example. But I have a Thomistic optimism when it comes to the human mind. In principle, the human being can respond to Creation, shaping his mind to encapsulate it so fully that his mind is an image of Creation, that is, an image of the thoughts God manifested as this particular Creation which includes this still more particular world. In principle, we can know the 'good-and-evil' which is a fundamental part of this world.

We can't know 'being-and-nonbeing' nor can we know what God might have created but didn't though we can imagine a number of worlds He might have shaped from the basic stuff of this particular Creation. He shaped us

to be capable of being the image of the Creator, His own divine Self in a freely-chosen and self-limited role. It was the very act of God in freely choosing such a role that is the act of Creation, the act-of-being which is this Creation, including this particular world He shaped from some rawer stuff. For further discussions of this idea of God in a self-limited role as Creator, see

1. Chapter 574, *Proving the Existence of Zeus*,
2. Chapter 24, *Extraterrestrial Life*, or
3. Chapter 256, *Evolutionary Thomists Don't Do Ontology*.

I claim we can – in principle – know those opposites which stem from God's act of creation though we can't know all that lies on the 'other side' of that act, God Himself in His transcendence including all the thoughts He didn't manifest in Creation.

# 605 Myth and History in the Bible and Everywhere Else in Creation

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=779>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/03/01.]

[This is a somewhat freewheeling response to *Biblical Leadership* – first given as a lecture in 1928 and published as a chapter in the book *On the Bible: Eighteen Studies* [16], a collection of short writings taken from the various works of Martin Buber.]

In the essay, *Biblical Leadership*, Martin Buber states:

I believe that we are standing at the beginning of a new era in biblical studies; whereas the past era was concerned with proving that the Bible did not contain history, the coming era will succeed in demonstrating its historicity. By this I do not mean that the Bible depicts men and women and events as they were in actual history; rather do I mean that its descriptions and narratives are the organic, legitimate ways of giving an account of what existed and what happened. I have nothing against calling these narratives myths and sagas, so long as we remember that myths and sagas are essentially memories which are actually conveyed from person to person.

I'll start out with a quibble which should perhaps be directed at many who speak of historical matters. The term "actual history" is suspicious. There is no "actual history" accessible to man but only specific histories which are narrated by particular, concrete human beings. The term "actual

history" implies – at least to me – a direct knowledge of the story God is telling, in its completeness and unity and coherence. I have to confess that I also tend to misuse the word 'history', using it at times as if it denoted a direct access to the narrative which is this world, an access implying the perfect knowledge of this world which. After all, that is what we aim at, however far it lies beyond our reach. Our human beings are the right sorts of entities to shape minds to encapsulate the very thoughts God manifested in this world, but we are far too small and too weak to actually encapsulate much. We are children playing with make-believe tools in imitation, but true imitation, of our Father as He goes about His work.

But let me return to the specific topic of bible history, that is, a specific set of human renderings of human events within the story God is telling.

There are historians to be sure who specialize in finding and studying manuscripts or royal archives or other public documents which are what they are. Such documents are quite useful but they provide a limited view of a complex reality. 'Objective and true history' would necessarily be a replay of events. Judging by the general feel of his writings, I think that Buber knows quite well that history is, and has to be, a literary narrative by a human thinker who organizes material to produce that narrative. Perhaps that term "actual history" was a slip-up – I'm sure I've made many such errors. To see that the world is not quite what most men claim it to be is not sufficient to know how to speak more truly. I can understand King David's viewpoint to some extent but I don't know what it's like to dance in procession in front of the Ark of the Covenant nor do I know what it's like to move up into the woods knowing that multiple groups of competent and brutal warriors wish to kill me. Yet, my mind is totemic enough that I can sort of know these experiences. We can only weakly approximate to God's intimate way of knowing His own Creation in each and every part. Yet, we can do that and a competent historian can provide a convincing and sometimes entrancing overview of a part of God's story. So do many others, such as poets and myth-makers and those who design buildings to correspond to a particular view of the world and man's place in it.

I go along with Buber completely in having "nothing against calling these [Biblical] narratives myths and sagas, so long as we remember that myths and sagas are essentially memories which are actually conveyed from person to person." My understanding of American history has been shaped by readings of the novels of Hawthorne and Melville and dos Passos, not just by readings of the nonfiction of Nisbet and McDonald and Toucqueville

and the Founding Fathers. Moreover, I myself write novels and probably write most of my theological and philosophical works in the manner of a novelist.

History has to be founded on facts but facts alone don't give the proper narrative structure – that is, moral structure, nor are the facts of history verifiable or even fully objective in the way of measurements of the sun's radiation output. This is to say that history is an approximate rendering of a very small part of the narrative God is telling, the narrative that is the world – this universe as seen in light of God's purposes for Creation.

There is another deep problem for localized entities such as a man, one dealt with in that poorly named field of study: chaos theory. As I noted in my first published book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [41]:

There's a pretty good way to generate physical events which are chaotic by some realistic and practical standard. The measurements of those events will be a stream of numbers random by some standard, sometimes quite high. You can simply put two independent systems in contact with each other and observe or measure what happens at the interface. That's all. It's a trick used in some of the simple experiments used to generate so-called chaotic motion. For example, take two pendulums with different periods of oscillation. Link the bobs of the pendulums and put one or both in motion. The two pendulums will clearly not be able to move as they would if each moved freely. In fact, the resulting motion will be chaotic, basically unpredictable. Equivalent experiments can be done with electronic components or even with simulations of the independent systems in software. There's nothing mystical involved in generating streams of physical events which are unpredictable or chaotic, generating numbers which are random by some low standard.

Chaotic motion can be visualized as an orbital path that never quite returns to the same point and is unpredictable beyond some length of time in the future or in the past. If you were to graph the orbits of such an object, and the orbiting earth is such an object, you would get a blur of orbits that lie close to each other and cross over often but no particular orbit is the same as any other. That sort of movement is patternless to human perception and measurement though usually staying

within some tight boundaries. Physicists have shown by way of demanding computer simulations that “the orbital movement of planets in the solar system is chaotic. . . which makes practically impossible any precise prediction beyond a few tens of millions of years. . .”

The early results of Professor [Jacques] Laskar’s research (his first simulations of the solar system [were carried out] in 1989) indicate that a mere 15 meter error in measurement of the earth’s current position makes it impossible to say if the earth’s orbit will be stable 100 million years from now. Because the equations of dynamics are symmetrical in time, this means it’s also impossible to prove the earth’s orbit was stable more than 100 million years in the past, with that range of ignorance moving with us so far as the future goes and also moving with us so far as the past goes. A few years later, Gerald Sussman and Jack Wisdom of MIT showed that after only 4 million years it is not possible to predict the orbit of the earth, or any of the planets of the solar system, with any confidence.

Undoubtedly, results will have been tightened up in the technical literature to which I have no access. But the principle is what’s important.

In a sense, knowledge is constantly coming into view ahead of us and constantly disappearing behind us. To be more explicit, this means that, despite common sense, we cannot prove by mathematical means that the earth stayed in its orbit 4 million years ago. So far as the equations go, with initial conditions provided by the current state of the solar system, the earth might have crashed into the sun or gone shooting past Mars 4 million years ago. Common sense sometimes tells us things that mathematics cannot.

You shouldn’t imagine that this situation occurs only at the level of planets like the earth. The sun itself is traveling a chaotic orbit around the center of the galaxy. Our galaxy, the Milky Way, is dancing around various gravitational centers of local clusters of galaxies and larger-scale clusters of galaxies.

There’s a deep and fundamental lack of determination about the

events in the universe, future events and past events alike. The strangeness of quantum mechanics does not really add much to this lack of determination, not in principle, though it's likely that it gives us a view of this looseness in reality on a different level. We're duty-bound to use this looseness in the chains of determinism to move towards God. We have a small but significant measure of physical freedom which we can use in making moral choices with some freedom.

There's a specific example of a chaotic or random stream of events that may be founded upon two interacting, independent physical systems which are largely well-determined – biological evolution. In the short-term and from the viewpoint of the individual organism, which is the entity being selected or otherwise acted upon, both genetic events and environmental events can be presented as well-determined, at least for the first stage of an analysis. The interaction of these two well-determined and independent systems produces a stream of unpredictable and under-determined events which are typically mis-labeled as 'random' by evolutionary biologists and popular science writers. Then again, they're random if we use the more recent redefinition of randomness to be factuality of a sort. They are random in the same way as the earth's orbit which doesn't quite repeat itself and is beyond the capabilities of human prediction, at least, given current understandings of what mathematics is.

Now let me state a principle that might help us move in the right direction away from the current confusion I've deliberately stirred up:

Things which exist are infinitely richer than any possible description of those things in either human language or human mathematics.

Statements and equations can only cover specific aspects of things and usually those specific aspects will not be fully covered. Even if it were possible to know a thing has only ten aspects by some system of categorization, you would have to push Humpty Dumpty off the wall to get at those aspects. An

equation describing the shell in all its surprising strength, a description of the genes in the yolk, and a philosophical discussion of the potential unity of these fragments and puddles of glop, won't get you Humpty Dumpty back again. No concrete thing can be broken up into sets of aspects which are non-overlapping but also cover the thing completely. Nor are we so good at dealing with aspects as some think. Again, it's St. Thomas Aquinas who had the better sense. While he defended the idea that the human mind could, in principle, comprehend all of this universe, he also noted that no actual human mind could fully understand so much as a flea.

The world remains a true narrative with moral purpose but also moments of uncertainty, moral and physical. To understand a man facing a moral decision is not necessarily to know what his decision will be. A man with a mind shaped to be an encapsulation of this world, or even of all Creation, doesn't know all that will happen or has happened; he only understands what he knows. Many men know much and don't understand much at all – their minds are shaped to another world than the one God created.

In a sense, we could even say that God, in His self-constrained role as Creator, has accepted a certain amount of ignorance as to the results of these moments of uncertainty. He meets us as someone who will respond to us, converse with us, as we respond to Him and converse with Him. He meets us as if He too were part of the developing world as it moves into a future free in some significant way which is difficult to even name let alone describe. The all-powerful God is the author of this world and its only true Ruler, but He meets us as a personal Lord who wishes us to return to Him, not as if our fate were already a foregone conclusion. This is the "I-thou" relationship so prominent in Buber's body of work.

So how is it that God can meet us in such a relationship when He's all-powerful and all-knowing? That's a subject worth exploring, by novelist and poet and musician as well as by theologian and philosopher and brain-scientist. See Chapter 596, *Freedom and Structure in Human Life – The Never-ending Project* for a discussion of exactly that – the impossibility of completing this project of exploring Creation, that is, the thoughts of God in His freely chosen role as Creator. That's not bad as such – exploring

Creation is one of the more interesting activities a man can take up and it might well be one of our main occupations in the world of the resurrected.



# 606 The Lines Are Further Blurred Between Flesh and Spirit

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=808>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/04/13.]

Flannery O'Connor was a devout Catholic Christian who no mercy on those who preached what she once labeled "Pious Crap." Sometimes, that might even mean poking fun at the ways in which a truth is held or rejected. One truth she clearly held is:

The body is the temple of the Holy Ghost.

She wrote a short story titled, appropriately enough, *A Temple of the Holy Ghost*. In that story, two girls from a Catholic school, Temple One and Temple Two as they called each other, came to visit, putting on red skirts and loud blouses and lipstick as soon as they unpacked their suitcases. Soon enough, they were being courted by young fellows who sang to them:

I've got a friend in Jesus,  
He's everything to me,  
...

To which the young women responded:

Tantum ergo Sacramentum  
Veneremur Cernui,  
...

Temple One and Temple Two seemed to be doing their best to become sluts to the disgust of the slightly younger girl who seemed to be something

like Miss O'Connor. At least as she perceived herself. But the young girl wasn't disgusted for reasons of some sort of religious purity. She was simply disgusted that the two young women were...so stupid. And the two young men were also so stupid. Everyone was so stupid, some for rejecting the great truths, some for showing no understanding of what the great truths really meant.

In Chapter 599, *Flannery O'Connor Was a Pretty Good Thomistic Philosopher*, I quoted her from a letter found on page 953 of the *Library of America* collection of her writings:

To see Christ as God and man is probably no more difficult today than it has always been, even if today there seem to be more reasons to doubt. For you it may be a matter of not being able to accept what you call a suspension of the laws of the flesh and the physical, but for my part I think that when I know what the laws of the flesh and the physical really are, then I will know what God is. We know them as we see them, not as God sees them. For me it is the virgin birth, the Incarnation, the resurrection which are the true laws of the flesh and the physical. Death, decay, destruction are the suspension of those laws. I am always astonished at the emphasis the Church puts on the body. It is not the soul she says that will rise but the body, glorified. I have always thought that purity was the most mysterious of the virtues, but it occurs to me that it would never have entered the human consciousness to conceive of purity if we were not to look forward to a resurrection of the body, which will be flesh and spirit united in peace, in the way they were in Christ. The resurrection of Christ seems the high point in the law of nature.

If we "know what the laws of the flesh and the physical really are, then [we] will know what God is."

We Christians often take on the practices of disciplining the body found in the writings or traditions which come from the early Christian Fathers or from the monks of succeeding centuries, but we misinterpret them, choosing to talk and act as if we discipline the body because it's something that came from the Devil and must be beaten into submission that it not gain domination over our better, more spiritual part.

Baloney.

I should discipline my body because it is me. Other parts of me form, call them 'mind' or 'soul' if you will, as I interact with what lies around me and, by doing so, interact with He who lies deep within me as well as deep within all that lies around me.

My body is me as a moral agent. If I wish to try to save a child in danger at risk to myself, I must have a body disciplined (sometimes naturally inclined) to override its own instinctive movements towards safety or at least not into danger. If I – in particular – am to sit quietly in contemplative prayer or trying to put together a difficult scene in a novel or a complex line of philosophical thought, I must discipline my body to sit still. It won't always work, but I have to work to increase the chances of success.

We discipline our bodies, our very selves, by holding to good routines in our daily schedules. We exercise properly. We don't baby ourselves – too much – when it comes to cold or other discomforts, though we should take proper care of ourselves. We fast.

Fasting. A complex topic. The Catholic Church in this day has squishy soft standards for fasting – typically, a complete but modest meal and two smaller meals. Some exercise gurus and health experts recommend tougher standards and more often than twice a year – Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are the only fast days on the calendar of the Catholic Church as of 2011. I knew some in California who would go on regular fasts to purge their bodies of various poisons we take in with each breath and with many a bite of food. A typical diet, circa 1978 might have been a day or more of only clear liquids, such as clear vegetable broth, with maybe a day or two before or after of very light eating.

Now some scientist confirm that *Routine Periodic Fasting Is Good for Your Health, and Your Heart, Study Suggests*, see <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/04/110403090259.htm>. Interesting, but hardly surprising and probably not established beyond reasonable doubt in the way of peer-reviewed science.

Maybe we Christians should think in these terms, that is, of our duty to God to purify the temple of the Holy Ghost. Junk builds up on those walls and floors inside.

Good for your health, and your heart. Good for your moral character, and your soul. I guess that makes fasting a pretty good thing. If only it were easier to do good things which leave us feeling uncomfortable. But that's the point of it all. To learn how to overcome the reluctance to feel discomfort

as I have to at the beginning of running season. At the end of winter, I try to get back to a regular running schedule and find myself in bad shape. Worse than that, I can't even reach the limits of a badly conditioned body because I have to relearn how to calmly take the next breath into struggling winterized lungs and have to tell those winterized legs to keep going because the discomfort is a sign of good things happening.

If I could fast properly, it might be easier to run or to start running in late winter if only because I'd be a few pounds lighter. But I'd also be better disciplined to endure a small but ongoing amount of discomfort.

I think it is not so much a more important matter as it is a different important matter to fast properly that it might be easier to pray, that I might better help others and might be better prepared to follow the Lord Jesus Christ even when that way leads through suffering or an early death.

# 607 Killing Babies and Children and Maiming the Body of Christ

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=846>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/05/16.]

Paul Gottfried is a political scientist always worth reading, his books and his short writings on the Internet. In this article, *What Drives the Religious Right* at <http://www.amconmag.com/blog/2011/05/12/who-misleads-the-religious-right/>, he made some good points about the nature of the religious right, predominately Evangelical Protestant though I know some Catholics who've taken up with their way of thought, or their way of intellectual laziness as Professor Gottfried describes their way of thought or non-thought or feeling good about themselves or whatever. I reached these sentences and had to comment on one issue that's been bothering me for a while:

Pat Robertson touted Giuliani as a presidential candidate on his television program, despite Giuliani's enthusiastic advocacy of a pro-choice position throughout his career. Robertson liked Giuliani because he was good on Israel. Leaders of the Religious Right have also had many nice things to say about Joe Lieberman, whose Zionism and advocacy of foreign wars seem to trump his support for third-term abortion. Bill Bennett backed Lieberman for president in 2008, without forfeiting (as far as I know) his credentials as an opponent of abortion beloved to the Religious Right.

So far as I can tell, there are a lot of my fellow Catholics, and maybe others, who describe themselves as pro-life but in practice are only opposed

to killing babies in certain ways. They're fine with killing babies so long as it's done in a morally and theologically proper way – shooting them with sprays of machine-gun bullets or dropping napalm on them or starving them to death or depriving them of important medicines.

We have to realize there are governments and other human institutions, even pro-life organizations, which have become parasites and/or cancers inside the Body of Christ, and some outside the Body of Christ as defined by the historical boundaries of regions predominately Christian – I know the problems with politicized or nominal Christianity but we have to start somewhere to understand this problem. I've written about these parasites and cancers with regard to governments in particular in Chapter 420, *What is a Conspiracy?*, which includes some comments I'd added later on my blog as Section 420.1, *Criminal and Not Satanic*. And we must remember that where there are powerful governments, no matter how evil, there will be many human beings ready and willing to do their bidding or fighting to take control.

The point I really wish to emphasize, what I'd like to keep in my personal scope of attention, is that the real issue is the Body of Christ. Compassionate might be the Lord, but He is clearly willing to tell a story in which the most innocent of creatures suffer. Human beings, including the sweetest of babies might be torn apart by vicious predators or they might have their skin stripped off their bodies by diseases that cause their own immune systems to attack the flesh just below that skin. God does what He does for His own reasons, but the most important reason from our viewpoint is: He is forming the Body of Christ by way of this story which is a world. This leads to a claim that there is something going on which is still more important to a Christian than even the mass murder of innocents – the American government in particular, but other Western governments as well, are acting as if to systematically destroy the Body of Christ starting with the outer (though often more ancient) churches in Asia. They say it's dangerous to be an enemy of the United States but fatal to be a friend. Enemy or friend, it seems fatal to all ancient Christian communities when the American military or intelligence services enters your country.

Many years ago, I read a story in which a Senator or Congressman was asked if he were accusing a colleague of being a Communist agent and he responded something like this, "No, but I am saying that if he were a Communist agent, he wouldn't have to act any differently." I'll say along those lines, "I'm not accusing the American people and their

leaders of trying to destroy the Body of Christ, starting with the ancient Christian churches of Iraq and Syria and others in Southwest Asia, but I am saying that they wouldn't have to act any differently if they were engaged in such an evil effort." [In fact, a little digging on the Internet will produce testimony that Western European countries and the United States also regularly betrayed the Christians of Poland and Russia and other Eastern European regions, often for the flimsiest of payments by Stalin or Hitler.]

The ancient Jews used to honor pious non-Jews with the title *Friend of God*. Perhaps the leaders of the United States, and all who march behind them, should honor each other with the title *Enemy of God*.

Or, perhaps we Christians in the United States should be watching our leaders more carefully and calling them to account when they act in evil ways.



# 608 The Proper Study of Mankind is Creation

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=862>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/05/25.]

Not only do I claim that the proper study of mankind is Creation; I also claim that the priority in that study for Christians in this mortal realm is the Body of Christ as it is developing in this mortal realm.

This doesn't mean that every human being should be a philosopher or physicist. It does mean we all have the duty to respond to objective reality in our own callings, the entirety of our lives.

I'm driven to remind myself of this because I've recently found myself reading comments on the Internet or engaging in conversations in which pious Christians have set out their all-too subjective concerns with Christianity as a human enterprise or with the Catholic Church as a set of human institutions. Acknowledging that things aren't going so well with our faith in this year of 2011, all of their solutions had to do with human institutional arrangements. Allow married priests in the Catholic Church. Allow women in the priesthood of the Catholic Church. Allow homosexual ministers in XXX denomination of Protestant Christianity. Feed the poor in Africa or build new, mildew-free houses for those in New Orleans who've still not recovered from Hurricane Katrina.

Some of the suggestions had some serious weight behind them as if dealing with duties which Christians have been neglecting. Some are the same old tired issues. The most viable suggestions, in my opinion, have to do with Christians trying to reign in their war-criminal leaders or showing themselves willing to pay a price to follow their Lord instead of always suggesting that the moral tone of society be improved by others giving up

sins that don't tempt most mainstream Christians.

Rarely do I hear anyone discuss the possibility which is so close to the heart of my efforts. Maybe we've lost touch with God's story which is this world? We do know something important about God's ultimate purposes as revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, maybe we should put in an effort to understand what God's doing in this mortal realm of His Creation? Maybe we should try to see what His purposes are for us and for the development of the Body of Christ in this vale of tears? Maybe we should be trying to perceive the thoughts God manifested in this universe?

This is close to the driving theme of the Hebrew prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah. God was nurturing some pagans that they might come to dominance in the region of Israel and Judea. Rather than trying to be excessively clever, let alone trying to stand up militarily to peoples of growing powers, it was time for the Judeans and Israelites to recognize their situation and to cooperate with God, not collaborate with violent barbarians but also not to stand in the way of powerful trends which were part of God's story.

Though wars rage throughout the world, I'm not really thinking of those particular aspects of mortal life in this context. I'm thinking, for example, of the general inability of Christians to address the nature of sin in light of biblical revelation and of Darwinian empirical knowledge. It seems that some tried only to lose their faith. I'm thinking of our lack of response to new understandings of time and space and matter which should lead to great enrichments of our understanding of the possibilities of resurrection and to radically new understandings of the sacramental nature of physical reality and of the Sacraments themselves – baptism and so forth. Maybe if we could present a plausible Christ-centered story which is compatible with this new knowledge of Creation, maybe, maybe we could preach Christ so that all of His children would stop and listen and maybe try to become a willing part of the story God is telling?

Perhaps we should work towards a better understanding of our own nature as developing creatures, members of a species which has evolved over an immense amount of time. Maybe we could then come to understand our problems and imperfections in ways that will help us deal with them a little better instead of babbling about free-will and a fall from a state of grace only to take our children and our friends to psychiatrists to deal with the imbalances in their brain chemicals.

See Chapter 25, *Broadening the Horizons of Reason*, for my response to a speech in which Pope Benedict expressed his awareness of this same

situation. In particular, he told us, “Modernity is not simply a historically-datable cultural phenomenon; in reality it requires a new focus, a more exact understanding of the nature of man.” I would add to this that we need to gain a similarly more exact understanding of the foundational aspects of the world in which we find ourselves, a more exact understanding of time and space and matter and of all the extraordinary relationships which exist between various sorts of entities in this world. I think we can learn some important thoughts of God by studying not only those bones dug out of the sands of Africa but also planets and gas clouds and those longfar-agoway objects such as quasars and giant, first-generation stars.

Maybe then we could have something intelligent to say about the resurrection or the Body of Christ, however tentative our first ideas might be in this new adventure of the mind and spirit.



# 609 Natural Theology vs. Revelation

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1029>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/09/19.]

I've started rereading *Science and Creation*[118] by John Polkinghorne, the physicist at Cambridge University who left his professorship to enter an Anglican seminary before returning to Cambridge as a chaplain and administrator.

Father Polkinghorne is quite polite to those who denigrate natural theology and to those who simply question what natural theology can really tell us about God. In particular, he responds in a respectful manner to Karl Barth, one of a number of those who study 'theology proper' and deny any possibility of understanding God at all through an understanding of God's acts as Creator. I put the case in my own way to show why I once published some essays in which I showed no respect whatsoever for this position, even on the part of so brave and distinguished a servant of Christ as Barth was. It's an absurd position, one which makes a mockery of God as a rational and coherent entity. It's more than absurd to say we learn nothing of an entity by studying his/His decisions and acts. In God's case, those decisions and acts come from a pure freedom which is itself beyond our total understanding, but even that freedom can be somewhat understood by studying and contemplating two implications of what we do understand about this universe:

1. It didn't have to be.
2. It could have been a radically different universe.

I've expanded this view out to the entirety of Creation, but it remains essentially the same argument at least to those willing and able to deal with very abstract realms of being. The concept of "abstract realms of being" is itself a major part of my worldview, but I'll deal with that, in passing, near the end of this short essay. First, I'll quote part of Father Polkinghorne's response to Barth and those who deny we can learn anything important about God by studying His Creation.

[T]he world is not just a neutral theatre in which these revelatory acts take place. Rather, it is itself, if theism is true, the creation of God and so potentially a vehicle also for his self-disclosure. God is to be found in the general as well as the particular. [118] [page 3]

That is, we learn about the Creator by understanding what man is and why he can be said to be the 'image of God', not just by experiencing the presence of God in some particular and 'personal' revelation. The reader should be aware that I try to be very careful about using the term 'Creator' whenever I'm writing or speaking about God in His freely chosen role as such.

This needs a few comments. First, Father Polkinghorne should not have qualified his claim with the word 'potentially' in the second sentence. A man's decisions and acts are what he is. God is different in that His act of Creation, the primary act-of-being by which He manifested the truths from which He shaped all of created being, is itself an act of absolutely free-will. He creates His own context for further acts-of-being and for what might be called His narrative acts. This means that Creation, in principle fully accessible to human exploration, isn't a guide to all that God is or all that He could do.

When a man studies any realm of Creation, the possible movements of his own body so that he might dance more freely or the role of genes in vulnerability to HIV infection, he doesn't just learn some facts or a way of better interacting with reality, though such claims help us in understanding the more complete and more radical claim which arises from this way of looking at matters: man shapes himself to encapsulate some smaller or greater realm of Creation. Man shapes himself to **be** some realm of created being which is a manifestation of particular thoughts of God in His freely chosen role of Creator. To become a true morally well-ordered human per-

son, man must also shape himself to the flow of the morally well-ordered narrative which is the world and also to a multitude of morally well-ordered or ill-ordered narratives which are our lives or the history of our particular culture or nation or . . .

Let me drop back to writing as if we acquire knowledge of being rather than writing in terms of the greater truth that we shape ourselves to become that being.

I wrote a book, freely downloadable, dealing with knowledge from that semi-traditional viewpoint: *Four Kinds of Knowledge* found at <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/know.pdf>. In that book, I explain that there are two kinds of knowledge: knowledge of God in His transcendence (theology proper) and knowledge of God in His thoughts and acts as Creator of this particular Creation. At the same time, I concede the limitations and general weaknesses of our human minds make it useful to think of knowledge as being of four kinds:

1. revealed knowledge;
2. speculative knowledge;
3. scientific empirical knowledge; and
4. practical empirical knowledge.

In my way of thinking about Creation, natural theology includes all knowledge but that of God in His transcendence and that natural knowledge is broken out into three major realms of knowledge. Ultimately, natural theology is knowledge of the transcendent God in His role as the Creator of this Creation. Ultimately, there is no real conflict between ‘natural theology’ and ‘theology proper’. Natural theology deals with God wearing His mask of a Creator of a particular Creation while theology proper deals with God in His fullness and transcendence.

The usual ways of splitting knowledge assume inadequate accounts of being, as I noted above. Ultimately, the human mind is a set of relationships, some dealing directly with our bodily actions or our practical plans of action and some dealing with more abstract realms, including the understanding and doing – very inadequate for now – of our more complex social and political and economic relationships. This last is my current main interest and it’s a good one for quickly giving a somewhat concrete shape

to my claim that we engage in natural theology to make ourselves images of the Creator, to shape ourselves to the thoughts God manifested in His freely chosen role as Creator.

We don't learn what civilization is and fit that knowledge into some slots in a generic human mind common to all men from that undefinable beginning of our race to the end of man's time in this mortal realm. We shape ourselves to a slowly developing cultural context which might be part of a civilization or might even grow into the core of a new civilization. Those particular cultures and civilizations are branches, fruitful or otherwise, on an evolutionary tree of sorts. Unlike the evolution of life, the evolution of human civilizations is guided to a goal, though one which leaves much room for various sorts of playful response in our ways of doing science and arts, technology and agriculture, politics and home economics. The goal is simply stated: by definition, a civilization must shape itself, in a faithful and profound way, to some substantial realm of this world, of the universe understood in light of God's purposes. A civilization is an imperfect and incomplete image of the Body of Christ, as more particular and focused communities are images of organs in that Body.

Even human politics, if we had the insight or integrity to do it right, gives us greater understanding of our Creator. In fact, these human social realms can even give us a greater understanding of one of the greatest of all mysteries of God. Despite what some think, God has manifested in Creation a potential image of those great mysteries, though we've not yet done well in developing that potential:

1. The Holy Trinity: God is three Persons in one God.
2. The nature of Christ: The Lord Jesus Christ is two natures in one Person.

We are individuals yet we are learning to be also true members of various communities in a complex network which reached its peak, so far, in this world as Western Civilization including that spiritual organ of worship – the Christian Church (however defined). We are following complex paths of evolution, not all cultures or civilizations are equally fruitful, and development, not all potentially fruitful cultures or civilizations reach harvest in a healthy state. Ultimately, as I've said before, a properly complex and rich understanding of the Body of Christ and a corresponding understanding of

human communities in this mortal realm which give lesser or greater hints of that Body will include an account of human beings remaining individuals while becoming fully members of the Body of Christ. Each of us, in a manner of speaking, will remain an individual human being while becoming fully a member of the one Body of Christ. If we can understand this, we will have some substantial understanding of the Triune God, three Persons – who remain individuals – in one God.

Let me summarize at the risk of repetitiveness:

1. The Triune God is three Persons, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, in one God.
2. The Body of Christ is a multitude of human persons and the divine Person of the Son in one Body.

It is possible to come to a better understanding of our Creator by better understanding a realm of Creation, in this case, human nature. In this case, we achieve a better understanding of one of the most fundamental aspects of His transcendental Self which God chose to manifest in human nature in its more complete individual and communal aspects. We also achieve a greater respect for the faithfulness and rationality of our maker and a greater respect for our relationship to Him, even two ways in which we can be images of God as individuals and as communities.



# 610 Belief in God is Intuitive and Not Reflective, at Least in This Age

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1039>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/09/22.]

Without a doubt, we are children of our age. There have been indications that the young folk with higher IQs tend to drift away from Christian and Jewish belief and practice. The interesting exception in some of those studies is the Church of the Latter-day Saints. I've read lightly, but substantially by current standards, in the historical and biographical studies of modern science. This literature tends to support the general trends which have resulted in practitioners and admirers of science tending to pull away from traditional ways of believing and worshiping.

Let me run roughshod over the history of human thought to point out a matter of sheer contingency which can be seen in that history.

There have been major periods in history when the smart guys were mostly metaphysicians who didn't engage in the traditional religious practices of their age nor did they have a proper respect for empirical knowledge – ancient Greece comes to mind. There have been periods when the smart guys were mostly theologians, or at least engaged in empirical research or metaphysical analysis from a theological perspective – the High Middle Ages in Europe comes to mind. There has even been at least one period when empirical researchers were also serious theological students, such as Galileo, or even creative thinkers, such as Newton. As the Modern Age progressed, there was a tendency for empirical researchers to become skeptics about both metaphysics and traditional religious beliefs and practices,

though many scientists practiced their own form of metaphysical analysis and also claimed to have a strong if unorthodox faith.

Some sort of skepticism has become dominant even amongst scientists who are personal believers and practitioners of some traditional form of religion. This is largely because of two trends in modern thought which I've discussed often and from – I hope – multiple perspectives:

1. We have learned to separate mind from the created being which is us and also is the stuff around us so that we become allegedly disinterested judges of what's out there and also of human nature rather than being students shaping ourselves to the thoughts manifested by God in His freely chosen role of Creator. We continue to – necessarily – shape our minds by our responses to created being, but we do so in a manner both surreptitious and half-hearted. The relationships which result from that shaping process are what we call 'mind', but we would rather have some sort of immaterial and transcendental mind. We would be as gods even if we are partially embodied gods.
2. We have learned, largely as a consequence of that first wrongful thought, to separate created being into largely non-overlapping realms, such as science and natural theology and literature and so forth. Stuff, including human nature, aren't part of a unified nature and don't even exist in themselves, instead having one nature when studied by a physicist, another when studied by a historian, and still another when studied by a philosopher. We'll make sure nature conforms to the practical strategies we adopt because of our limited and defective skills of exploration and analysis. If nature refuses to so conform we'll... Well, perhaps those *Gods of the Copybook Headings* described by Kipling are once more catching up to us. (See [http://www.kipling.org.uk/poems\\_copybook.htm](http://www.kipling.org.uk/poems_copybook.htm) to read the poem.)

It's hardly a surprise to learn that research has indicated, with some serious qualifications, that *Intuitive Thinking May Influence Belief in God* – read the article at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/09/110920121615.htm>. In that article, we read:

In a series of studies, researchers at Harvard University found that people with a more intuitive thinking style tend to have

stronger beliefs in God than those with a more reflective style. Intuitive thinking means going with one's first instinct and reaching decisions quickly based on automatic cognitive processes. Reflective thinking involves the questioning of first instinct and consideration of other possibilities, thus allowing for counterintuitive decisions.

With the Divine Presence in Creation thinned out to a Ghostly Presence, we have to engage in strange séances to make any sort of contact with God. Was this necessary? No, we should have known from the start, or at least learned by experience, that even the most transcendental of God's self-revelations are necessarily received by way of vibrations in the air or by light-waves impinging on the eye. We should have known that even those revelations pointing to the transcendental attributes of God are necessarily understood by way of bodily processes in a physical creature and by way of communal knowledge, traditional or new, as embodied in both the knowledge and practices of communities of physical human animals.

In the modern worldview, permeating our ways of perceiving and our ways of thinking and our ways of acting even when we claim to be traditionalists, God is not to be truly understood as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit but rather as Ethereal Entity #1, Ethereal Entity #2, and Ethereal Entity #3. In Jewish terms, the King of Creation is to be seen as Ethereal Entity. Some would claim we can use the language of received revelation, such as Father and Son and Holy Spirit, while claiming that the received revelations are 'personal' and unanchored in our communal understanding of empirical reality, of created being, of Creation. They could have stopped at the valid point that our communal understandings must be endorsed by a personal experience if our faith is to be alive, but they insisted on passing on to an absurdity. Moreover, they ignore the evidence that some of God's most faithful servants, such as Mother Teresa of Calcutta – hardly an excessive rationalist, have been bereft of that personal grounding for their faith.

And so it is that we've become confused puppies, trying to hold on to the insights and the practical advantages of the knowledge gained by modern empirical exploration and analysis of physical reality and allied mathematical abstractions but also wishing to believe in what we – wrongly, for the most part – see as the spiritual ways of traditional forms of Christianity, Judaism, and other communities expressing a faith in a personal God.

Please join me, at least as an amused spectator, in an effort to do better, to provide better foundations for the human understanding of Creation and the Creator as we live through the decay of one phase of Western Civilization and – we can hope – the founding of another phase. My way of understanding Creation and the Creator will encourage you to use both intuitive and reflective ways of thought whether you are thinking about God or about some level or realm or aspect of created being.

# 611 Is It Unknown for the Many to Be One While Remaining Each Itself?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1084>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/11/17.]

Let me state a certain political position as:

The United States of America are but Massachusetts is.

This is a grammatical statement of the classic States' Rights doctrine – see [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/States\\_rights](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/States_rights) for a discussion. This doctrine was at issue in many of the political debates and struggles in the years leading up to the American war between the states. It was, in fact, a matter of contention from the beginning of the discussion of some sort of federation between the North American colonies – some of the Founding Fathers of the United States hoped that Canada and, a big maybe, the French and Spanish colonies above the Rio Grande would join in a general rebellion.

The deeper question was the one implied by the title of this essay: if several or many entities join together in some sense, can they become truly one in some sense and – if so – what is that sense?

This is the general form of the question I'm asking in various writings about the most important of all corporations, that of the brethren of Christ into the Body of Christ. This is a question of development and of evolution as I discussed in Chapter 272, *Human Moral Nature: An Overview*. Jesus Christ is inherently and naturally the Head of His Body, but the rest of us

can become members only by the completing and perfecting processes of grace acting upon us.

The Body of Christ is. And the Body of Christ are.

For good reasons, we Christians always use the singular for God even when speaking of the Almighty in a sense where we are concentrating on the divine community of three Persons. God isn't just the supreme Act-of-being, His own Act-of-being: He's an act-of-being which brings into existence, from eternity to eternity, three Persons in one God.

Americans seem quite too well disposed to see unity in corporate collectives. We say, "General Motors is. . .," while the British and most others say, "General Motors are. . ." Let's call the whole thing a disagreement hovering in the wind high above solid ground.

If several or many entities join together in some sense, can they become truly one in some sense and—if so—what is that sense?

Let's at least make it clear what's involved rather than talking past each other.

Do positive laws, enacted legislation for the most part, bring a nominal entity into real existence? I think not.

Do we have any reason to believe that even the mortal corporate bodies we consider 'individuals' to truly be such? Maybe, but we haven't explicitly dealt with the issues, except perhaps for some science fiction books and other related entertainment.

There are known evolutionary and developmental processes by which groups of individuals act together and, by those acts, form a corporate body with at least some of the traits of a true individual. Cells come together to form various sorts of organisms, ranging from jellyfish which are barely more than well-organized colonies to human beings made of so many cells subordinate to various organs themselves subordinate to the entire human organism. Yes, those cells retain some of the characteristics of individuals, but they are mostly servants of the organism. The situation becomes more complex when we realize that many of the bacteria in our body are part of a complex ecological system which can be perhaps regarded as our greater biological self. After all, recent research indicates the various little critters in our guts and other parts of our bodies are the ones expected in our family lines. I don't know of any tight explanations of how this happens but those

little critters not only exploit us but also serve us by helping us in digestion and other metabolic activities and also by occupying niches which might otherwise be occupied by bacteria decidedly less friendly to us.

1. Sometimes, the several or the many can become one while retaining their own individuality.
2. Sometimes, the many can become one and lose their own individuality.
3. Sometimes, the many can become one and their individuality takes on an ambiguous status.
4. Often, we speak of the many as one but they are one only in a nominalistic sense.

I'm not at all confident that I have firm criteria for slotting particular phenomena in any of the above categories. I'm also not confident that I understand what happens when an individual, of perhaps defective unity, begins to fragment. That it breaks into free-standing entities and no longer exists as an corporate entity with its own individual self does not mean it was never such a unified corporate entity. I tentatively accept Ian Hacking's explanation (see *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory*) of the multiple personality phenomena as being learned behaviors in which the original individual learns to wall off unpleasant memories and that process takes on a life of its own and creates 'persons' living on those various ghettos in the memory. But I don't know what that means because I've come to realize that I can't define how an organism comes to a true unity when an organism seems to be a conglomerate of a sort which evolved in a largely ad-hoc way. I don't doubt there is a true definition or a substantial understanding, but I don't pretend to have such.

We should be careful to provide good definitions for those entities, objects, processes, and relationships which are important to our understanding of ourselves and our world. We often literally don't know what we're talking about. We Christians tend strongly to be willfully obscure, pushing off God's self-revelations as mysteries of a magical sort when there seem to be always ways of speaking of God in terms of entities and objects and processes and relationships found in His Creation. After all, Creation is a manifestation of certain thoughts of God. Should we be surprised

to see that there is a good set of examples and counter-examples for discussing God's Triune nature: He who is Father and Son and Holy Spirit in one God? Augustine found one I don't accept but it's plausible and started us off on finding better ways of discussing the truths expressed at the Council of Nicaea, better than the Fathers of Nicaea themselves came up with. From the article titled *Augustine of Hippo/On The Trinity* and found at [http://en.wikiversity.org/wiki/Augustine\\_of\\_Hippo/On\\_The\\_Trinity](http://en.wikiversity.org/wiki/Augustine_of_Hippo/On_The_Trinity), we learn:

Augustine gave classic expression to the psychological analogy of the Trinity in which the unity of essence is likened to the rational part of the human soul, composed as it is of "the mind, and the knowledge by which it knows itself, and the love by which it loves itself." [*The Trinity* by St. Augustine of Hippo]

- The image of God in us consists of that part of the soul which the beasts do not have in common with us, i.e., the ability to contemplate the eternal forms and to make judgments (know things) according to them.
- This ability requires memory—the metaphysical warehouse in which we not only store sense impressions, but in which we discover things we never knew we knew (present illumination vs. Plato's reminiscence).
- It requires intellect (understanding) - the mind's eye, as it were, which takes on the form of what it beholds in memory and conceives thought thereby. It requires will—that which directs the mind's eye, as it does the bodily senses, to what it loves and attaches it thereto.

I think we can do better than Augustine was able to do in his time, though he should be honored for realizing it's inappropriate to speak of God in terms of substance. Unfortunately, Augustine didn't sharpen his ideas to nearly the point of Aquinas' claim that God is an Act-of-being, His own Act-of-being, the supreme Act-of-being. I think we can discuss even the greatest and most transcendental truths in terms of God's Creation, including even the most concrete and empirical aspects of this world of rocks and dirt, rattlesnakes and elephants, daffodils and redwood trees. We merely have to have the faith and courage and willingness to respond

creatively to Creation. In current terms, this means we have to be willing to draw upon the those mountains of partially digested information about this world and the abstract realms upon which it draws. We need to realize that analogies to the greatest theological truths can be drawn even from evolutionary biology and even from that bloody record of villainy and deceit and treachery we know as human history. Even our currently unlovable governments might be failed forms of something which is an important part of the Body of Christ.

There are two chapters in this book dealing with physical aspects of these issues. Chapter 366, *Creation and Freedom*, a commentary upon one discussion in Henri Bergson's *Creative Evolution*, which includes a short discussion of an experiment in which physicists created a new state of matter: "Cooling rubidium atoms to less than 170 billionths of a degree above absolute zero caused the individual atoms to condense into a 'superatom' behaving as a single entity..." Chapter 193, *A Universe is More than it Contains*, presents a claim the universe is an entity of its own and not just a collection of stars and gas and strange forms of matter.



## 612 Speaking (Along) with God

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1087>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/11/22.]

God, the Creator of this universe and far more, isn't a lunatic speaking mere syllables strung together. God is rational and all-knowing. When He speaks, He knows. When He speaks, what He says is true, already or in some state of development. When He chooses to know something about contingent being in an active way, He speaks and what He knows comes into existence, not as a result of some magical words but rather as the flip side of the coin of speaking. He is our Creator, our Father if we choose to be His children in the fullest sense, our Brother if we choose Christ, our teacher and source of spiritual energy if we open ourselves to the Holy Spirit.

To speak with God, we need to be open to Creation, open also to the Spirit, but we need to know of what we speak. To speak with God, we must know as God knows, however faint and imperfect and ineffective our knowledge is compared to that of God. And we have to realize the knowledge we can gain by our own efforts (always working with God as a child works with an adult) is knowledge of Creation, of specific realms of thoughts manifested by God as various sorts of created being.

To speak with God is to accept His self-revelation in terms drawn from Creation and to understand Creation in those same terms, Creation's own terms. I've noted often that St. Thomas Aquinas told us this:

[J]ust as a disciple reaches an understanding of the teacher's wisdom by the words he hears from him, so man can reach an understanding of God's wisdom by examining the creatures He made. . . (St. Thomas Aquinas' commentary on 1 Corinthians.)

To speak (along) with God, we must know something, in our minds or in our bodies. God doesn't speak gibberish, though He seems to at least tolerate a lot of silly sorts of humor in poetry and songs. He seems to allow us our jokes and our good-natured satire, perhaps even tolerates the sarcasm and bitter satire we sometimes feel necessary to direct at those we see as exploitive or destructive because of their stupidity or misdirected greed.

On the whole, we can guess that this universe and its inhabitants are moving in a direction that suits the purposes of the all-powerful and all-knowing God. We need to learn how to speak and act as God speaks and His words become reality, the story which is this world, a story ordered to the purposes of the Almighty.

God demands more from us, His people, than mere piety in face of a confusing and dangerous world. He demands of us that we, as individuals, play our parts and some have roles related to exploring, some to explaining and narrating what has been discovered by the explorers, some to teaching what has been learned to the children and the adults who have not been given the particular gifts of the intellect or of narration, some to other tasks equally important such as managing the infrastructure of society or nurturing the children.

We each should use our gifts for the good of ourselves, our immediate loved ones, our immediate not-loved ones, and all men of good will. We should even try to bring those not of good will into a better state – if we have that calling and the opportunities.

When God speaks, what He says is true or begins to emerge as true. When we speak, we more often describe what God has done, but we also can speak in a way that helps God's will to emerge in this world. Our acts, our doing, should be part of our imitating God's acts of speaking. We are weak but not totally without power.

The question arises:

Why would God have made the world as I describe it, incomplete and developing in time, developing in such a way that the emerging good is often obscured or even nearly invisible while the innocent and the good suffer?

Perhaps God made the world this way, made this particular world within this more general but still particular Creation, because He loves us, includ-

ing that human being – Jesus of Nazareth – who is the human nature taken up by the Son of God? We human beings are creatures of this developing world, this world in which the good emerges through ugly processes we often describe as ‘evil’. It says something about us, a mixture of good and bad, that we are creatures of such a world but it says something unequivocally good about us that we can emerge from this world and – by the grace of God, the loving action of God – become creatures capable of sharing the life of the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ.

We have always to remember it isn’t our choice what sort of world this be, what sort of Creation it be part of. It isn’t our choice what roles we select from. Even when it comes to matters which are subject to our choices, we are limited to those options given us by our Creator. If we are to be rational and moral creatures, if we are to form rational and moral communities, we must study and understand our complex world as it emerges to our perceptions and our probing intellects. We must deliberately work to form those rational and moral communities or God will move on and raise new men from the stones of the field. More likely, we and the next few generations will suffer because of our lack of faith, our lack of concern for the world as God created it and not as we imagine it to be for the sake of our lazy and morally passive selves.

If we in the West have failed to such an extent that a century or more will be needed for morally healthy societies centered upon God to develop, then we can still move towards a recovery by working to better understand and imitate what God has done and what He is doing. First, we must have something substantial to say. Or to do. For there seems to be no difference between doing and speaking for the Creator, a claim that leads to a different understanding of revelation than is held by most Christians and perhaps most others as well. We also must know and do at the same time and there is only one way to do that: our knowing must correspond to our best understanding of God’s acts-of-being as Creator and our doing must correspond to our knowing.



# 613 Does the Body of Christ Have Non-human Components?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1144>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/12/30.]

We usually think of entities of mixed biological and non-biological components as being monsters though good experience with prosthetics has perhaps eased that prejudice a lot. (I use ‘prejudice’ in a non-judgmental way as some prejudices are valid and some aren’t, some are dangerous to others and our own selves and some are not.)

Is it possible that as we form the Body of Christ, we integrate human technology such as the Internet viewed as a fancy memory device? For a secular and somewhat mundane discussion of what is an important issue, see the article *Internet Changes How We Remember: Knowing we can retrieve facts online later alters memory* at <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=the-google-effect>. It’s possible that we are learning how to remember how to retrieve facts rather than remembering the facts directly.

Technology does become part of us. Michael Polanyi was a medical doctor before he left Hungary when the Nazis took over in 1933. He was also a physical chemist whose research was well-regarded and encouraged by Einstein and, in his middle years, became a philosopher of note. For a bit more background on this important thinker, see the article on him at [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Michael\\_Polanyi](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Michael_Polanyi). Professor Polanyi spoke in *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* of our tools becoming an extension of our bodies when we become truly expert in using them. He spoke in particular of the scalpel from his own experience performing surgery. I would imagine the brain of a surgeon reorganizes

itself so that there are regions devoted to the control of scalpel and other instruments. I imagine the brain of a pianist also reorganizes itself and also that of a carpenter.

Truly does technology become part of us and not just the tools we personally use. We grow larger and more active when our health is improved by fresh water systems and sewage systems. Our minds grow as they respond to the use of microscopes and various sorts of technology. Our minds grow also as they respond to proper use of books, even electronic books. There are many books which are a part of my being and some of them alive to the extent that they change beyond what the author had written – this makes it dangerous at times for me to rely on my memory.

Truly does technology become part of our communal beings, our communities. Even our ways of worshiping God are tied to the building technologies of an age. Our forms of friendship, our range of friendship, can change with greater mobility, with electrical and then electronic devices. Our communities grow larger and more complex, safer and more stable, with better energy production. As individuals and as communities, we form relationships, political and economic and intellectual and spiritual, with more more communities, some of them longfar agoway. Yes, even with communities long gone. However superficial the museum experience might be for most, we yet connect a little with the ancient Egyptians and Mayans, Medieval Saxons and Moslems, Renaissance Italians and Ashkenazi Jews, Colonial Virginians and West Indians, early modern Japanese and Zulus.

We Christians have a tendency to etherealize the nature of heavenly and of resurrected human beings. In fact, our resurrected selves are completed and perfected versions of our mortal selves. If our technology has become a part of us and our communities here on earth, even a part of the pilgrim Body of Christ, then we would be mutilated creatures if we were resurrected without it, without perfected and completed technology of the sort which can aid in that perfection and completion of a true human life and in that perfection and completion of the Body of Christ.

## 614 The Thermodynamics of Love and Heaven

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1166>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/01/17.]

Love is probably undefinable but we can at least understand some aspects of that love and can probably come to a substantial **narrative** understanding of some loves in their specific contexts. We can maybe even understand some of the ways in which a truer and incorruptible love will make the world of the resurrected, heaven, a far better world than this.

In the poem, *The Country of Marriage*, Wendell Berry, speaking to his wife, prophesies:

What I am learning to give you is my death  
to set you free of me, and me from myself  
into the dark and the new light. Like the water  
of a deep stream, love is always too much. We  
did not make it. Though we drink till we burst  
we cannot have it all, or want it all.  
In its abundance it survives our thirst.

There's more, before and after, but what interested me was the last sentence in what I've quoted: "In [love's] abundance it survives our thirst." Love never runs out. This points to a claim, a la St. John the Evangelist, that "God is love." I'm making my way toward an issue I've dealt with before in a very cursory way. In Chapter 191, *What are the Thermodynamic Properties of Heaven?*, I tried to make sense of the question in that title, a question seemingly simple but actually the question needed to be answered

by anyone who takes seriously (without necessarily holding any strong beliefs) about both the nature of this universe as currently understood and also the possibility of a world where some or all might live for time without end with their God, whether understood in Christian or Jewish or Islamic terms. In effect, we need to be able to speak about created being in a way that can help us to believe that there can be a realm, a form, of created being not subject to decay.

As I've stated many times: the Christian principle is that grace completes and perfects nature rather than replacing nature. If this principle be true, there must be some way of talking coherently about the world of the resurrected – Heaven in traditional terms – in terms drawn from our understanding of Creation which itself has to be based upon our understanding of this world.

Let's strip thermodynamics of its particular nature in this universe. Is there some abstraction behind the Second Law of Thermodynamics, that entropy or 'disorder' increases, or at least doesn't decrease for an isolated system? There's one abstraction well-known and discussed by physicists – the increase in entropy is actually a movement towards a state of higher probability.

This means we are discussing not necessarily well-behaved functions but rather movements along paths through state-spaces which might be somewhat 'pathological' as we might say. For example, there might be no paths to the state of greatest entropy but for those which pass through states with far lower entropy than the system currently has. This would put us in a valley of sorts, surrounded by insurmountable barriers, at least seeming 'insurmountable'.

The mathematician and physicist Roger Penrose has claimed, in constructing a plausible way of speaking about reality, that our universe is so well-behaved in moving relentlessly towards an overall state of greater entropy because it began to expand from a state of extraordinarily low-probability and low-entropy. When the universe began its current expansionary phase at the time of the so-called Big Bang, the opening in the balloon was pointing into the valley in which we find ourselves. This universe seems to lie in a region surrounded by regions of far higher entropy or disorder. There is no obvious way to escape this region, but there remains so much we don't know.

When we seek to understand the true possibilities for worlds in this Creation, we would have to first explore the nature of the state-space of possible

universes which could provide the stuff of a world, a universe ordered as a coherent narrative, that is, ordered to a purpose.

If I were willing to suggest that Heaven lies not in the empirical realm but rather in the transcendental realm where the Holy Trinity has His absolute existence, I could say that the problem is solved. God, who is love, who is beyond even absolute infinity, will take us into His own life so that we will stay there. Creation, any contingent being or even the set of all possible Creations, is so small compared to God that there would be zero probability of moving out of that transcendent realm – unless God willed it to happen.

The previous paragraph will almost certainly prove to be wrong in terms of better ways of thinking about these issues but perhaps, like many human thoughts about far lesser matters, it points towards a better way of speaking. In any case, it might provide many believers a way out of the intellectual ghetto in which they find themselves because they have no way, are putting no effort into discovering a way, to discuss this universe in terms of a Creation of the God of Jesus Christ.

I'm going to lay out a basis for part of an intellectual program which might help us find a way to reunite faith and reason (my writings over the past 20 years, including my novels, are all parts of a greater such program):

1. God is true to His self-chosen role as Creator and will remain true to Creation in the way that He shapes the world of the resurrected, that is, He won't suddenly bring His friends into a realm outside of Creation properly understood;
2. To first appearances, that world of the resurrected will be much like this but will not have decay or disorder, nor processes which might lead to such;
3. To provide for the dynamic nature of a world suited for the resurrected individuals and the Body of Christ of which they are members, there will have to be a movement towards an ever lesser entropy or – far better – a greater and more God-like order;
4. In terms appropriate to this universe and at least indicative of the more abstract terms suited to a description of all of Creation: movement of the physical stuff of any world, corruptible matter or matter perfected by grace will be a movement towards a more highly probable realm, an infinitely larger realm for the situation I'm dealing with

here and so it is that I claim that love, God's realm in a manner of speaking, is effectively all that truly exists.

If only we understood the state-space of Creation – to use the terms appropriate for physics in this world, we could see this more clearly. But the greater situation in this world, at least from the Christian viewpoint, is obscured. It would seem God has given us a valley as our place of birth and development and this valley is eroding and flowing locally toward the lowest spot in the valley. We're surrounded by mountains which prevent us from moving toward better regions of Creation. Or maybe there would be a way to, somewhat, reverse the processes of decay in this world if we could understand the mountains and learn how to move over or through them. I would doubt it but no human community has done well betting against the possibility of advanced technologies pulling off miracles of a sort.

More importantly, at least to a Christian and certainly one who takes seriously the viewpoint in the writings of the school of St. John the Evangelist, love is all. Love is the highest probability state of all though we might have trouble understanding that while we remain stuck in this valley, this "vale of tears" as a prayer to the Mother of God, *Hail Holy Queen*, terms it. Without God's help, we can't pass beyond all barriers to enter the absolutely good regions of Creation, though we might be able to pass the immediate mountains and better our situation. In any case, God – for reasons He hasn't given to us – has isolated us from regions where we could move toward greater order rather than to the disordered muck at the bottom of our valley.

Am I satisfied with my current understanding of this aspect of Creation? Am I satisfied with my understanding of the ways in which the world of the resurrected will have better thermodynamic properties than this one? No, I'm not satisfied with my current understanding by a long shot but I am pretty happy with my understanding as a very tentative position. I'll end by pointing out that, ultimately, we should question if it makes sense to use thermodynamic concepts to discuss the better-ordered, higher-probability regions of Creation. Yet, we have to be realistic about our limited natures and the general situation we're in. We have to make our way slowly toward a better understanding.

# 615 A Stage Lower than Hypocrisy

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1237>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/04/12.]

In *The End of the Twentieth Century* [87], the Hungarian-American – and Catholic – historian John Lukacs points out:

[A]t the end of the twentieth century, many people respect religion as well as science, together; but the respect is faint. (This has to do with the fact that we have descended to a stage lower than hypocrisy, the problem being no longer the difference between what people say and what they believe; now the difference seems to be between what people think they believe and what they really believe.) [page 224]

I'd agree heartily and even add that there are many who think themselves to be Christians, Catholic or otherwise, because of a formal adherence to what we might label 'Biblical teachings' while their more deeply held beliefs seem to be paganistic, perhaps a regression toward the baptized form of paganism the Church tolerated, maybe unwisely, during the centuries of bringing the Good News of Christ to the European peoples. I think Professor Lukacs was speaking more of another group, those who have fallen into weak, liberalized forms of Christianity – Unitarians at Mass in a manner of speaking, but I think most Christians willing to publicly call themselves such are pagans, moving along with the herd as Christianity is repaganized. Given the strong religious instincts of human beings and the laziness leading to the acceptance of easily understood ideas, I suspect the

repaganized Christians will soon be dominant over atheists, unitarians, and also Christians who adhere to a coherent set of beliefs.

As I see things, a coherent form of Christianity necessarily is allied with that family of philosophical beliefs we can call ‘moderate realism’. This is the belief that we live in a Creation and we learn about that Creation and about any absolute or transcendental truths not divinely revealed by “examining God’s creatures” in the profound words of St. Thomas Aquinas in his commentary on 1 Corinthians. Even God’s own revelations are given to a human being by way of physical environments and the sensory organs which deal with those environments. As soon as we bring our favored absolute beliefs, immune from any empirical evidence, to the task of understanding God’s Creation, we have fallen away from that foundation of Christian belief – moderate realism.

Earlier in *The End of the Twentieth Century* [87], Professor Lukacs had stated we need to give up Darwinism if we are to recover our faith in the uniqueness and value of human life. I think he was talking about Darwinism as an ideology rather than a scientific theory. (I personally don’t feel any worse for being descended from an apish creature than I would for being descended from a man shaped from the slime of the earth.) Even at that, I think he was a little off because I think the repaganized Christians are the greater danger to the Church and to the Western Civilization built by earlier generations of Christians. Those repaganized Christians tend rather strongly to be anti-Darwinist and often anti-science, though they do tend to like technology. They also tend to pick up their understanding of history from rather strange attempts to literalistically understand the Bible or from the words of strange seers who have visions of the Mother of God or maybe visions of Satan. They don’t tend towards hardheaded understandings of the books given to us by prophets who seem to have been blessed as God’s interpreters of the Almighty’s acts in human history: Isaiah and Jeremiah. I guess those prophets didn’t pay enough respect to the powers of angels and demons. In any case, I don’t value highly the human nature which those repaganized Christians would defend.

Amongst those who have turned parts of modern science into ideologies, there are many who would blur the distinction between those two radically different sets of beliefs labeled as ‘Darwinism’, confusing the words of a biologist who is an aggressive proselyte of atheism with a hardheaded evolutionary theorist who might hold any religious or anti-religious beliefs, but he holds them in abeyance during his working hours as a biologist. This

isn't because there's a true wall between God and His Creation. It is because human beings are specialists and need to work together as members of communities, right up to those complex communities we know as civilizations. Most biologists shouldn't try to be amateur metaphysicians or theologians and most metaphysicians and theologians should accept mainstream scientific ideas, cleansed of obvious corruptions by those who can work in both fields.

Our Christian beliefs, at least in that tradition of moderate realism as developed by St. Paul through St. Augustine and on through St. Thomas Aquinas, teach a trust in God as Creator, a willingness to accept what God has accomplished as Creator and has given to us. We ignore what is contained in the best of modern science, history, literature, and other fields of empirical knowledge at the peril of turning away from He who shaped us from a line of apish primates and He who – as Isaiah and Jeremiah taught us – is the driving force of our lives and the events of our communities. (Note that God is Subject even when grammatically an object.) God is God even when His Creation involves volcanoes and man-eating tigers and genocidal madmen. We retreat from the appropriately honest understandings of Creation only by – at the very least – compromising our faith in an all-powerful God. We seek to justify a belief in a gentler God, one who tried to do well if only Satan hadn't (temporarily) conquered Creation, only by giving up the core of our Christian beliefs. We might profess a strong faith but we hold a severely compromised form of Christian faith, either unitarian or neo-paganistic.



# 616 Can We Just Invent Large Numbers or Desirable Communities?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1266>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/05/18.]

I'm still contemplating a few issues raised or brought back to memory by my recent reading of *The Meaning of Truth*[78] by William James. The ideas of William James put pressure upon my own ideas, a form of updated Thomism, just because he knew how to respect empirical reality without being a reductionist but also, mistakenly in my opinion, without being willing to posit a world of which his empirically observed things and relationships are a part. So it is that I've returned to vague thoughts about that precise subject of mathematics. Can we make up a large number simply by writing down some symbolic representation and inventing a name for it? Is it meaningful?

The name *Googol* is from number theory and doesn't refer to the Internet search firm. See <http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Googol> for the story of how this name was invented as a whimsy of sorts. A googol is  $10^{100}$  or a 1 followed by one hundred zeroes. It was invented as part of an educational effort, the discussion of the difference between very large and infinite. In that context, the meaningless number acquired a good enough meaning to justify its use. More reasonably, large numbers might fall out of proofs involving questions such as: at what point do prime numbers become as common as they theoretically should be? (In the range of small and readily accessible numbers, prime numbers are too sparse according to number theory.) Large numbers can also fall out of calculations such as time and

quantum state calculations involving a number of particles similar to the number believed to exist in our universe.

Some sort of objectivity in naming a large number or writing it out in symbols seems to be required if only for intelligent discussion with other human beings. Otherwise, pure whimsy in the realm of numbers and other matters of cognitive substance could turn certain discussions into playground arguments: “Yeah, well I’ll take your number and multiply it by a million and my number’s a lot bigger.”

I think there has to be some sort of operational meaning to a large number, such as the above example where very large numbers sometimes pop out naturally in various sorts of proofs or explorations in number theory or explorations in theoretical physics. Very large numbers can also arise in studies of computer science and cryptography. An interesting example of large numbers arising in the theory of recursive functions, very important in mathematics and computer science, is the numbers produced by the Ackermann function, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ackermann\\_function](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ackermann_function), which, though a simple calculation, rapidly produces numbers which are very large even by the standards of mathematicians. The power of this function to generate large numbers is somewhat surprising and has been explored a bit in various modified forms. A reader with even a casual interest can read a little more in the way of background in this article, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Large\\_numbers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Large_numbers), on large numbers.

I return to the more general issue of truth having an experienceable nature as William James claimed in *The Meaning of Truth*[78] and I discussed in a recent essay, *What Can Be Experienced?* found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1230>. This is the issue: if truth is experienceable, if it must have some sort of operational meaning for human beings to grasp it, does sanity require boundaries on our imaginations? I’m most certainly not reducing truth to an operational form, but I am saying that human beings need something to grab hold of for any sort of truth to be such in our sorts of minds. Our minds are relationships and need to have a true relationship to even a number for it to reside in these minds. Put in other terms, we can understand the functional relationships which recursively generate very large numbers even though the sizes of those numbers are far beyond the size of our minds. In a similar way, we can understand entities too complex to hold in our minds, such as a non-symmetric black-hole or a human community or a strand of DNA in a plague bacterium. We can also understand things which don’t happen to exist but maybe could

exist in another plausible universe or in our universe if it had developed differently.

We can even picture a Jabberwock, described at <http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Jabberwocky>, at least with the help of the artist John Tenniel, see [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/John\\_Tenniel](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/John_Tenniel). Though that poem was no more, and no less, than a wonderful piece of whimsy, the strange creatures and even the meaningless words have some meaning to us. They can be experienced in a meaningful way, but maybe words which ‘fit’ but have no meaning are little different from a large number created by simply piling up exponents? In response, we could point out that many long extinct creatures, and a few discovered deep in the ocean, are as strange and as nasty as the Jabberwock as imagined by Lewis Carroll and his many readers.

That nonsense poem about the non-existent beast began as a different sort of nonsense poem, a parody of sorts first titled *Stanza of Anglo-Saxon Poetry*:

Twas bryllyg, and ye slythy toves  
 Did gyre and gymbles in ye wabe  
 All mimsy were ye borogoves;  
 And ye mome raths outgrabe.

It was apparently written to poke a little fun at the efforts of modern English-speakers to read older versions of their own language. It is historically-grounded whimsy, not an effort to shape something allegedly new by using some selected facts of human history to invent some nightmare world, such as a bar in which we can watch the interaction of races which evolved on different star systems and yet can easily communicate, heck! – they can eat the same foods and drink the same intoxicating liquors.

So, can we simply string together exponents:  $10^{10^{10}}$  . . . and call it a number? Can we simply make up other universes or entire infinities of other universes?

There seem to be two requirements to establish the legitimacy of efforts of whimsy, fantasizing or invention if you will. The first is that, like the ‘Anglo-Saxon Poetry’ of Lewis Carroll, it has to be plausible in some way, even if just by archaic appearance or sound. The second is that it has to be experienceable in some meaningful way, not a way that is fundamentally

dishonest. Incompetence in both content and execution should be eliminated, will be eliminated by time alone. Schlock of the sort dominant in science-fiction – there are a few worthwhile works in those piles of strange and smelly things – will prove to be ephemeral in its appeal since it stands in some dreamworld of one generation and not in some objectively accessible understanding of historical and scientific reality.

I don't think we can simply string together exponents:  $10^{10^{10}}$  ... and call it a number. Some sort of operational meaning is required.

I don't think we can simply make up other universes or entire infinities of other universes. Some sort of grounding in historical reality is required.

There are other streams of events which might have occurred in our universe and there are other possible universes, but we have to imaginatively work from the one universe we can directly perceive and explore. Our thoughts about universes and their various narrative streams: astrophysical or biological or historical, should be plausible in light of what we can perceive and explore.

The various confusions about proper use of the human imagination do little harm in mathematics and other fields of science as currently defined because of the forms of disciplined peer-review which tend to dominate, if imperfectly so. This could change. Even mathematics could lose its fortifications against irrationality, as we modern men settle down in that state of barbarian childhood seen and foreseen nearly a century ago by Jose Ortega Y Gasset in *The Revolt of the Masses* [60] which dealt with the failure of the masses of peasants and their urban equivalent to grow into the greater realms of civilization opened to them in the modern era. Ortega was actually most upset by the failure of the cultural and social elites to teach those liberated peoples, to help them to integrate themselves into the civilization of Moses and Plato and St. Paul and Dante and so forth rather than simply becoming part of a mass of consumers and seekers of forms of entertainment appealing to our raw animal desires. In fact, those elites have themselves sunk to that low level of cultural and spiritual vulgarity.

I'll make one final point about an inconsistency in the thoughts of many fans of so-called science-fiction and fantasy. A book or movie can be criticized for taking too much imaginative liberty with the facts and strongly established theories of physics and chemistry and most other fields, though a great deal of liberty is allowed in the realm of biology. Almost complete liberty is allowed to differ with the human nature we know mostly through history even in this age of neurobiology. History teaches some harsh lessons

about the political and social and moral aspects of human nature, the only rational nature we know about. Science-fiction often seems to imagine, in what I'd call a diseased manner, that the developmental and evolutionary processes of this universe could be projected ahead so that we can imagine the sort of creature which could be peaceful in a way which is in contradiction to the nature of such a universe.

We could speak in Christian or Darwinian terms, or even mixed terms as I often do, but it's hard to sanely imagine a world shaped by evolution being peaceful or orderly in the way we often desire and some think possible to realize just because they desire it and think they can imagine that peaceful world so that it can be realized despite the nasty lessons of human history. This is a mistake being made by not just science-fiction fans but by many Christians including prominent leaders.

I'm currently reading some histories of the ancient world and one lesson of those histories is the tendency of multicultural civilizations to break down into wars of one group against each other even for relatively trivial reasons. The Greeks were a homogeneous people and the Greek colonists in Italy who were descended from Corinthians couldn't live in peace with Greek colonists in Italy from the island of Samos, but neither could the parent-polities in Greece live in peace. This doesn't mean it's impossible to form a multicultural society which is peaceful over the long-term but to merely preach that peoples from a variety of alien races can automatically get along so long as they go along with the (undescribed) program is morally irresponsible and intellectually empty. A desirable goal, that of a human race where each loves the other and all groups can co-exist next to each other, isn't an intelligent plan of action, especially when that goal is probably unreachable in this mortal realm. We should remember the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas about the intentionality which forms human moral nature and, hence, human communities. Intention isn't some subjective desire or motivation or goal, but rather a growth process, more often than not a slow and sometimes painful growth process.

We should be careful and morally responsible in our use of our imaginations and never assume that our imaginations correspond to reality. In my essay, *Human Moral Nature: An Overview* found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1079>, I discuss my understanding of the proper way to form abstractions and proper use of imagination is an integral part of this way. Part of that essay presents a sketch of an imaginative journey from the concrete reality of an apish physical creature up into more abstract regions

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of being where moral paths and Einsteinian spacetime paths are the same sort of entity. This is one way to define proper use of the imagination, you can stray from what has been concretely realized but you must stay in the domain of what is possible when considering the abstract stuff from which that concreteness has been shaped. We must also consider the evolutionary and developmental processes by which that abstract stuff is shaped into concrete things and relationships, including creatures with community lives.

To act as if something is possible just because you can string together words describing some sort of alleged good, can be morally irresponsible. Even to act as if the possible can be directly realized – and by late this afternoon – is just as morally irresponsible.

## 617 Raising the Ante on Passion: Nabokov and Gibson

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1269>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/05/21.]

Many modern Christians can't understand why a distinguished man of letters, Vladimir Nabokov, would have written a novel about a man attracted to girls just before adolescence or perhaps just entering that ripening of sexual nature. The answer is as clear as the glorification of Mel Gibson's gory movie, *The Passion of the Christ*. We of the post-Enlightenment are a numbed people who need extremes to feel even the normal pleasures of human biological nature. Nabokov saw this and depicted this situation though himself disgusted by those sorts of perverse desires. Nabokov was quite clearly a man of civilized thoughts and feelings who was somewhat horrified by the predominance of barbarian children in the modern West.

Nabokov was right. We modern men are so numbed in our minds and souls and moral characters and – necessarily – even our glands that only perverse forms of love can reach the strong levels once felt in more normal forms by our ancestors, including novelists and poets and philosophers and shoe-makers and founders of evolutionary biology. At best, we are lukewarm inside of our bodies and in our minds. We find it hard to love God in the way of St. John the Evangelist or women in the way of Robert Burns or men and women in the ways found in the novels of Jane Austen. In general, the quiet passions of the Victorian Age or any morally well-ordered age are nearly impossible for us to even perceive in the pages of a great novel or in the memories some of us have of those born in the 1800s.

Then there are religious feelings, not so fully separate from sexual desires. Mel Gibson, in *The Passion of the Christ*, appears to have explored

a view similar to that of Nabokov with the rather important distinction that Gibson wasn't and isn't a civilized man trying to make some sense of a disquieting situation but rather a barbarian child who has himself been deformed as he grew up in a morally disordered age. Odd it might seem that such barbarian children feel empty inside, lukewarm in their desires. Odd it might seem that they can't appreciate simple pleasures and basic sexual desires so well as can those of ages well-ordered to the brink of outright repression. Is it the case that moral order increases the strength and maintains the proper focus of our normal animal desires? Or is it the case that we modern men are numbed because of the sheer complexity and fast pace of our lives? Or is something else going on?

I can only agree with Nabokov's artful and highly intellectual presentation, Gibson's childish and unconscious presentation, of our modern selves as being creatures needing perversions to reach levels of passion which our peasant ancestors met in simple encounters on the marriage bed or in worship services.

# 618 Running From Hell Might Not Get You to Heaven

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1323>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/06/29.]

This article hardly surprises me: *Belief in Hell, According to International Data, Is Associated With Reduced Crime* found at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2012/06/120619093217.htm>. The findings summarized in the article also don't make me happy. I would advise against any major effort to scare sinners away from Hell because that doesn't mean they will necessarily go to Heaven. If they do go to Heaven only because of fear of everlasting punishment, Heaven might turn out to be Hell for them. Some Christian thinkers from the Middle Ages knew this and supposedly had a joke: Heaven and Hell are the same place. I'll let you think about that way of phrasing matters.

Mark Twain said somewhere that he couldn't imagine a Heaven compatible with Christian beliefs where Americans would be happy. Americans have typically been responsive to warnings of Hell, at least for the period of a revival meeting and sometimes for as long as a strong-willed preacher or priest ruled the local community of worship. Even Americans not so inclined have certainly been aware of the warnings about a Hell which is a place of eternal punishment. Who wishes to go to such a place? Not I. Not anyone I know. Most Americans I know are convinced they are going to Heaven because they are basically good people, at least not active criminals or sinners. Most of those Americans lead lives where they engage in a lot of activities, many of them part of a good human life, but they avoid worship and formal prayer and the like. Some who enjoy watching football games extending over an elapsed time of three or four hours will complain about

any church service which goes much over a half-hour or so.

Those Americans, typically considering themselves Christians even if they rarely worship in any community, believe (quite falsely) that the promises of Christ can be met only if we are born with immortal souls (whatever those are in the minds of 'believers'). Most clergymen and teachers in Sunday Schools or CCD programs will reinforce that belief. Apparently, few with faith have faith enough to believe the God who created Tom once can re-create him in Heaven. And so we immortal human beings have to go somewhere when we die. Heaven or Hell. If you flee Hell out of fear of eternal punishment, then surely you flee toward Heaven, a place of eternal bliss.

Actually, in the thought of Aquinas and other Medieval thinkers, most clearly as interpreted by the poet Dante Alighieri in his *Divine Comedy*, it's the outer circle of Hell, 'limbo', which is the place of eternal life with the sort of physical comfort which all healthy human beings will seek and many will nurture as the common element of nearly all their desires. Those Medieval thinkers speculated upon such an arrangement because of Aristotle and other pagans who were men of high virtue, of moral discipline. They were not God-centered men and couldn't possibly appreciate, maybe couldn't even feel a hint of, the spiritual bliss which is the 'atmosphere' of a life shared with God. So it was that Dante depicted the ancient Greek philosophers in that outer circle of Hell, enjoying moderate physical pleasure and walking about as they continued their discussions of metaphysics. Maybe there's a region of that outer circle where someone could move from a television viewing room to a theme-park to sports stadium.

Personally, I think we're born as human animals, clever creatures who are cousins of the great apes. We have no immortal nature nor any part which survives our physical death. If I can enjoy Heaven, then the same God who created me once will re-create me, resurrect me if you will, and I'll share the life of Jesus Christ. That is, I'll be a part of the Body of Christ for time without end, being fully a part of that Body while still being a man and a particular individual. I'll be me but, by an ongoing gift, I'll share in being God by being a member of the Body of Christ.

I'll put that aside and return to speaking about the more typical American beliefs. They think they will survive death and, thus, if they behave, they'll go to Heaven and be rewarded by a less troubled version of earthly life. For example, those who spent their spare time offering themselves up as passive consumers will apparently expect Heaven to include the most

comfortable sofas you could imagine, those sofas being set in front of large-screen televisions displaying a non-stop stream of infinitely pleasing shows. I could make similar statements of those who are obsessed with sports or amusement parks, those who think rock-and-roll concerts are the greatest of all pleasures, those who like to turn other cultures or entire continents into theme-parks, those who read or listen to good music but only that which is well within their comfort zone.

Comfort-zone. Passivity. I doubt if such is part of the life of Father and Son and Holy Spirit, nor will we be able to tolerate life without end if Heaven is what John Newton seemed to anticipate in *Amazing Grace*: we'll be ever worshipping and singing hymns as we join in the Heavenly Choir facing God. . .

No. If we were to face God for time without end, Heaven itself would turn into Hell. Worship of God would itself turn to tedium and even wretchedness if we remained men outside of God, even if we were near to Him (whatever that could mean).

Heaven is bearable only if we can actually share the life of God who is timeless rather than eternal but He took on eternal life in relationship to His own Creation when He incarnated His Son as a man, as a creature doomed by human nature to the grave, to an end. We share the eternal life of the Creator rather than the timeless life of God in His transcendence. At this point, I'll give credit where due: the Eastern Orthodox have always viewed our life after death in terms of divinization of our mortal selves. They never made the mistake of believing, implicitly or explicitly, that life after death is some sort of infinitely pleasurable DisneyWorld.

To zag now that I've zigged, I suspect that those will be resurrected into Heaven who can enjoy it, even if they were morally undisciplined and seemingly allergic to most forms of worship during their mortal lives. In some way, anyone who will be able to enjoy sharing God's life has to at least render God the justice of acknowledging Him as our Maker – see my article, *Justice: The First Step Towards God*, which can be freely downloaded at <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/justice.pdf>. From that point, we need to develop a true sense of life, we need to learn how to live by actively engaging God through His Creation, a Creation which includes churches and synagogues, prayer groups and bible-study groups, but also includes many other thoughts of God manifested as forests and lakes, human technology and human arts and letters. Let us prepare for Heaven by responding actively to God's Creation so that we shape ourselves to encapsulate the

thoughts He manifested in created being of all sorts.

## 619 *Leisure: the Basis of Culture: What is Leisure?*

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1333>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/07/03.]

I'm re-reading *Leisure: The Basis of Culture* [114] by Josef Pieper. As Pieper plausibly, and I think correctly, discusses matters, the loss of leisure and the consequent loss of culture is bound up, at least in this age of men, with the process of proletarianization, that is, the limitation of men to their laboring aspects. Pieper writes:

In antiquity and the Middle Ages, the essence of the *artes serviles* was held to consist in their being directed, as St. Thomas [Aquinas] says, 'to the satisfaction of a need through activity'. 'Proletarianism' would then mean the limitation of existence and activity to the sphere of the *artes serviles* – whether this limitation were occasioned by lack of property, State compulsion, or spiritual impoverishment. By the same token, 'deproletarianizing' would mean: enlarging the scope of life beyond the confines of merely useful servile work, and widening the sphere of servile work to the advantage of the liberal arts; and this process, once again, can only be carried out by combining three things: by giving the wage-earner the opportunity to save and acquire property, by limiting the power of the state, and by overcoming the inner impoverishment of the individual. [page 40]

Later in the book, in the second essay, he argues that leisure is related to the spirit which he considers, plausibly and without superstition

or enthusiastic mysticism, to be a relationship to the entirety of Creation, certainly within the context of what you can be expected to know of the various realms of created being. After all, he's an admirer of Aristotle and Aquinas, neither of who could have imagined how vast and rich and complex created being now seems to be, but those thinkers tried to understand all that they thought to exist.

To have leisure, or to take leisure by making sacrifices in your practical life, is to have a sense of wholeness, of Creation and, by reflection, of your own self. It is to have a self in the fullest sense. If man is capable – in principle – of understanding all of Creation and even a little about God in His transcendence, that man reaches his greatest fulfillment in gaining some such understanding, however imperfect and incomplete it will be. Moreover, by gaining that understanding, man makes a foundation for a civilization, an immature and incomplete Body of Christ – most likely very immature and incomplete for sure but we must grow slowly and carefully toward a higher state of communal being as well as toward a higher state of individual being.

Leisure can be active in its own way, at least in some phases of a healthy and more complete human life. It's even possible that leisure might seem much like servile labor at times. It's been ten years since I've lived where I could have a garden, but in those days – partly because I grew vegetables and flowers for pleasure and not out of need – gardening was leisure and yard-work was servile labor in that older language that Pieper uses to good purposes. I mowed the lawn so it would be neat and relatively free of annoying bugs; the goal was to have finished mowing and that goal was often on my mind as I pushed the mower around. When I gardened, I would lose myself in the activity – not always to be sure, but often. I gardened because I enjoyed the activity and it was a break from my reading and writing, giving me a chance to let ideas and plots and character developments stew around quietly in the back of my mind. But, even that need to relax from the strains of writing was not the real point. I enjoyed building soil and seeing plants grow. I enjoyed the feeling when I stuck my arm up to my elbow in soil which had been supplemented by home-baked compost and which had not known human shoes for a few years. I achieved a state of oneness with certain aspects of Creation by working with the things and forces of nature.

I think that even some farmers who live off their produce are in a state of leisure part of the time when they go about their tasks. In a similar way, someone like me is often in a state of leisure when I'm doing difficult reading

to prepare for advancing in my thoughts or just because I have a feeling that it might be good, perhaps useful by accident, to know something about an era in human history or about a field of physics. Even when I'm struggling through a boring stretch of a history of the Middle Ages or through some calculations hard on my middle-aged brain, I'm doing what I wish to do, what I feel called to do, and I'm often in a state of contemplation about the greater scale aspects of my work.

Perhaps leisure is the state in which our active responses to Creation and Creator begin to bear fruit, the state when we become something like images of our Creator because we've encapsulated the thoughts He manifested in created being, however incomplete and defective that encapsulation might be.



## 620 *Leisure, the Basis of Culture: Ends and Means*

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1339>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/07/10.]

In *Leisure: The Basis of Culture* [114], Josef Pieper makes this qualification to the separation of leisure and culture from the pursuance of (mostly practical) goods:

[T]his is not to say that there is no sort of connection between the fulfilment of the ‘common good’ and the philosophy taught in a country! Only the relationship can never be established or regulated from the point of view of the general good; when a thing contains its own end or is an end in itself, it can never be made to serve as a means to any other end – just as no one can love someone ‘in order that’. [page 77]

I also think there to be such a “connection between the fulfilment of the ‘common good’ and the philosophy taught in a country” and I also can’t say quite what it is. Part of the problem is that of scale, over time and geographical space and over the large and conflicting goals and goods of the various residents of any country. Philosophers cover vast scales in one sense, that of moving up to abstractions which are the stuff from which many concrete situations are shaped, but ‘goods’ for mortal creatures are mostly those concrete manifestations of bundles of abstractions and we can’t trace back easily or accurately to the abstract stuff of philosophers or mathematicians and theoretical physicists.

A philosophy can seem right for a country, or more appropriately, a civilization, and it can be conducive to the ‘common good’, but it’s far

too complex and complicated for us to say how it is that Augustinian or Thomistic teachings on political philosophy might have helped create the conditions for the modern liberation of the common man. It seems just as complex and complicated to draw closer to, say, the founding of the United States and to speak about the effects that Locke's teachings and those of Hobbes may have had on the thoughts of Jefferson or Adams or Hamilton – none of whom seem to have been partisans of a well-formed philosophy as such. It most certainly isn't easy to understand the effect of the political teachings of the Jesuits who happily passed on the reluctant admission of St. Thomas Aquinas that even a king from a dynasty of long tradition could be overthrown if he refused to serve or couldn't serve the public good.

There are a number of angles from which I could approach Professor Pieper's claim but I'll start with the correction I made in the first sentence of the prior paragraph: though schools of philosophy originate in specific locales, I think countries as we understand them are the wrong scale for true schools of thought grand enough to be named as philosophies. That is, countries are the wrong scale for both time and space. In fact, I think spacetime is the correct setting for such definitions. Our awareness of the human race extends across the entire globe and back to the first stirrings of our single-celled ancestors. We have some plausible ways of projecting human life into possible futures. Even now, human life is already so complex and involves so many individuals and communities and so much interaction with our universe as to render implausible the simpler views of, for example, moral paths based upon simple ideas of human beings traveling through time across a Euclidean landscape. The space and time of human life and certainly of human communities interact in ways that force us to develop more complex geometries for visualizing and analyzing and describing human lives and human communal lives.

There is certainly a sense in which parts of a more general way of thought, such as a political philosophy drawn from Thomism or from Lockeanism, could be customized to the needs and desires and local beliefs of a country but something so grand as a true 'philosophy' is scaled more to the level of a civilization, the West and not even English-speaking peoples let alone England or the United States. The greater insight is that there is a level of abstraction where the human intellect, the communal mind, is the same as a civilization. The individual human minds are also somewhat the same because my mind is, so to speak, a localized and far more limited version of the communal mind of the West or at least of some civilization or

phase of the West which is still in an embryonic form. (The individual also has certain freedoms of movement not available to the entire community, but I'll not try to deal with that issue here.) So it is that an individual mind is also an encapsulation of Creation or any lesser understanding of what exists. Even the greatest communal mind we've yet seen, that of Western Civilization, perhaps a hundred years ago before the processes of decay intensified, was very much imperfect and incomplete. Any individual mind, even one so magnificent as that of Goethe, was far less complete than the communal mind of the West but possibly less imperfect in the sense of being more unified and coherent.

The three necessary characteristics of some very important entities, worlds and human persons and moral communities and divine Persons are unity and coherence and completeness. The entities of this sort which are yet growing and developing will be at various states with regard to these characteristics. A mortal human person, in his mind and his moral character, will promise the fulfillment of those characteristics but won't deliver. A resurrected human person sharing the life of God will be at least well on the way to fulfillment of those characteristics, however much even a perfected and completed human person will fall short of the three divine Persons. Similar statements can be made about various scales of human communities right up to the Body of Christ.

A philosophy is a major part of a human mind, it is his understanding of created being, at the level of concrete being and at the level of abstractions. Of course, the perception and understanding of concrete and abstract being were different in ancient Athens than they were in Medieval Paris. Moreover, they are currently different on the campus of Stanford University from what they are in a small town in Arkansas, and both of those understandings are far different from my worldview. This diversity is mostly good though diseased views of created being, including human nature, can grow up and can even threaten the health and sanity of an entire civilization.

A philosophy serves the 'common good' of a civilization by allowing the most unified and most coherent and most complete possible understanding of created being available to that civilization. Such a philosophy is liberal in the proper sense – open-minded and generous and true to what seems at least plausible. Such a philosophy isn't unique. Even at the most abstract level of understanding being, there has ever been a conflict between full-blown, 'essentialist' forms of Realism (such as various forms of Platonism), moderate forms of Realism (such as Aristotelianism and Augustinianism

and Thomism narrowly understood), and a form of moderate Realism which has taken a radically existentialist turn (such as Thomism as interpreted by Etienne Gilson and others including me). Fit the philosophies of Kant and Locke and Hegel and James in there as you will. The actual situation is, of course, messy and calls for another grand work of history of Western philosophy as much can be seen more clearly during or perhaps a little after the collapse of a phase of a civilization, or – equivalently – the collapse of a group of understandings of created being, the collapse of existing philosophies as men of an age lose their way in the cosmos and consequently lose the moral order in their communities and in their individual souls. We often can better understand the meanings inherent in an individual or a community after he or it is no longer with us.

I've made it clear that I'm on a mission to establish an understanding of created being, allowing for Christian truths and modern empirical knowledge, which will allow a great 'common good', the foundation of a new civilization or – even better – a new phase of Western Civilization. I don't know how to define more precisely the particular 'common good' to which I work because I can't see the future. I can't define it even so well as Aquinas or Kant could have defined it in their different historical periods, their different times within the life of Western Civilization. I can claim that I'm working toward a philosophy for a Christian civilization, a way of viewing created being which will allow residents of that civilization, full believers more so, to live morally well-ordered lives, will allow them to plausibly achieve some sort of balance in the different aspects of a good, full human life.

There isn't any 'common good' of a well-structured sort, not any engineered product. I speak of goods which are those of organisms and communal entities which are organic in more ways than not. Ultimately, the 'common good', at least to us Christians, is what is good for the purposes of the Body of Christ as a whole or of major organs. The 'common good' we should seek is the healthy development of a child not under our control but partly under our care, a child which will show its inclinations and talents as it grows, a child which is not to be healthy if its caregivers were to force it into a predetermined mold. Call it a communal child if you wish for we are part of that child. That insight points to various complex interactions which further emphasize the need for more complex and more complicated ways of understanding with our human lives and our communal lives.

In this light, the common good can be seen as involving practical, even

material, goods. Even those sorts of goods can be impossible to plan for – How many in the early centuries of the modern era would have foreseen anything like the engineering schools so important to our material prosperity? – but what is hardest to foresee and plan for is the goods related to such matters as moral character. When it comes to those matters, we need to rely on intent as defined by St. Thomas Aquinas. Under this way of thinking, we can say we intend towards the goals of a good human life and also good communal lives, morally well-ordered lives with the proper sorts of material and cultural goods, and we can move forward towards these goals one step at a time. But those goals are actually a huge expanse of twisting and turning settings for the stories which are our lives and the stories which are those of our particular communities and even the story which is the universe seen in light of God's purposes for it. The goal, the end towards which we target ourselves is open-ended until it's past and we see what we have accomplished in response to, in interaction with, our environments. We understand the ways in which we truly met the 'common good' and the ways in which we failed by looking in the rear-view mirror, but we should quickly turn our eyes back to the direction in which we move.



## 621 If It's Forced, It's Probably an Act of Rebellion Against God

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1342>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/07/14.]

In Chapter 620, *Leisure, the Basis of Culture": Ends and Means.*, I tried to distinguish between ends of shorter- or longer-term. I came to a humbling conclusion that we can't shape the future but only "intend towards the goals of a good human life and also good communal lives, morally well-ordered lives with the proper sorts of material and cultural goods, and we can move forward towards these goals one step at a time. But those goals are actually a huge expanse of twisting and turning settings for the stories which are our lives and the stories which are those of our particular communities and even the story which is the universe seen in light of God's purposes for it. The goal, the end towards which we target ourselves is open-ended until it's past and we see what we have accomplished in response to, in interaction with, our environments. We understand the ways in which we truly met the 'common good' and the ways in which we failed by looking in the rear-view mirror, but we should quickly turn our eyes back to the direction in which we move."

This truly is humbling according to our current conceits, our current faith that we can know what the world is supposed to be now and at some spacetime ahead of us. Far too often we seek to shape the world to match those vague dreams we have which are shown even in many mindless movies, to be nightmares. We can't really build the world of the Terminator but we can build one where robots of various sorts roam about surveilling children or nudists or maybe child-like nude terrorists in their backyards. And sometimes shooting missiles or other projectiles at them. Shoot first and

find out later if you shot a gathering of terrorists or a wedding party; likely enough, you'll find out from some alternative news site on the Internet.

We take risks we don't understand when we force the world or the things in it to correspond to some vague image in our minds without understanding the consequences. We lay asphalt to make accessible wilderness regions – surely one of the silliest ideas of modern men – even as we forbid ranchers to protect their herds from wild animals. Grizzly bears and wolves can't be shot because we're busy turning them into characters in some grotesque movie about the sheer cuteness of wilderness. We destroy communities by forcing peoples to live together in blocks of concrete buildings where neighbors can't speak each other's languages or respond to each other's rules of behavior and we fund strange political groups which push out of power the more natural leaders and institutions such as the traditional ministers of African-American communities. When we act in such a way, we aren't intending the good but rather seeking to feel good about ourselves at the expense of others. For goods, communal or individual, are what prove to be good when we live our communal or individual lives in morally well-ordered ways.

The possible goods are constrained, greatly in the near-term and less so in the far-term, by our physical stuff and our cultures. Who knows what possible goods can be obtained in the long-term future? A Christian should believe that in the very long-term, not to be actually reached on this side of the grave, we will achieve a state of individual and communal perfection. The form of that perfection is certainly a matter of faith though I believe many men of various faiths can look in wonder upon all that has been achieved towards the goal of a god-like man and a human community encompassing all who are of good-will.

Clever, apish creature have gathered together into various sorts of communities which have built cities holding tens of millions and possessing huge sewer and fresh water systems. They have developed technology which would seem no less than magic to men of even a few centuries ago. They fly through the air at speeds far beyond those of hawk and eagle. They move thousands for thousands of miles in aircraft carriers built of concrete and steel and powered by nuclear fission processes based upon scientific principles unknown to even Einstein when he proposed his theory of Special Relativity and that of General Relativity. They have included the likes of Virgil and Mozart and Monet. They have brought deserts to bloom and can even, to some limited extent, live on the Antarctic ice masses. They have

flown to the Moon and will likely one day reach Mars and maybe beyond.

And they have done much to damage the earth and the seas and to litter even space miles above the earth's surface with now useless hunks of metal and plastic. They have waged horrible wars and have engaged, and still engage, in the immoral exploitation of other men and various sorts of nonhuman creatures. They have not always had the proper moral intentions, that is, the proper sort of active moral growth and development, nor have they always done what they should have done to develop proper relationships in their various communities and with other communities.

Progress is for real, but not automatic nor is it guaranteed to prevent any given war or ecological abuses or exploitation of other human beings. But we do move forward, purposefully but not according to the plans of any mortal creature. We move ahead according to the plans and purposes of our Maker. To me, this means we move forward as the Body of Christ matures, being completed and perfected, neither of which is to be a done deed before this world ends. At the same time, we should realistically evaluate what has been accomplished over man's time on earth. From creatures who made tools from flint and wooden shaft, we have become creatures capable of shooting rockets into space or nuclear-armed missiles at our enemies. We can feed billions and show some signs of raising the standard of living of many of those billions – if we can control our warmongers and other scoundrels. We have conquered many of the old diseases and parasites and have developed skills which might allow us to minimize the damage of any new diseases and parasites before they cause too much suffering or death.

Men descended from Celtic tribesmen who migrated to northwestern Europe from somewhere near modern-day Russia/Ukraine have learned of the existence of the native tribes of Australia and the Amazon River basin and have learned to speak with them and to somewhat understand their ways of thought and feeling. Men descended from Semitic desert warriors and now living in many lands have explored this universe back to the beginning of this stage of expansion, some 13 billion years or more, and have learned truths and have made plausible speculations about the nature of spacetime and of matter which wouldn't even register on the minds of Plato and Aristotle and would amaze Newton and Laplace and even Planck.

All this has been accomplished not by the grand planners of our race, for only God can truly remember and understand human history and can conceive of the possible pathways we'll travel in the future. We are his children and his apprentices and He has blessed us with the sorts of minds

capable of remembering and understanding but even ignoring the weakness and smallness of those minds, we have to recognize that freedom, including our own moral freedom, lies at the instant where our future is being shaped. We have not the total freedom of God Himself – not, that is, until we share His life in the world of the resurrected. The future we would need to foresee is being shaped now as each entity in this world moves forward as it will, sometimes with little freedom and sometimes with none. There are precious and dangerous times when we human beings have a great deal of freedom to choose our future. We should be prepared for those times, but even then our ability to shape the future is limited, however great it is by the standards of mortal men.

The Founding Fathers of the United States acted courageously and won some substantial forms of liberty for themselves and the other citizens of the rebellious colonies. A seer might have forecast a glorious future and some of that glory was realized but the American citizenry proved itself unready to handle the responsibilities of political and economic freedom and problems built up slowly by the standards of one human life but rapidly by historical standards. Those Founding Fathers didn't design a country nor did they even structure a government as such. From the administration of George Washington right up to that of Barack Obama, Presidents and cabinet officials and bureaucrats have been busy constructing more or less plausible structures costing increasing amounts of money and placing more constraints upon the activities of Americans and other residents of the United States.

The initial ideas were good and the Founding Fathers, as a group battling each other as much as the British and the French revolutionaries and the native Americans and anyone else standing nearby, stepped forward into a vast and open region, not necessarily restricting the particular directions or the developmental activities of future generations. One of the problems with history, particularly in the Modern Age, is that we have no reverse gear and only weak brakes on our communities as they move into those vast and open regions, moving more as a herd and less as an intellectual community of intelligent and morally self-aware creatures.

No brakes and no reverse gear and we are heading toward tough ground, probably not a cliff but toward a region so rough that it's breaking the herd into smaller groups. Many individuals, many groups, might not make it through the rough times ahead.

We shouldn't be pretending any longer that we are in control and

shouldn't be assuming our leaders have so much as a clue what they are really doing though they have what passes for a vision of reality which is nothing short of insane and perverse. We are being forced into ad-hoc improvisations and don't realize we're being dragged and driven as part of a herd into the worst of the regions ahead.

One point to remember is that we're still moving forward. We might act so badly as to drive ourselves back to a state of primitivism and might even act so badly as to pretty much wipe out the human race. Both of those situations seem unlikely. It seems to me more likely that we'll lose much of our prosperity and the so-called advanced nations will lose a lot of their power though they might still remain the dominant nations in a world reduced in ways that will force one and all to concentrate on more local matters. Consider that likelihood to be a rebalancing act built into the workings of this world.

God's story moves forward.

Each of us plays a role in this story, as does each and every living creatures and, indeed, each and every nonliving creature in this world. Some human beings have humble roles, whether that of running a family farm and household or studying and writing about the history of human thought. Others have roles which are more like those humble roles than not, but they are, in a manner of speaking, highly leveraged in future effects so that there is an air of greatness about them, such as finding the way of sustainable and humane living in a world of greater population and greater mobility than we've yet learned to handle or developing a way to understand the world so that the efforts of concrete reformers can be brought together into a coherent whole, a new civilization or perhaps a new phase of Western Civilization.

It's God and only God who can know what the long-term effects of our actions will be, our wise and unwise actions alike. Only God knew at the ratification of the Constitution of the United States that it would prove to be a fruitful failure, a certain sort of false path in the evolutionary processes driving toward a political organ suited for the Body of Christ. To be sure, I suspect the underlying project will yet move on and might result in something like a federation of republics living in liberty might grow up from the ruins we're about to leave over much of North America, but it's far easier to see failure, especially in its late stages, than it is to see what good or bad might come of that failure.

It's God and only God who can shape landscapes so that our efforts as

pioneers and settlers work toward the purposes He has set for this world, the purposes for which He created the raw stuff of created being and then shaped it by some complex processes to make it into this world. From our position in Creation, we see local processes naturally and have not yet figured out how evolution can produce such complex entities by way of processes which are blind to the future. True it is, that we can see hints about a part of the entire process, possibly a very small part, when we try to consider the world into which evolutionary processes select for survival – to consider the most important but certainly not the only process of biological evolution.

We have the sorts of minds which can understand what God has done and is doing in this world, but even at that we see the concrete manifestations of God's work and can't penetrate to His power as the God who can create from nothingness. That power is at work even as I write and is part of the mystery of His story-telling. I think that even there we can learn to speak as if we understood God's powers as a true Creator. Speaking in such a way, we will shape our minds so that something akin to true understanding will grow over time. We can do this, more humbly – we can play our individual roles, if and only if we work without ceasing but work toward goals which we can truly see without deluding ourselves that we can see far into the future, without puffing ourselves up to believe we can know and work toward the truly and absolutely and permanently good human society, without thinking to take over the telling of God's story.

It is sufficient and noble enough that we learn to properly live the stories of our own selves and of our well-formed communities without thinking we are the ones chosen from all time to settle the form of the communities yet in early stages of evolution and development. We are certainly not the ones to form the Body of Christ. That Body is forming as a result of progressive forces which seem at times to be as lacking in purpose and in moral order as the processes we observe in biological evolution and human history. Moral order, as well as other sorts of advanced order, have come into being but not in any way that allows us to set down in textbook fashion how it is that a sometimes brutal struggle for survival has resulted in the moral order of a wolf-pack or that of a Buddhist monastery. As surprising as it might seem at first, it's easier to see the struggle for power of Soviet functionaries or American bankers and politicians as part of that bloody struggle for survival which produced velociraptors and rattlesnakes.

We can perhaps see a little bit better if we consider those violent events

known as volcanic eruptions. They cover forests and living creatures with melted rock or smash them with rolling masses of terribly hot gases and ashes. They reshape the earth's surface. They have built the Hawaiian Islands and many of the islands off the coast of southeast Asia. They have reshaped some regions of the west coast of the Americas into beautiful homes for creatures much like the ones which were buried under molten rock. Some of those regions have proven to be useful to man as harbors and recreational areas. In these natural events, we can see hints of a Creator who works toward His goals by methods often violent and often locally destructive – until other natural forces start the processes of healing and making a region of the earth's surface still better than it would have been otherwise.

I wouldn't enjoy being a victim of those violent forces and I don't look forward to spending the rest of my life in a world which will likely be relatively impoverished and subject to the violent forces of war and mass immigrations of desperate peoples and – likely enough – famines and epidemics of historically short-term but devastating sorts.

Do I pretend to be a seer? No, but I know enough of history to know what will happen when dramatic changes need to be made and established power-elites, or other human or non-human entities, struggle to block the building pressures. I live in a neighborhood with a very thin layer of loam over dunes of sand and gravel which were built up during ice ages when the Chicopee River flooded the local valley and formed a lake. There was at least one period when the entire Connecticut River was blocked by a huge ice dam near modern-day Hartford down in the state of Connecticut. Near the end of that ice age, that dam gave way and the rush of water is said to have sliced a wide and deep canal right through Long Island.

To the extent I can see even shadows of the future, I don't see any events so violent in our near-term future, but we have tried to block and continue to block the forward movement of God's story and we do so primarily by not moving forward in our own lives and in the lives of our better-formed and local communities. We have ceased to move toward the state of civilized beings, human beings in formation as members or at least as-if members of the Body of Christ. We sit on our fat behinds and wait for others to entertain us or perhaps we become so active as to head down to a resort on a Caribbean island or – the horror of it all! – to DisneyWorld. Or maybe to the Superbowl where we can live the dissolute week gloriously parodied by Hunter Thompson. We no longer truly get our own jokes, perverse as they

are – we now think it funny that we distort our own beings for the sake of enjoying pleasures which aren't always despicable but they always are so when we engage in them as if deliberately blocking our own moral maturing processes and, more generally, our own proper acts of moving forward as God tells His story.

Now perhaps we can see more clearly why it is that we don't let God tell His story. He isn't telling a story we like. We have taken up with the pleasures preferred by some of the more perverse members of the human race. Too many of us have let those perverse creatures, but not necessarily evil creatures, steer us in our individual lives and in our family and kinship and church and neighborhood lives. Rather than taking in those perverse creatures and trying to teach them the sustainable pleasures of craft hobbies or music performance or serving others in charitable activities, we've allowed them to teach us that pleasures are exciting and exotic and always far different from the simpler pleasures our grandparents enjoyed in gatherings in the backyard or on the front porch or at the church or town community center.

The same can be said in the specific realms of politics and economics. Certain perverse men who have come to love the life of political intrigue and international crime of the sort glorified in so-called thriller novels have moved toward the centers of power and have distorted governmental actions in ways that would mystify the most greedy and ambitious of robber barons from the 19th century. By this, I mean that the Rockefellers and Morgans and others interfered in domestic politics or the governments of other countries for the purpose of making money and gathering power into their hands, not for the thrill of engaging in espionage and not to systematically reduce large regions of the world to unprofitable chaos. Various serious thinkers from about 1900 (W.E.H. Lecky, Henry and Brooks Adams in their different ways, Henry James, and so on) saw the American political class as the most corrupt in the world. We've gone on to corrupt much of the world. And it's no longer just the political class which is corrupt, morally disordered in a thoroughly ignoble way.

This is a large part of the reason for the extreme anti-government attitudes of some modern liberals, such as those who call themselves libertarians. They see American forms of government and political activity and those of other 'exciting' periods of history and see government as evil and inherently corrupt – for good reason – and conclude that governments and political activity are always evil and inherently corrupt. This seems akin to

labeling sex as evil because it's misused so often in disordered communities such as many in the modern West or those during the exciting years of the establishment of the Roman Empire. It's no different from those American muckrakers who labeled all businessmen as greedy and corrupt because of crimes committed by some in the Robber Baron generation. Some generalize unwisely from the crimes committed by politicians, some from the crimes committed by bankers, some from the crimes committed by warmongers in the aerospace industry. All good human activities can be corrupted, the more powerful the potential good, the more powerful also the potential evil. When we misuse our gifts systematically, we fall into, or perhaps rush into, a state of rebellion against the Creator. We refuse to play our proper roles in the story which the Creator is telling, the story which is this world. We try to play God, choosing to shape human societies rather than steering them toward better ordered forms. We choose to rise above morality, committing evil acts for the sake of some long-term and quite imaginary good.

The form of the modern American rebellion against God and His story is that of perverse and morally immature desires for exciting lives of intrigue and conquest and war. We have shaped our understanding of human history according to James Bond movies and science-fiction nightmares and *All in the Family* and the self-deprecating humor of our stand-up comedians who seem not to realize we have no substantial or morally ordered selves to ridicule gently or harshly. We don't really know the Bible or its historical setting, nor do we know the contents of the books written by Jaroslav Pelikan or Carroll Quigley or Jacques Barzun or Michael Grant. Nor do we know much about the lives and thoughts of Julius Caesar or the Medieval popes or Amadeus Mozart (though we know some of the historically absurd claims of an otherwise interesting drama about someone named Amadeus) or Thomas Jefferson or the Iron Duke or the great generals of World War II.

We live in a world shaped more by Disney and the strange mixture of lies and often decontextualized facts found in Coppola's movie *Patton*. We know about alien races meeting in bars in some far region of the galaxy and we know the distortions of the political activities of FDR and Eisenhower which were, more or less, shaped by our journalists and our movie-makers to the needs of our two major political parties.

The modern American in general has a very strange idea of the nature of history, largely centering around some view of the United States as some

sort of morally pure entity which is opposed by other nations only because those others are evil and have not yet seen the God-ordained goodness of the United States and its leaders. Individual leaders of the United States or leaders of allied countries often have more limited goals of more normal sorts of greed and ambition, but the system as a whole is so strange and so rebellious as to invite the claim that the United States have become some sort of corporate anti-Christ knowing what God should have made this world to be and in the process of making it so.

In the end, God will smash all those insane enough to think they can shape the world and design human beings and human communities to meet their own plans. And He will necessarily smash an awful lot of innocent men and women and children as well.

# 622 Man, Society, and the Body of Christ

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1408>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/09/25.]

## 622.1 Some Preliminaries

Human beings think and feel and act and do so in response to what lies around them. As various communities have advanced in the way of civilization, they've done so—thought and felt and acted—in response to some more or less plausible worldview covering created being in its abstract realms as well as this concrete realm. That worldview has to have not only some understanding of concrete stuff, such as human flesh and blood, and abstract stuff, such as geometric relationships, but also an understanding of the specific narratives in which human beings and human communities live, including that narrative of the entirety, the story of the world in which we live. Call it a cosmogony leading into an ongoing story if you will. At times, some of the abstract realms of being were, and are, brought in by way of mythical terms, such as vaguely apprehended forces personified as gods or spirits or daemons or as a story in which the meaning of human life and human lives are given a purpose and meaning at the very beginning of this world.

In my way of thinking and speaking, many myths are valid efforts of speculation given a limited set of tools and limited empirical knowledge. Myths become superstitions when they don't properly use the best empirical knowledge and the best thinking methods available to the participants. Let me write briefly about the subject of the world of the resurrected, Heaven

in traditional terms. The ideas of Heaven found in better quality works in the Middle Ages, most certainly the great poems of Dante, draw upon the best understandings of what we call the universe and was often called the Cosmos. There is a problem here, which I've perhaps aggravated by using the term 'universe' to designate one possible entity in the concrete realm of Creation. To Dante and others before and after him, the Cosmos was all that God had created; some even seemed to imply, by way of Heavenly thrones and the like, that God Himself lives in this Cosmos. In any case, Heaven, the home of the blessed, was seen as simply the 'highest' or 'purest' region of the Cosmos. Heaven was a real place. In principle, creatures could make the journey from Earth to Heaven though men were missing angelic wings. The point is that Heaven and Hell were part of the same Creation as Earth in a way that made sense to men accustomed to Ptolemaic models of the Cosmos—in fact, I'm sure most men thought in terms less sophisticated than a geometer but compatible with those models.

In Chapter 199, *Theories, Meta-theories, and Meta-etc*, I dealt with the correspondence between created being and human knowledge. In this context, 'knowledge' includes feelings disciplined to the circumstances and also proper activities. A human being is a microcosm, more so if he makes a morally guided effort to shape himself to reality as he best understands it given his abilities and those of his communities. Unlike creatures mostly limited to the concrete realms of Creation, including perhaps some small amount of abstractions in the case of social animals, men can encapsulate the more abstract realms of Creation. We can't go beyond on our own powers; thus are transcendental realms beyond our reach except for some small bits of knowledge revealed to us by God.

We human beings are creatures of empirical reality, in its directly perceptible concrete aspects and its abstract aspects as well. Our communities are no different in this regard, except perhaps for having a relatively higher proportion of abstract aspects. The Body of Christ as I conceive it will draw fully upon all realms of Creation, from the concrete realm of material objects to that of the truths as manifested by God as the raw stuff of Creation.

This entire line of thought has led me to reconfigure a book I'd been stuck on. I had planned for the entire book to be about the human mind. Now, I'll be dealing with the complete human being, mind and heart and hands. Moreover, I'll try to put my understanding of the individual human being into the context of the spectrum of created being (abstract to con-

crete) and also the context of the developing and evolving Body of Christ.

I'd been worried about that last and ultimate goal of understanding human nature in terms of Christian beliefs, that is, in terms of the promises Christ made to those He's chosen to raise from the grave that they might share His life for time without end. As I've interpreted it, in line with Christian tradition and also modern understandings of created being which tend to be both profound and incoherent, I've seen this resurrection into true life as an enfolding into the Body of Christ. In that body, the members will remain individuals while being truly the one Body of Christ as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit remain individuals while being truly the one God.

The goal is to be able to discuss all of this in a way that's rational and coherent. I realized I couldn't discuss mind apart from other important aspects of human nature when I read some of the works of Jacob Neusner and sided with him and the Judaic Sages he's studied so lovingly and written about so powerfully—see Chapter 282, *Do We Need Heart and Hands as Well as Mind to Understand Reality?*. Mind, heart, and hands are the aspects of a human being which must be considered when we study what the modern students of those Sages would call a 'mensch', a true and God-centered man.

From a Christian point of view, we complete the work of Jesus Christ by first taking up discipleship as individuals and then working to complete the Body of Christ, the community which includes not only Jesus Christ as head but also all of His brothers and sisters as members. We do this in various ways, using hands and heart and mind. As a Christian, I'm particularly concerned with the formation of the Body of Christ, including the ultimate intellect, that is, the capitalized and communal live mind of that Body—in terms of Jacques Barzun's definition from his profound discussion, from a secular and cultural viewpoint. See my discussion of Barzun's book, *The House of Intellect* [7], in Chapter 127, *Intelligence vs. Intellect*.

The intellect hasn't been doing so well in the Christian Church for at least the past couple of centuries. Etienne Gilson made the claim that Catholic intellectuals had failed to come up with good, Christian answers to the legitimate questions raised during the early phases of the Modern Age and then, when some very bad answers had shown themselves in anarchy and the guillotine, those Catholic intellectuals had led the Church into an intellectual ghetto. Protestants did no better though the details were different. Nor do I see signs that secularists, Christian or nominally Christian or non-Christian, did any better in terms of an overall understanding though

they produced—perhaps—better individual works than those of Christians in the West. In this twentieth century after Christ, Catholic intellectuals continue to think, feel, and act as if we can inhabit a concrete realm of Creation described well by Einstein and Darwin and then talk about greater truths in terms given us by descriptions of this concrete realm from the 18th century and earlier. I'm suggesting that modern Christians, including the best of our intellectuals, don't even have an understanding of created being, in particular—human nature in its individual and communal aspects, which will support a view of the Body of Christ which is sufficiently rich and complex to seem plausible in light of modern human communities in this mortal realm.

Let me move on to a rough view of the human nature in its individual and communal forms, including the ultimate community, the Body of Christ.

## 622.2 A plausible description of individual human beings

I gave what I consider a good framework for a plausible description of individual human beings in the essay I referred to above: Chapter 282, *Do We Need Heart and Hands as Well as Mind to Understand Reality?*.

[M]odern biological sciences including evolutionary biology support the idea that emotions aren't some sort of imperfection in the human being nor do they merely exist to give us epiphenomena to color our existence in a world which is 'just material', let alone 'only logical'. Most biologists who have had reasons to express opinions on the importance of emotion to thinking don't even consider emotions to be primarily short-cuts to conclusions we would reach by thinking if we had the time. There is that element in feeling but also in thinking and doing. They are different aspects of acts-of-being, more fundamental than even substance, and thinking can help us when our feeling is inadequate—as any Catholic would know from reading a guide to confession which will tell us an intellectual repentance suffices when we can't muster up the proper depth of feeling. Similar statements can be made about all these three aspects of human efforts to participate in God's acts-of-being: feeling, thinking,

and doing. They can each help the others along and perhaps a resurrected and perfected human being would become God-like in that he would no longer feel, think, or do without doing and feeling and thinking, all three at once and in each and every act.

We are given a sort of concrete human nature, including a very complex brain, which allows us to shape ourselves to encapsulate some relatively greater or lesser part of Creation. We understand Creation, created being, by these active responses, those of Fred Astaire and those of Vincent van Gogh as well as those of Albert Einstein—a viewpoint advocated by such prominent neuroscientists as Gerald Edelman and Walter J. Freeman, both of whom have written books which provide pleasure as well as wisdom to the truly literate reader. The neuroscientists Jerome Kagan and Antonio Damasio are but two who've written accessible and widely available books on the irreducible importance of emotions to human life.

If we are to understand Creation, spacetime and matter and all other components and aspects, then we'll understand by shaping ourselves to encapsulate Creation. We won't understand Creation if we start by misunderstanding ourselves and trying to fit created being into 'logical frameworks'. We have no such 'logical frameworks' in our brains in which to fit Creation and have no reason to believe Creation could fit into any such frameworks if they existed. In fact, even when we try in ways more proper to human nature, we're too small and too imperfect to understand much more than a vanishingly small bit as individuals and not much more even at the level of the community of the entire human race. But we're making progress in understanding some parts and some aspects of Creation, a surprising amount of progress given our small and imperfect selves.

Do those components of human understanding, feeling and thinking and doing, really respond to irreducible components or aspects of Creation? Let me first paraphrase Einstein in words he wouldn't use but I don't think he would object to the general thrust of my ideas: Our understanding of created being should be as simple as possible, but no simpler.

Reduce reality to its various components and aspects but stop reducing when you reach components or aspects which can-

not be used to fully explain or to ‘reconstruct’ each other. At that point in the process of analysis, it’s time to look for explanations which include all those seemingly fundamental components and aspects. You might be wrong and the next few generations might busy themselves taking your fundamental components and aspects apart to find still smaller particles. First, we searched for atoms, a search which had lasted for centuries and went through such strange paths as alchemy, but did result in the deep knowledge summarized in modern periodic tables of the elements. Then, we explored subatomic particles and discovered electrons and protons and neutrons and then strange hints of particles which didn’t fit into the simple scheme of things. Then we found out that there is a large zoo of particles out there and they seem to be broken pieces of more symmetric entities. [A still more complex process has started in which modern brain-scientists and evolutionary theorists are replacing the idealistic psychologies given us by St. Augustine and Freud and others.]

God acts and feels even as He does, and so forth. The Almighty is unified, and coherent and complete, in ways that aren’t possible to us—at least in our mortal lives. Why can’t we be unified in this way?

As noted above and in many of my essays on this blog, the concrete forms of being in this universe are the results of the fragmentation of more symmetric forms of created being, more abstract forms of created being. Physicists, in the Standard Theory of particle physics, have described an electroweak force which is the more symmetric entity which shattered into electromagnetic force and weak nuclear force as the universe expanded and cooled after the so-called Big Bang. The electroweak force can be described and understood in many ways but it’s electromagnetic force and weak nuclear force which are manifested in our concrete realm as particular forms of that more abstract force. In a similar way, we are concrete creatures who have evolved and developed from broken pieces of more symmetric, more abstract, forms of being. Feeling and thinking and doing are tightly related and can even help strengthen each other and can even cover for one another under certain circumstances.

As I said above: Reduce reality to its various components and aspects but stop reducing when you reach components or aspects which cannot be used to fully explain or to ‘reconstruct’ each other. We can replace ‘reality’ by ‘this concrete level of being’ and then we can understand, by analogy to modern physics, that we can construct plausible understandings of being in which feeling and thinking and doing are broken pieces of but one symmetric act-of-being, but those three components, again—in analogy to electromagnetic force and weak nuclear force, are irreducible components or aspects of minded [and social] creatures in this world of concrete being.

For now, I have nothing new to add to this plan for describing human nature.

### **622.3 What can we say about the forces which draw or force individuals into communities?**

We are drawn together not by the soft or squeamish emotions, not even fear, so much as we are drawn together by ties of dependencies, whether those ties are to those we like or dislike. Something tells me we’re relatively unlikely to form ties of dependencies to those to whom we’re indifferent, but that’s merely my speculation.

The ties of dependencies have evolved and developed, and will continue to do so, as the binding forces of human communities which have evolved over millions of years and developed over the centuries. I’ll not try to add to what I’ve written in the past about this issue. In an Chapter 410, *As the Ruins Crumble...*, first published on my weblog in July of 2009, I wrote about the bottom-up evolution and development of communities and paid a little bit of special attention to those who are currently pessimistic about the very existence of governments—truly, an understandable feeling within the context our unfolding political disasters. Recognizing the truer developmental and evolutionary past of human individual and communal nature will lead us in a different direction though not justifying any optimism about the current governments of the West. In that essay, I claimed:

Many are the classical liberals and libertarians who seem to think that we can solve our problems by getting the government off our back and getting back to work, unlikely as it is that Washington or Boston/Albany/Sacramento/. . . will shrink to more appropriate sizes. The problem is that, as I've discussed in a few entries, the human mind which is so important to our ability to function in a complex civilization has developed along with that civilization. If that civilization has decayed, or has never taken root in the case of the United States, that tells us that few are those who have minds well-formed enough to really understand themselves as individuals living in complex societies embedded in complex political structures. Few can even understand such abstract concepts as property rights or even rights over their own persons. It takes many generations to build a civilization that can be destroyed in a single generation, but that destruction reaches down into the minds and souls of the resulting barbarian children.

I've written of the contingent nature of the human mind, that is the aspects of a human being that work with abstractions – see Chapter 250, *Preliminary Thoughts on the Evolution of the Human Mind*. Simplistically, the human mind has evolved over eons at the species level though it doesn't seem to have shown itself until circa 600BC when Homer and the succeeding lyric poets had made philosophy and mathematics possible, when some unknown Israelites put together the complex mosaic known as the Books of Moses, when some unknown Vedic geniuses created Hinduism. No matter how poor or rich the social environment, the individual mind must develop over a lifetime. Clearly, there are going to be complications as a result of intermediary relationships and entities such as large-scale civilizations and smaller-scale societies, including towns and church communities and extended families. It takes centuries, and a lot of hard work on the part of butchers and bakers and poetry-makers, to build a civilization which can then be a home to those smaller-scale societies. In the case of the most recent cycle of Western Civilization, it has taken about five centuries of growth and then decay in literacy and reasoning skills to bring us to a sad point – see Jacques Barzun's *From Dawn to Decadence* for a powerful

narration of this most recent major period in the West.

We aren't those Glasgow Scots of the mid-1700s with their damaged but intact moral and social structures. We should be careful in applying Adam Smith's thought to modern Americans who possess little hint of the perhaps defective but certainly strong moral character of an eighteenth century Scotsman. And those Scotsmen lived in a society that demanded certain types of behavior from its merchants and professionals. Whatever one thinks of the specifics of that morality, it provided a good framework for freedom in the marketplace, that is, one merchant could trust another if only because he knew the price the other would pay for behavior seen as wrongful.

I'll go no further into those sorts of issues, preferring to make the more fundamental, and Thomistic, claim that we are intentional animals. Our moral natures and our minds develop in an organic manner producing physical changes including changes in external relationships. For now, I'll ignore the complication that our relationship to our Creator isn't quite external and deal with the other aspects of our lives.

Man is a particular creature, each of us developing by our responses to our environments – which sometimes include some representation of the entire universe or even some additional parts of Creation. But our environments and our readily available responses, our habits and customs, are the results of historical processes themselves made possible by billions of years of evolution. I believe man has become the sort of creature who can, in principle, encapsulate all of Creation within his mind, thus imitating by way of understanding what God did in creating this world and all else that is part of Creation. That implies there are some proper directions for our development. To transcend our immediate environments and even to understand the depths of our own human nature, we have to develop our abstract reasoning abilities. To move towards a state where we are truly images of God, we have to be like Jesus Christ, true persons who move with freedom yet do the will of the Father.

In Chapter 424, *What is politics?*, first published on my weblog in May of 2011, I continued my efforts to understand, and explain to others, the

bottom-up evolution and development of communities. In that essay, I claimed:

And we have to be careful about our thoughts. We think about a certain realm of human life in terms of engineering or bureaucratic system building when we should be participants in a narrative process which can't be guided if it's to remain healthy and strong. That is, we'd have to be careful not to 'guide' the process too much and certainly not to try to impose our favorite solutions upon an evolving system.

Healthy human communities evolve over longer scales of time and develop over shorter scales of time. As the historian Carroll Quigley claimed: "The truth unfolds in time through communal processes."

In my way of thought, this is an recursively entangled line of thought. You see, "Things are true," and "Truths are thing-like." This means that communities are true and not just ad-hoc arrangements. Moreover, communities are thing-like. The communities and the communal processes themselves unfold in time.

But entities like the United States and the so-called global economy are hierarchical structures imposed on masses of human beings and various human communities which would otherwise develop truer and more fruitful communities.

Perhaps we can say that the community evolves in time as true relationships emerge?

We haven't gotten it right yet and we aren't capable of fixing everything because we don't even know what we're fixing let alone what it's really supposed to be like. More than that, we're organisms, ourselves growing and developing towards futures we can help shape but can't plan in the way that modern bureaucrats once imagined they could plan for a safer and more prosperous and more aesthetically pleasing Harlem.

Rather than trying to design our various communities, we need somehow to regard them as being more like evolving and developing organisms than designed and manufactured machines. When we so regard them, we can research them and analyze them, not for the purpose of controlling what shouldn't

be controlled but rather for the purpose of understanding them that we might move along with their development in our own lives and with their evolution to the extent we can consciously live as members of one generation in that democracy of the dead, the living, and the yet unborn.

In conclusion, I think it relatively easy to define politics as the art, drawing upon some science, of bringing together different skills and other forms of memory for the purpose of forming a community, perhaps to serve God and perhaps to get in a good game of bridge once a week. It's harder to define even a vague range of legitimate actions on the part of the those who take on leadership roles with a 'political' aspect, but I strongly believe they should limit themselves to being actors who are part of more or less spontaneous processes, perhaps guiding them when a community begins to stray from all possible moral paths, but, even then, not trying to guide them down a specific path.

More recently, in Chapter 457, *Moral Order vs. National Welfare Systems*, first published on my weblog in February of 2012, I dealt once more with issue of bottom-up evolution and development of human communities, using the current American battles over healthcare as a good example of how we're doing a very bad job of dealing with the problems—and opportunities—of our modern, complex and densely populated, communities. In that essay, I wrote:

[T]he American Catholic Church and its leaders, Christian leaders in general, had no business in recent decades pushing for any sort of national health-care in a country where there is no consensus on moral issues affecting medical care, such as abortion, contraception, hospice care, or the care for children lacking some of the capabilities of most children. If anything, they should have been questioning many existing programs such as Social Security and Medicare. After all, the opponents of Social Security beginning in the 1930s have criticized more than the financial dangers of Social Security. Some have also claimed that such a program would weaken the bonds of families and would even cause an inter-generational war. And, as it turns out, weak families and inter-generational war over Social Secu-

rity and Medicare are among our greatest existing or imminent problems.

As we become more dependent upon medical systems which are certainly not under the control of individuals nor local communities nor even the larger religious communities, we'll be offered such poisonous fruits as drugs and techniques developed by experimentation on lab-grown embryos 'engineered' to have specific medical problems, growth of embryos who will never be born but will provide transplantable tissue or organs, engineering of babies to be brought to birth to provide transplantable organs – some of this is already happening quietly in major research centers. For example, this relatively old article from 2006, *Harvard to Create Human Embryonic Stem Cell Lines* found at [http://www.rxpgnews.com/stem-cell-research/Harvard\\_to\\_Create\\_Human\\_Embryonic\\_Stem\\_Cell\\_Lines\\_4400\\_4400.shtml](http://www.rxpgnews.com/stem-cell-research/Harvard_to_Create_Human_Embryonic_Stem_Cell_Lines_4400_4400.shtml), tells us, "After more than two years of intensive ethical and scientific review, Harvard Stem Cell Institute (HSCI) researchers at Harvard and Children's Hospital Boston have been cleared to begin experiments using Somatic Cell Nuclear Transfer (SCNT) to create disease-specific stem cell lines in an effort to develop treatments for a wide range of now-incurable conditions afflicting tens of millions of people."

Here's an article from the *Harvard Gazette*, talking about a meeting of some theologians who discuss some varying views on the allowability of using these embryos for research – the Catholic Church and more conservative Protestant churches seem not to have been represented: *Stem cells, through a religious lens* found at <http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2007/03/stem-cells-through-a-religious-lens/>. Read the article and note the difference in moral teachings regarding the use of embryos grown from stem-cells even amongst theologians of monotheistic religions. How can Catholics participate fully in a health-care system with Muslims who allow the therapeutic use of stem-cells derived from 'surplus embryos' produced in fertility treatments? I don't feel the right or the urge to go on a nationwide crusade to stop all acts I consider immoral but I also can't benefit from such acts without

endangering my relationship to God, not even surreptitiously by way of medicines or techniques derived from research on those embryos. Nor do I even wish to be in a hospital which carries out what I consider to be immoral research or treatment. If we can't be sure the service or product isn't free of the taint of moral disorder, then we'll have to refuse it. The bishops have helped to create a situation where any morally well-ordered Catholic Christians might soon have to refuse all services and products of the American medical industry. The entire industry is on its way to being morally contaminated in a very deep way.

We should learn to think in terms of the general rule suggested above: Social systems which have a major moral component should be designed for and implemented within morally coherent communities. [I should have added that those morally coherent communities are themselves organically developing entities.]

Human beings with diverse moral beliefs aren't going to be able to agree on a wide variety of health-care issues or social welfare issues in general. A morally diverse group of human beings or a morally diverse gathering of human communities aren't going to be able to form a coherent community at a small or large scale. A falsely-justified attempt at implementing social programs with those who don't agree with your moral positions will result first in the moral corruption or confusion of human beings in the various communities, not just the community with the highest moral standards. In addition, such confused efforts will produce serious disagreements threatening any existing social coherence, however slight, and will endanger any chances of meaningful dialog on matters of fundamental moral importance. And they might even endanger the very existence of some of these communities reduced to dependence upon a government which pursues its own interests, probably more free to do so because of the lack of moral coherence along with the pretense that we are a morally coherent nation.

## 622.4 The Body of Christ

I was a little surprised to realize that though I mention the Body of Christ regularly in my essays, I've not written too much in the way of even preliminary exploratory analyses as I've done with other realms of created being. This is probably reflective of a deep uncertainty I've felt about the proper way to discuss the Body of Christ. As an example, perhaps the most important example, of a particular problem: the Catholic Church and the Protestant churches even more so have moved away over the previous five centuries or so from the idea that the Christian churches, as ecclesiastical or liturgical institutions, can meet all the legitimate and inherent needs and desires of human nature. Few, if any, really have any desire to spend all their hours for time without end in liturgies. We have needs and desires which are met in terms of this-worldly vocations and avocations of various sorts. Some are met in our economic activities, some in political activities, some in human-centered art and literature, and some in simple human gatherings—parties and picnics. In January of 2010, I published an essay on my weblog which is included in this book as Chapter 591, *The Reality of Perfection*, in which I made some very sketchy proposals about the Body of Christ:

So-called traditionalists and conservatives will often deny that real progress can occur in this world. This is a valid viewpoint for a pagan thinker but not a Christian. A Christian has to believe that progress is possible, at least in principle. The individual man can, at least in principle, develop towards a Christ-like state. The entire race, even including those men who will not be resurrected into Heaven, can develop towards the state we call the Body of Christ. We can't achieve such a state of perfection, even in principle, in a world where decay is a fact. This is the place to point out that decay, increasing entropy, isn't a law but rather a direct world of God's choice to produce a world particular in certain ways – the world has been advancing towards a more probable state since then. This particular advance results in an increase of entropy. In other words, 'increasing entropy' isn't a fundamental property of matter and energy but rather a result of the universe starting out in a very specific state, specific in a sense still being explored by scientists.

As a summary of sorts, I'll note it remains true to a Christian thinker that: "Grace completes nature and doesn't destroy it to replace it with something else."

If what we are is the rough beginnings of a completed man – that is, one perfected to a Christ-like state, then a healthy moral imagination can imagine moving towards that perfected state. The principle is established that what we are can be perfected into a Christ-like state. A similar though more convoluted statement can be made about human communities, families and political communities and economic communities and the Church, being rough—in fact, fragmented—beginnings of the Body of Christ.

The next month, February of 2010, I published an essay motivated by the American response to a major earthquake in Haiti. In this essay, included in this book as Chapter 415, *Why We Can't Build or Rebuild the Countries of Other Peoples*, I wrote:

We don't know where the world is heading. We don't even know what will happen to our families or countries, we who are Christians are bound to believe that the end result will be the incorporation of those who belong to Christ in the Body of Christ without loss of individuality. In fact, that individuality will be enhanced so that we can be truly Christ-like. Before I can further explore this idea of the Body of Christ – not to be done in this article, I have to say what should be obvious from the Bible, especially the letters of St. Paul. Individuals are unique and don't even all fit in the same general categories. The same is true of nations and other natural groupings of human beings. We won't fill the same role in the Body of Christ and we don't fill the same role in this mortal realm. Not every human being is suited for life as a rocket engineer at NASA and not every human community is suited to be a part of a high-tech society that sends rockets to the moon. Moreover, some individuals capable of living such a life, some communities capable of so forming themselves, have no desire to do so.

And, I added a warning about the complex way in which these processes work bottom-up but not exclusively:

Development of an organism, or the evolution of a family-line of organisms, isn't really something that works [entirely from the] bottom-up. The development of complex organisms is ongoing at multiple levels and perhaps at all levels of development currently available to that organism. One of the best examples involves only two levels – individual organisms develop over their lifetimes even as species evolve over longer periods of time. But individual development and special evolution overlap. As we develop as individuals reflecting one temporal stage of evolution of the human species, we remain part of the greater evolutionary flow, though there is reason to believe evolution might itself have evolved with the appearance of a rational and self-aware race. Moreover, we have other forms of evolution or development which overlap with biological evolution and the development of an organism. Life on earth engages in complex and recursive relationships with the atmosphere of the earth. There is also interaction at the level of DNA and soma between different species – such as that between viruses and their hosts. Viruses can implant their genetic coding inside the genetic code of other species. Viruses can also transport pieces of genetic coding from one species to another. Bacteria form a superorganism of sorts, being able to shed some genes and pick up others from a pool of bacterial genes flowing through the earth's biosphere and including genes for resistance to various antibiotics. An interested reader can download my dark comedy, *A Man for Every Purpose* at <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/aman.pdf>, which plays off some of these confusions caused by our willful misunderstandings of our human selves and our situation in this world.

A human community is one very complex entity. We should fear those who try to guide this development because they will deform the organism, just as if a child were to be fitted at birth with a brace to straighten the natural and necessary curve in his spine or to force his skull into the shape found in a different ethnic group.

## 622.5 Something Like a Summary

I'll end with an observation about the current political and economic arguments which are going nowhere, leading us to neither deeper understandings nor to a courageous movement into the future, even if the courage has to be faked at first.

I'm claiming the situation is different from those who are pessimistic about the entire idea of government because we haven't done it right yet and those who hold the delusion that we just need to fine-tune our existing governments and they'll be fine. Our existing governments have failed to do what they should as our human communities of various sorts have grown more numerous, larger, and more complex. Moreover, those human communities and most individual human beings have failed to take notice of our promising and dangerous situation. Our communities have increasingly been co-opted by the central governments and we as individuals have preferred to remain within our comfort zones, assuming those fine men and women in Washington are dedicated to doing right by the United States and its citizens and leaving us free to enjoy our gadgets. In any case, we can't do better by 'designing better governments' or by 'reforming our current governments'. We have to take a deep breath, admit we've failed for now, and prepare for the hard work of moving towards a vaguely seen but plausible future, step by step. Don't ask me how to do this in detail. If I knew, I could design that better government for you and just tell you how to build it. I'm here to tell you that's the wrong way to go about the task.



## 623 Not the God of the Gaps Nor the God of the Singularities

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1416>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/10/08.]

In, *Bangs, Crunches, Whimpers, and Shrieks: Singularities and Acausalities in Relativistic Spacetimes* [31], John Earman, a philosopher of science, warns believers of some errors in efforts to localize God in space-time. The first warning has to do with causation:

So for Craig [W.L. Craig, a theistic philosopher apparently attempting to use the Big Bang to prove God's existence] the principle "Whatever begins to exist has a cause" applies to these [Big Bang] models. However, on Craig's reading this principle is not an obvious "metaphysical truth"; in particular, it is not a consequence of the widely held principle "Every event has a cause", which is satisfied in the FRW's big bang models without any help from the theists. [page 209; FRW = "Friedman-Robinson-Walker"]

In other words, there are philosophically distinct forms of cause-and-effect and I'll use this point as part of my effort to redirect attention to the general issues of being and away from misdirected efforts to see God's presence in particular events of an unusual or spectacular sort. By the way, this doesn't mean there are no logically coherent ways to argue from being to a Creator, only that there are some logically incoherent ways and we should avoid such. Such great thinkers as Aristotle and Maimonides and Aquinas have provided such arguments—better regarded as tests of coherence or rationality but that's another story. Those arguments should

at least implicitly respect knowledge of being in its concrete forms but those arguments cannot proceed directly from or be fully founded upon empirical thought, not even those highly disciplined forms of empirical thoughts we label as 'scientific'.

More generally, it's necessary to the living spirit of a civilization to develop a coherent understanding of being, but more is needed than the type of analysis done by scientists and many sorts of philosophers. That type of analysis plays a role but not usually the dominant role in a larger understanding of created being, of all of Creation.

Things, the most concrete forms of created being, are true and truth is thing-like. In other words, what exists must be accepted to be understood but not 'explained' as Newton explained momentum by writing down mathematical equations. Brain-scientists and physiologists and optical physicists deal with problems in human beings gathering true information about our world. Philosophers and theologians should be paying attention to those scientists and what they discover about, for example, human tendencies to see patterns in the most disordered of data. They should be paying attention to those scientists, indeed to all empirical researchers including historians and language scholars, but the very fact that we can identify and correct specific problems tells us there is no general 'knowledge problem'.

Both philosophers and theologians have the responsibility to first learn about what exists before talking about what exists. Christians can only talk about existence as a gift, something given by God. This holds in general for all of created being and in particular for their individual selves.

We Christians need to learn how to properly use scientific knowledge along with all other sorts of legitimate knowledge in our efforts to understand Creation. This is my how I'd advocate dealing with this issue:

1. God is His own act-of-being, the supreme act-of-being, and also the source of being for all of Creation.
2. From a certain limited viewpoint, the Old Testament covenants are a pre-scientific image of a God who moves His Creation along by way of laws given before the fact, laws which can be seen as binding Him only because He chose them as adequate for His purposes.
3. God should not be excluded from the story He's telling but He tells the story which is this world as a Creator God, the source of being, and

not as some pagan God throwing thunder-bolts and leading armies into battle in a world which somehow exists independently of Him.

Professor Earman has more to say which is worth paying attention to in this world in which so many accept or reject the God they wish to believe in or disbelieve in rather than taking revelation, natural and special, in the way it is presented. Earman notes:

Speaking purely personally now, it strikes me as bordering on the sacrilegious to see God's creative force as able to operate only at a singularity or ideal point. It is more to His glory if He operates everywhere and everywhen, and if He operates independently of such contingencies as whether there is an initial singularity and, if so, what type it is. Those who want to find God in the big bang should beware of falling into the trap of relegating God to the diminishing interstices left by modern science. Once the trap is recognized it is easy to escape using God's supernatural attributes. If there is no first instant for the physical universe or no prior physical time to the big bang at which God can operate, no matter. The Creator "may be conceived to exist in a metaphysical time" and "to exist temporally prior to the inception of physical time". [Quotes are from Craig's article "Professor Grünbaum on Creation", *Erkenntnis*, 40, 325-341.] The constraints of physics cannot bind the Creator. But precisely to the extent that a supernatural cause of the beginning of the universe does not have to answer to the constraints of nature, scientists qua scientists are entitled to ignore it. [page 209]

We Christians have failed to achieve a greater understanding of Creation and we have retreated from any claims that such a Christian understanding is possible. We have retreated from the stances of the likes of St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Isaac Newton, Blaise Pascal, and a handful of more recent thinkers who saw a true need for such a stance but failed to get even so far in the great work as did Newton and Pascal and certainly failed to follow Augustine and Aquinas in developing a more complete Christian understanding of Creation which was faithful to the Biblical and Creedal revelations while also integrating the best of empirical and speculative knowledge in a plausible way.

We endanger our faith and even endanger our relationship to God when we restrict the Almighty to being such at only points, such as singularities, where our understanding of reality seems to break down. He is Creator but He remains here as the most important character in the story and stories He's telling.

## 624 Why We Need a Christian Civilization?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1433>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/11/13.]

I've made the claim that the Christian Church itself is but one organ in the Body of Christ, though the most important and potentially most powerful organ. I would supplement that claim with another: the true power of the Church is dependent not upon external force but upon proper execution of Her duties of teaching those who are at least nominally within Her doors and evangelizing those who are without. The Church prays and worships; She teaches how to pray and worship, Who it is that we worship, and why we pay Him such respect.

I'll ignore the great complication, but no more than complication, of the various schisms in Christianity, some being historically driven schisms at some level of hierarchy and some involving more serious differences in theology or in understanding of Creation and its relationship, and our relationships, to God. This makes it hard to understand the Christian confusion on earth in terms of a pilgrim Church with a direct relationship to God, but only hard.

I'll also mention a somewhat new complication. There has been some tendency, increasingly strong in recent centuries, to see Jews as being on the road to salvation despite not having accepted Jesus Christ as the Messiah. The real issue within my developing worldview is the communal nature of Judaism. After all, I see this world as being the story of the birth and development of the Body of Christ which is the completion of the work accomplished by the Son of God in sacrificing Himself to the Father as an oblation of love. It is the People of Israel and not some collective of

individual Jews who are truly moving toward God, the People of Israel who are—at least at the level of human perception and conception—the parallel to the Christian Church rather than individual Jews being some sort of parallel to individual Christians.

There are more open questions than certain statements in any interesting exploration and analysis of God's Creation and of our relationships to Him. This is good, not because such questions bring us knowledge which we can then integrate into our minds but because our minds are formed by our acts of restating those questions properly as thoughts manifested by the Creator in the various realms of created being. Our good questions about revealed knowledge, speculative knowledge, and various sorts of empirical knowledge lead to larger and richer human minds, especially in the communal form of the human mind—the intellect.

The ultimate setting for an intellect, the largest possible domain in terms of human culture and individual minds, would be a civilization encompassing all of humanity. Some would say, the prior sentence should have 'pilgrim Church on earth' rather than 'civilization', but I've taken the different position that the various aspects of human life over which the Church's human servants have renounced complete authority—moral and spiritual authority over all human institutions still belongs to Her—are manifested and lived in institutions which are part of the Body of Christ but somewhat independent of the Church. Nothing in the Body of Christ can be independent of the entirety of that Body or of each individual member.

Let me state the implicit conclusion I just drew: the perfect and complete human civilization in this mortal realm would be one which is a balanced, honest, and creative response to all of God's revelations and also the explorable aspects of Creation as it can be understood by creatures such as us.

Now I shift momentarily to social insects.

Ants and other social insects are quite plausibly described by scientists such as E.O. Wilson, a founder of the discipline of sociobiology, as slaves to their DNA, or perhaps to the family line whose characteristics are encoded in their DNA—in this restatement, I'm proposing that DNA is more a glue than a substance. It's mostly correct to say that this makes those insects non-individualistic members of a community which is, typically a domineering sisterhood of neuters or a sisterhood of neuters dominated by a fertile mother. In the first case, the fertile mother exists but, more or less, as a slave of her daughters. There is a genetic basis for these two different

ant societies which the interested reader can find in Wilson's books on sociobiology, such as *Sociobiology, The Abridged Edition* [151], or in articles over the years published in magazines such as *Scientific American*.

I will now switch to my preferred term 'community' rather than 'society' for describing human communal entities, just because it seems more usefully general.

There are examples of slave societies, such as the Mameluks of Islamic history. The Mameluks were non-Arab warriors purchased as slaves by Arabs. You can find a description of the Mameluks at <http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Mameluk>. They formed a warrior caste whose members were typically of higher status than free-born Muslims, but the Mameluks were in theory and to a large extent in fact subordinated absolutely to their caste as a whole. This can be seen, at least by me, as a human society resembling in some ways ant societies but far from completely because, while education and training would have inculcated the Mameluk-attitude, there was a necessary external pressure to conform rather than conformance being a part of the basic nature of the member as is true of ants and other social insects. More generally, the caste was defined by other than genetic relationships though most Mameluks were captured from a relatively small number of ethnic groups, typically Christians.

Recent science-fiction television series, and probably movies, have included such societies as a 1984-ish bogey. This is a very unlikely development of the human race, not because of some idealistic understanding of man but because of man's strategies and skills for survival and reproduction. We are individualists in a sense but mostly small-group creatures. By 'small-group', I mean simply that concrete, hand-to-hand, mouth-to-ear, relationships—based on genetic or gene-proxy relationships—are the foundation of any larger human communities. Human communities form from smaller units which are then formed from individuals who retain some of the good and bad characteristics of that implausibly free-standing individual of American myth and libertarian ideology.

I've grossly oversimplified by claiming "Human societies form from smaller units which are then formed from individuals." In fact, individuals and various communal groupings of human beings, such as teen-agers or young mothers or members of a crafts group or local politicians or lawyers, form various groups in all sorts of combinations of individual and group relationships. Larger-scale societies are complex networks drawn from this entire mess. The mess is certainly interesting and a mere hint as to why

E.O. Wilson rightly claims that understanding the biological and social nature of man is a problem orders of magnitude greater than those of physics.

The problem with sociobiologists is that they see men clearly in terms of the evolutionary past but have an understanding of men as they have now are and that leads to a serious misunderstanding of possible futures for the human race and a similar misunderstanding of men in their relationship to being or ‘created being’ in my usage.

What do I propose instead? In Chapter 472, *Why Does Time Move Only Forward?: Once Upon a Time...*, I wrote a highly summarized version of my understanding of human nature:

What is the relationship between a world [unified and coherent and complete] and a person as I understand them? A creature such as a human being is born a particular sort of physical animal and is more or less invited implicitly by his surroundings (and perhaps explicitly by his Creator) to start shaping himself by response to those surroundings. Human communities play an important role as the centuries go by, developing broader and deeper understandings of those surroundings, perhaps even coming to view that physical entity which we call the ‘universe’.

I also wrote:

The overall narrative by which this concrete realm, this universe, moves forward is what makes it a world, unified and coherent and complete. The overall narrative by which we concrete human beings move forward can make us persons, unified and coherent and complete.

The narrative, which is the movement into the future in our world, is as fundamental as the entities and relationships studied by physicists and other physical scientists. It cannot be reduced out of our understanding of this world. It cannot be explained by way of the field equation of general relativity or by Schrodinger’s equation in quantum mechanics. In fact, I would suggest that many physical laws, many physical entities, are what they are because of their role as the ‘stuff’ of a particular narrative.

Find the story of our universe, or at least a plausible story given our current knowledge. That is the world. At least to a

Christian who intends to be a member of the Body of Christ and perhaps to a Jew intending to be a member of Israel, that story is also him, her, us and—expanded properly—that story is the story of all of Creation.

A perfected and completed civilization would be the form and substance of a perfected and completed human race acting and thinking and feeling along with the Creator as He goes about His work. This is a description of the Body of Christ, at least to a sacramental Christian. It's the description of a human race at peace with itself and its members, individual and communal, and also at peace with Creation and with God Himself. It's an ideal but one which can guide us in forming communities which are morally and spiritually well-ordered as well as being appropriately rich and complex in cultural areas, artistic and intellectual.

It is Christianity, the religion in which God is both three Persons and also a community of perfect unity, the religion in which the Son of God is incarnate in His own Creation, which can give us such a view of a civilization, one which can be seen ultimately to be a view of the world of those resurrected to live with Jesus Christ for time without end.



## 625 What Would Madame Bovary Make of Heaven?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1462>. It was finished and uploaded on 2012/12/07.]

I read somewhere, in a far distant spacetime, that Medieval theologians had a one-line joke: Heaven and Hell are the same place. An inch-millisecond ago by cosmological standards, circa 1900, Albert Jay Nock left the Episcopal priesthood and later said it was partly because he couldn't see that many human beings had much in the way of life in them in this mortal realm and couldn't see how such creatures could possibly enjoy life without end. Need I add that Mark Twain claimed he couldn't imagine a Heaven consistent with Christian beliefs where Americans would be happy.

In terms of theology, I have a quibble or two with each statement but no substantial problem with the main messages, very much overlapping though I'm sure Nock and Twain would have put in their interesting two bits. God can save who He will but it's not so easy to imagine that everyone, even some very nice men and women, could be happy in Heaven according to Christian beliefs, or Jewish beliefs for that matter.

In various writings, I've made substantially the same claim by stating that Heaven isn't an everlasting DisneyWorld, a place where passive pleasure-seekers can enjoy just the right mixture of nice foods and nice shows and nice rides for time without end. To enjoy Heaven, a human being would have to be a member of the Body of Christ, the perfected and completed community of all human beings who are God-centered, though I admit to not being able to define that term since I know pious men and women who seem bereft of true love or any other passion but perhaps the desire to feel good about themselves and I know skeptics or atheists who

have a profound piety though seemingly directed to entities or communities in Creation rather than to the Creator.

I will not claim to be able to identify those who will enjoy Heaven but I will claim that merely entering into Heaven will likely be a frightening and disorienting experience even for those who truly love God.

As is my inclination, I was stirred by a current reading to write about thoughts which I've been playing with for months. *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert is a strange book to those not fully inebriated upon the modernist sensibility. The strangeness is fully embodied in the title character.

Madame Emma Bovary, wife of a country doctor named Charles Bovary, was born into a prosperous farm family and was apparently well-educated in a convent school to perhaps the pre-college level in some subset of the liberal arts. She could play the piano well, had some true literacy, and showed life only in response to events which are legitimate but quite optional parts of some human lives, such as a ball at the home of a rich aristocrat. She had no real appreciation for music, being almost literally a hairless ape who had been trained to strike skillfully at piano keys in certain patterns. She showed no more appreciation for literature. Even as a mother. . . She farmed her daughter out to a wet-nurse and was mostly annoyed by the young girl after taking her back into her dysfunctional home.

She was much like that morally insane American who so obsessed Hermann Melville, though he chose to write a book about a more courageous and honest version than the typical American or Madame Bovary. Captain Ahab knew he was in rebellion against Creation and he pushed forward in that rebellion to his own willful destruction. He knew he had an inside, a stew of desires and views of what was right and wrong, and he had no intention of surrendering to reality, to making peace with a Creation not to his standards, let alone shaping his thoughts and feelings and actions to accord with what the Almighty had created.

Madame Bovary, the younger, was different in that she seemed to honestly believe she could pursue desires in conflict with her moral character, her family life, her social life, and so forth, and attain those desires without doing great harm to herself or those she cared about, at least in an occasional and mostly self-indulgent way. (To be fair, she first took up her corrupt ways after being seduced rather forcefully by a country squire of sorts whose life seems to have followed the general pattern of Flaubert's.)

The book, *Madame Bovary*, ends sadly and a bit ambiguously, especially

regarding the state of Monsieur Bovary's moral and cognitive and spiritual state. At least ambiguity seems to have been intended by the author and probably seen by most readers. I don't think there is so much ambiguity in Madame Bovary's deathbed scene when she grabbed the crucifix from the priest's hand and planted upon the corpus of Jesus Christ the most passionate kiss of her life.

There is a romantic group in Christianity, those who believe that Heaven can be won with a single decision, a great flood of passion coming at but an instant. That flood can even occur on the deathbed after a life of systematic sinning, murdering, stealing, sadistic abuse of other human beings. Only God knows for sure, but I wouldn't count on that being a possibility after you've sinned to your greatest extent. If Hitler had surrendered and confessed to the errors of his ways, if he had promised a life of repentance, would we have believed him? Some take William the Conqueror's deathbed conversion, his repentance, seriously. After a life of killing and looting and even castrating his conquered enemies, he becomes God's good servant. As some would say, "Right." He might have convinced me if he had repented when he was still young enough and robust enough to act as he was truly inclined to do. It would have led to a gradual, long, painful process of reshaping himself.

Until we're in Heaven, if we are resurrected to be the comrades of Jesus Christ, we won't know, not about ourselves and not about William the Conqueror or Hitler or the lesser sinners such as the real-life Madame Bovarys. But, if we are to do our duty of guidance of our own selves and others around us, we must do our best to attain some serious understanding of this matter.

This all leads me to consider the meaning of that Medieval joke—Heaven and Hell are the same place—in light of my understanding of Creation and further leads me on to a claim I made years ago: the saved will be those capable of enjoying Heaven.

Who can enjoy Heaven? What could that mean? Wouldn't anyone wish to go to Heaven? Certainly, in the story told by most Christians, we're all gifted at our conception with some sort of immortality and we each go to Heaven or Hell. Given that choice...

But all such stories should be evaluated given not only the Biblical promises but also the best possible understanding of human animals, of living creatures in general, of spacetime and matter, of history and the other sorts of stories we tell about ourselves and our world, of music and the

ways in which we build houses and factories and temples. Theologians and philosophers should take on their vocations of firming up certain truths, however poorly we can state them, about revelation and being. Those stories have to be told in terms of the best, most exact, understandings we have of human beings and their world, even the entirety of Creation now that we have better knowledge and intellectual tools to start understanding the full spectrum of created being, abstract to concrete.

I'll quickly return to discuss the case of Madame Bovary and Gustave Flaubert himself, according to some quips he made and some of the events of his life.

The problem with Madame Bovary from the standpoint of a rational Christian anthropology is that she lived inside of herself, a sometime torrid stew of dreams and desires, though in her earlier years, her insides had been a somewhat calmer stew of 'rich-peasant' and Catholic-school dreams and desires. Even when Madame Bovary seems to have accepted grace, passionately kissing the crucifix on her deathbed, we have to wonder what was really happening. Was she all of a sudden embedded in God's Creation, acknowledging she was truly a creature of created being, a manifested thought of God? Or was she still a free-standing modern individualist looking out upon a world which existed to be used for self-defined purposes and to self-centered goals?

Let me use a method of argumentation which traditionalists use (properly in some cases) as much as Marxists use it (improperly in nearly all cases). Let me appeal to the words of men truly deserving the respect due to sages. Let me quote words both profoundly insightful regarding the current state of Western man and also prophetic. These two men come from the Jewish tradition but I think there to be much that is shared, especially in this matter, by Jewish and Christian traditions.

First, in response to those who take too seriously the passionate deathbed conversions of fiction and history (Emma Bovary and William the Conqueror), I'll quote Abraham Joshua Heschel from *God in Search of Man* [71]:

[T]he essence of religion does not lie in the satisfaction of a human need. As long as man sees religion as a source of satisfaction for his own needs, it is not God who he serves but his own self. [page 350]

On the same page, Heschel somewhat restates the claim: “The purpose of religion is not to satisfy the needs we feel but to create in us the need of serving ends, of which we otherwise remain oblivious.”

God doesn’t exist to serve us, though He offered to serve us if we enter His community—for my current efforts, it matters not if we understand that community as the People of Israel or the Christian Church and I tend to think both are part of the Body of Christ though some Jews might not like that way of putting it. In important ways, God truly serves the Body composed of His friends and servants; by so serving, God serves each of the members of that Body. At the same time, it’s also true that God, as Creator, serves in some significant sense all that He created—to His ends and for His pleasure. But God as Creator serves all the lilies of the field and the beasts of the forest. If you submit to God’s ‘servitude’ in only this way, you might be headed to the same permanent grave as those lilies and beasts.

I’ll quote another Jewish thinker of great insight and wisdom, Jacob Neusner from his book *Judaism in the Matrix of Christianity*:

In the Western Protestant tradition of Edwards and Schleiermacher we take it for granted that emotions speak for the private individual, not the nation. In the tradition of philosophy from the Greeks onward, moreover, emotions speak not rationally but irrationally. This other view, that of the ancient sages (a view that is also gaining currency in contemporary philosophy and psychology), sees the matter differently. It regards emotions as artifacts of culture and conceives that emotions lay down judgments. They therefore emerge as rational, public, and social, speaking not only for the individual but also to him or her. Feelings, too, define modes of symbolic behavior, as noted. When we examine the doctrine of emotions in the canonical writings of formative Judaism, we enter a world to which it is self-evident that feeling is subject to law and emotion is a matter of lesson and tradition. [page 51]

Red-hot passions, soaking in one’s own holy juices, can be a step toward God and toward a membership in the Body (Church and People) composed of those to be saved. As the individual human intelligence must be disciplined to an intellect appropriate to that Body, and appropriate to some

civilization of this mortal realm on this side of death, so our feelings and emotions must be disciplined to the forms of feelings and emotions which are—as Barzun said of intellect relative to (individual) intelligence—the communal and capitalized form of individual feelings and emotions. (See Chapter 127, *Intelligence vs. Intellect*.)

The issue is still greater than feelings and even wider than feelings and mind. Our actions also have to be disciplined to the law and the tradition, however we define those. I discussed this in another essay earlier this year: Chapter 282, *Do We Need Heart and Hands as Well as Mind to Understand Reality?*

The conclusion is that Madame Bovary would be able to enjoy Heaven, she would be suited to salvation, to the extent that she could and would become a true member of the community of those who are true friends of God, a community that we Christians believe to include Jesus Christ, both man and God, creature and Son of Mary as well as God and Son of the Father. If God and Heaven remained objects of Madame Bovary's passions, Heaven would be Hell for her.

# 626 Losing Our Liberty by Losing Our Religion?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1537>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/02/18.]

I don't think we ever had our religion in the United States, at least not a true Biblical religion. From an early period, immigrants to this country considered themselves largely freed of the traditions of their home countries, including their Christian traditions. They thought to retain the title of 'Christian' without letting anyone tell them what they had to believe or do as a Christian.

Jacques Barzun discussed a more general version of this American trait in *The House of Intellect* [7] by first acknowledging that:

We [in the United States] have in fact intelligence in plenty and we use it perhaps more widely than other nations, for we apply it with praiseworthy innocence to parts of life elsewhere ruled by custom or routine. [page 4]

But there is more to the human mind than our thoughts as individuals. In fact, none of us, not even an Augustine or a Newton or a Goethe, can accomplish much without a different form of intelligence which Barzun described in these words:

Intellect is the capitalized and communal form of live intelligence; it is intelligence stored up and made into habits of discipline, signs and symbols of meaning, chains of reasoning and spurs to emotion—a shorthand and a wireless by which the mind can skip connectives, recognize ability, and communicate

truth. Intellect is at once a body of common knowledge and the channels through which the right particle of it can be brought to bear quickly, without the effort of redemonstration, on the matter in hand. [page 4]

As Barzun tells us, and as I discuss a little more in Chapter 127, *Intelligence vs. Intellect*, Americans have far less intellect than individual intelligence. Most of us don't consider this communal form of intelligence to be very important and, as a consequence, have only partial human minds. Even those of us who have struggled to develop a truer intellect have a bit of strangeness about us: as a thinker, I'm in conversation with a lot of dead human beings, individual and communal, and a fair number of non-Christians or even anti-Christians through their books. Even as I try to redevelop a respect for community, especially that ultimate community—the Body of Christ, I'm isolated. I'm active in many ways in my family and my parish, but so far as my mental life goes: I'm a hermit of the sort I would preach against.

Our radical individualism, a disease in my view and one spreading across the world even as we become enslaved radical individuals, is an indication of the anti-Biblical views which underly American forms of religion, even those forms labeled 'fundamental Christianity' or 'Biblical Christianity'. The Bible speaks of the formation of a people, described as 'Israel' in the Old Testament and 'Church' or 'the Body of Christ' in the New Testament. Religions true to the Bible, Jewish or Christian, can't co-exist with that individualism which is so deeply a part of the American soul.

There are many concerned about the possible loss of liberty in the West as our central governments react to real and exaggerated and imaginary problems by building the pieces of police states. The critics of our political and economic systems might, and sometimes do, claim this loss of liberty has come about because the mass of citizens in the West have largely lost their ties to the Christian faith which was the source of so much good in the political history of the West. In a way, this is what has happened but the more clearly stated truth, as I've already partially stated, is: our ancestors developed a defective liberty in the United States even as they walked into the wilderness and left behind their Christian beliefs and any attachments they had to one or another cultures which were part of Western Civilization.

[I'm jumping over many rough spots in this essay. The reader wishing a deeper understanding of these issues should read or reread Ortega y Gasset's

*Revolt of the Masses* [60] where a coherent position is presented: the masses of peoples of Europe were freed from parochial lives and limited viewpoints during the years of revolution, French and Industrial and so forth, but were never integrated more completely into Western Civilization. This is a very complicated story which can only be told by way of iterations and complex loops over a variety of historical and theological and metaphysical and sociological and political analyses. And more.]

Having grown up in liberal Protestantism, the modern Congregational Church no longer of the Puritans, I knew little of the doctrines of traditional Christianity. Even the Trinitarian doctrine was sung once each Sunday and then ignored in sermons and Sunday School lessons as if a little embarrassing to an American with any common sense. So far as I could tell, the adults in the congregation were mostly good and decent men and women who were Christians by way of a momentum rapidly dying away. I suspect they thought Jesus was both holy and a good man and we should all try to be more like him. But he probably didn't walk on water and we shouldn't try that either, though it's as good a story as *Puss in Boots*. Few of those in my Sunday School classes remained practicing Christians once they were old enough to decide on their own. Having since entered the Catholic Church, I've come to realize that American Catholics are simply American Protestants who practice strange magical rituals and lag behind their Protestant brothers by a generation or so as we all march into the Brave New World.

American Christians, both Protestants and Catholics, have, to my observation, been accepting of the political and historical myths of this country but also have been quite skeptical about some major portion of the Gospel as understood and preached by traditional Christians. We accept that American leaders would never engage in criminal conspiracies against their own country and citizenry but we have serious doubts about the divinity of Jesus Christ. FDR was infallible in ordaining how this country was to care for its elderly but we Americans know it's absurd to claim that guy over in Rome could be infallible in any way. As for that Catholic and Orthodox business about bread becoming the Body of God and wine becoming His Blood, well, cubes of Wonder bread and shot-glasses of grape-juice are easier to swallow.

We take sides in the arguments about the orthodoxy of the Founding Fathers without having a clue about the true meaning of 'orthodox beliefs', but we're raised to walk to the fridge during commercial breaks and to

similarly exercise our wills by forming opinions which are then defended as if we did know what we're talking about. Americans have been, and are, quite dismissive of any understanding of the Sacraments which admit any objective, real-world effect. They tend to think of Heaven as a place for hordes of individuals to gather for worship of God and a generally good time of a well-behaved sort. The Body of Christ is no more than a term to designate that gathering of individuals. It isn't a real entity. Christ is head of that Body in the way the American President is head of a collection of 300 million individualists.

In between my youth as a Congregationalist and my entry into the Catholic Church, I was a practicing Evangelical Protestant in a very good church community in the Atlanta area. I took away the impression that even Baptism is a mere sign and the real act of becoming a Christian occurs when we accept the Lord Jesus as our savior. Despite an official position that we can be saved only by God's grace, American Evangelicals actually believe it is the public profession of our will to be saved that saves us. We Americans save our own individualistic selves.

In past essays, I've written about the tendency in the modern West to consider will as dominant over the mind. That tendency seeming to have begun with the radical Franciscan theologians at Oxford in the 14th century or so. Let me switch to the trio of mind, heart, and hands. As the Protestant rebellion against sacramental Christianity gathered steam along with similar rebellions inside the Catholic Church, mind and hands were both denigrated compared to heart, which would have been a disciplined heart in the thoughts of that radical Franciscan, William of Ockham, as well as in the thoughts of Calvin and Luther and various Catholic thinkers. In fact, mind and hands play a role in disciplining the heart. From my current view as a Monday morning quarterback, it's hardly surprising that the wills of Western men have become rather flabby things capable only of soggy sentiments and corrupt desires. By now, this is also true of American Catholics and certainly American Episcopalians and probably Orthodox living in the United States. Indeed, this spiritual disease, this metastatic growth of an undisciplined will, seems to be little more in practice than an acquiescence to whatever our leaders tell us to think and feel and do. That is what we choose to will. I don't think old George could have dreamed up the particulars of this Orwellian nightmare.

Without a well-disciplined Christian mind to shape itself and also guide the shaping of heart and hands, without Christian hands well-formed to

good habits to actually deal with what lies outside of us, heart becomes a dangerous thing. It can become a little demon in our chests, whispering or roaring the Satanic desire: I will to control what is me and what is not me. The more cowardly of us might just think: I'll eat and drink and smoke whatever appeals to me, and watch a lot of television.

In Chapter 219, *What is Freedom?*, I said:

In the modern world, we tend to think of freedom in terms of satisfying desires. To be sure, even many who live for that false sort of freedom seem to realize that we then become no more than our desires or, more horribly, the thwarting of those desires—a terrible and humiliating state in either case. Hannibal the Cannibal is the most free of all modern men because he has become his desires and he has gained the power to satisfy them. Hannibal the Cannibal is the role-model for our politicians and our lawyers, our investment bankers and our corporate executives, our athletes and our entertainers. He may even be a role-model for many clergymen.

We can restore Christianity worthy of the name only if we try to heal our entire selves, mind and heart and hands, with the mind of the creative trailblazers necessarily taking a primary and guiding role, but other parts and other human beings should be quickly joining in. In fact, I'm beginning to fear it will take the fresh minds of a new generation freed from our school systems and mass entertainment to follow any who might be trailblazers. [Be careful. We heal our selves only by shaping those selves by way of active responses to God's Creation, not by concentrating too much on our own selves or a human leader. We and our leaders are part of what we should respond to, but only part.]

It's hardly surprising to me that many in the United States have decided it's not worthwhile to even pretend they are Christians or Jews when the guy with the clipboard comes by to measure the American soul, but some, including insightful and learned scholars and critics, see more true Christianity in the American past than I do. *Liberty Fund* has published on one of its websites, <http://www.libertyfund.org>, this different take on this issue: *The "Nones" and American Liberty* at <http://www.libertylawsite.org/2013/02/17/the-nones-and-american-liberty/>. It is a highly intelligent perspective

worth the read even if my view is more plausible, as I believe it to be. Near the end of that essay, we find this quote from Tocqueville which, in terms of Eric Voegelin's critique of the modern world, recommends we turn and start crawling back up the slippery slope, maybe halfway up would be good:

So it is that every day it [American democracy which glorifies equality] renders the employment of free will less useful and more rare; it confines the action of the will in a smaller space and little by little steals the very use of free will from each citizen. Equality has prepared men for all these things; it has disposed them to tolerate them and often even to regard them as a benefit.

I have a great deal of respect for Tocqueville and we should remember he wrote these words as a young man in a Brave New World where he had to develop new forms of perception and new tools of analysis even as he was exploring the newly revealed landscape and soulscape. Yet, I don't see how a return to a Christianity based on a mutilated human nature, "Will is what will save us," can help much. Tocqueville in these words, part of a critique of democracy, was speaking of a will (a part of what I call 'heart') which had weakened exactly because it had been glorified over mind and hands and too much had been expected of that will. Even more important than the excessive expectations is the fact that the American understanding of Christian man glorifies a mutilated human being and such creatures could never establish stable moral order, the basis of other sorts of order in our political and economic and cultural lives. Nor can such creatures be comfortable with a truer form of Christianity, sacramental in outlook and Sacramental in liturgical practice.

This is the optimistic viewpoint: God is smashing what we've misbuilt and our grandchildren will have a chance to build a better Christian civilization. There is still the small chance, getting smaller rapidly, that we will stir up enough creative turmoil that we can revive and reform Western Civilization. I'm not counting on it though I'm ever hopeful that I'm only one of many who are beginning to work to that goal. I wouldn't think it possible to have any revival from inside the power structures or academic institutions or ecclesiastical institutions of the West. Individuals inside the power structures and institutions might participate but those structures and institutions will struggle to survive by suppressing reforms. At this point,

I can recommend Carroll Quigley's *The Evolution of Civilization* [119] for a discussion of these latter issues and for short narratives of two times when Western Civilization did manage to pull out of a collapse to become greater than it had been. Not entirely by coincidence, this book has been republished by *Liberty Fund*, a good organization if a bit biased toward an excessively individualistic viewpoint.



# 627 Grace Working Toward Christ-like Man by Way of Evolution

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1540>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/02/20.]

I've claimed that we can see the world, at least after Jesus Christ's ascension to His Father, as being the story of the growth and development of the Body of Christ, including the evolution and development of the organs of that Body. We can read the main purposes of God as Creator out of this story, not just purposes regarding the physical stuff around us but even our moral obligations to each other.

To realize God's purposes for us, we need to more strongly intend membership in the Body of Christ, that is, we need to move toward that membership, making God's purposes our own as best we can. This sort of a Christian viewpoint complicates, even fundamentally changes, a Christian's movement toward salvation. The Body of Christ is the communal us in full union with Jesus Christ. That Body is alive in this mortal realm, developing and growing, sinning as well as working for the good.

We need to act as morally courageous individuals, but we Christians, Jews as well, are communal beings as well as individuals. We Christians travel together in the Body of Christ. Since we can't be sure who is truly in that Body, not even our own selves, then we must treat all human beings as being members or at least as being potential recruits before their mortal lives are ended. This doesn't mean we need to be squishy toward others, forgiving when we have no right to forgive. It doesn't mean we should give up our right to legitimate defense of ourselves or others under our care,

though there are some other and more plausible arguments for a radically non-resistant attitude in Christians.

Let me try to deal with a specific moral question: What responsibilities do we have toward those who can't care for themselves? Do we have any responsibilities toward those who seem to be missing some of the attributes of human nature, not being able to socialize or perhaps being stuck in a coma with few signs of brain activity because of an accident or because they were born without some major brain regions? Can we serve God by fighting against the mechanisms of evolution as God ordained them to be in this sometime nasty world? Do we want those with low IQs or the impulsive tendencies of criminals to leave behind children and grandchildren? If such human creatures survive to a long life in this world, can they enjoy their years in the way of a true human being? Should we be extending charity to those who have problems and may well produce children with similar problems?

I discussed the relationship between progressives and eugenics programs which sterilize those declared "defective" in Chapter 132, *Progressives as Typical Modern Thinkers*, but I didn't try to address the issue of natural selection. Are we fighting God's story when we keep alive those who clearly wouldn't be able to survive on their own in, say, a radically individualistic civilization? Not that I think such a civilization could ever form.

There are various lines of analysis which can lead to possibly consistent answers to this sort of questions. Some of those answers draw a line in the sand—on this side, human, but not human on the other side. Some of those answers, Christian or Jewish, find it difficult to exclude any creature which might be human. In fact, there is a rule at least as ancient as the first generation of Christians: we should treat any creature which might be human as if it were fully human. Even if the creature is missing much of a human brain and is incapable of even moving toward food, we should care for him and treat him with the respect we wish for our own intact selves.

I'm raising this somewhat complex question, which I've asked in slightly different forms before, only to say we should contemplate possible answers but realize there is no way to provide an answer which all men will accept. This is the story God chose to tell: that of the Son of God emptying Himself of His divinity to live as a creature, to enjoy life, to suffer, to die in a humiliating and painful way, and to be raised from the grave as a perfect union of God and man that He might ascend to the world of the resurrected to one day be reunited in the Body of Christ with all of those He chooses

to be His friends and companions, part of His own Body, for time without end. Suffering is part of that story. Some can't accept that an all-good Creator would create realms of being in which suffering plays a major and necessary role. Some have defective but seeming rational reasons and some have merely allowed their feelings to be deformed by a squeamishness masquerading as compassion. Most of these dissenters against the Christian position about the goodness of this world of both pleasure and suffering have good motives, however defective their reasoning or their feeling. We need to respect these Christians of wavering faith as well as the many non-Christians. We need to evangelize them properly and we need to start by realizing that we modern Christians as a community have no good story in which the sufferings of Jesus Christ, the sufferings of a child with inoperable brain cancer, biological evolution, and Christian beliefs come together as other than a pagan tragedy. We have mostly ungrounded assertions, largely drawn from past centuries when they might have been grounded in premodern understandings of this world and what might lie beyond it.

We are saved as members of that Body and not as individuals. We can understand a little better what that Body is by learning from the works of evolutionary biologists studying the social natures of living creatures, especially human beings: see Chapter 286, *A Christian Sociobiology*, for a very preliminary effort to adopt sociobiological concepts into Christian thought. After all, the Body of Christ first forms as a community in this mortal realm, a community of mortal men not yet fully in union with Jesus Christ.

Communities are real and have been made real by the processes described by evolutionary biologists doing sociobiological analyses. Communities are real and aren't just ways of speaking about gatherings of individuals, as I argued recently in the essay included as Chapter 178, *Are Communities a Form of Created Being?*, where I wrote:

We modern believers in a radical and incoherent individualism deny too easily our raw perceptions of communal entities. We ignore the underlying being which can't be explained to any significant extent by assembling our understanding of the constituent members and other parts. This is strange on the part of sacramental Christians; after all, some of the special bonds coming down to unite man and woman as a married couple, individuals as a Church, and mortal men as sharers of God's life

are brought about by those acts we call Sacraments. The more general, less special bonds are still knowable as the glue of a sacramental world.

Communities are for real, not just at the level of civilizations or of that ultimate community, a supernatural civilization of sorts: the Body of Christ. Marriages are real and not just contractual relationships; extended families are for real; towns and churches and synagogues and ethnic clubs and associations of scientists or lawyers are communities of real being and not just gatherings of individuals. We become members of communities, not just for defense against real or imaginary enemies, not just to sell pickup trucks and hamburgers to each other, not even just to form communities of worship. We become members of communities to become part of each other by becoming each the entire community in the small, so that the community can become each of us in the large. As God is three Persons in one God, we will ultimately be many human persons in one Body of Christ, billions of human beings in one perfect Man, made perfect because Jesus Christ is one of us.

Except for Jesus Christ, we men are all incomplete and defective. Not a one of us can claim to be more than a tiny and badly defective part of that complete and perfect man, but God will make up the shortfall for each and every man or woman or child He chooses to bring into the Body of Christ. We become complete and perfect by drawing upon each other in forming the one man, most of all by drawing upon our Lord Jesus Christ. Even Jesus Christ has chosen to be incomplete in a strong sense. He chose to become fully a member of a race of social mammals and will ever love those who are His own. He needs us, in a different way than we need Him, and He chose to need us. But He needs us to complete His Body in the world of the resurrected.

We are infinitely more defective than the human nature of the Son of God, infinitely less complete than is that divine Person. In context, a young boy with a severe form of Muscular Dystrophy that prevents normal paths of human development isn't so bad compared to the greatest of men. I don't know that little boy will be taken up to Heaven but I don't have a good reason to believe he won't. He is one of God's creatures, a member of a race of creatures adopted by God, and we should treat him as such. A human community extrapolated to some state of perfection and completeness looks an awful lot like a gathering of Christ-like men and women, perhaps

sheltering some who could never attain a mature state of humanity. It takes only a morally well-ordered Christian imagination to go from apes only a little reluctant to kill other members of their own species to that Christ-like man. After all, part of that imaginative journey lies in the past and is being actively studied by a variety of evolutionary biologists, anthropologists, archaeologists, narrative historians working with the scant evidence before the invention of writing, and others. We have those parts of the story to add to the Bible and more modern history.

Christians need to understand this mortal realm with all its pain and suffering. We need also to understand the strangeness of strong social bonds and moral behaviors developing in this world red of tooth and claw. Strange or not, it has happened and it's a more complete theory of biological evolution, a theory we can only see vaguely for now, which ties Christian moral and social thought firmly to God's Creation so long as we honestly deal with the fact that the man who is descended from ape-like creatures is the same man who is said to be the image of God.

After all, grace can be seen, in part, as the energy driving God's story toward the fullness of the Body of Christ. Christian thinkers need to reshape their minds to God's thoughts, their hearts to God's feelings, their hands to God's ways of doing things. Then, evolutionary biology and Christian theology aren't in irreconcilable conflict; rather are they two different views of God's acts as Creator.

I have come by an indirect path to one of the most important principles of Christian thought:

Grace doesn't destroy or replace nature. Grace perfects and completes nature.

This is, or should be, the goal of the Christian intellect, the capitalized and communal mind of Christians: to explain all that God has created in terms of what God has created, terms in principle accessible to the human mind which can shape itself to the manifested thoughts of God. We explain Creation, the thoughts God chose to manifest, in terms we learn by studying Creation in light of our small stock of revelations.

The perverse problem created by human thinkers, Christian and non-Christian, is that of explaining what we can explore and analyze and know in terms of supposedly more certain truths, maybe even absolutely certain truths. If we recognize abstract realms as also being part of the Creation

God has given to man, then we start exploring reality as reality and understanding reality becomes simply the problem of reshaping our minds to the reality which is, after all, the manifestation of certain thoughts of God.

As Christians understand this story, God wishes us to form communities on the way to the formation of the Body of Christ. Those who are “defective” by the standards of progressivists or others are to be brought into our communities and cared for if at all possible.

Yet, we should be aware that the laws of genetics and the processes of evolution aren’t to be denied in this mortal realm and we Christians need more than others to study such fields as sociobiology, at a professional level, that we might arrive at better, more technical, more exact understandings of what is really happening as the human race continues to evolve along with other species and within the context of the changing ecological environments and rapidly changing human communities.

Coming to an understanding of our moral duties as children of God doesn’t automatically tell us how to live our individual and communal lives. We do need to understand Creation, in its own terms, terms we can study as physicists and historians and novelists and theologians and carpenters and nurses.

# 628 Becoming Child-like in Our Thinking

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1543>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/02/21.]

We were told by Jesus of Nazareth that we must become like children to enter Heaven. We must become ‘child-like’ and not ‘childish’.

As creatures of mind and heart and hands, how can we become child-like? Wouldn’t that mean we would think as a child, feel as a child, and act as a child? That doesn’t seem right. It would seem to be strongly opposed to my advocacy of a sophisticated effort to understand God’s Creation.

In the distinction I’m drawing, to be child-like doesn’t mean we’re to be like children in all ways, doesn’t mean we should be childish. Jesus didn’t command us to throw tantrums when we don’t get a desert after dinner every night nor did He command us to repeatedly try to understand modern empirical knowledge by the imposing traditional frameworks of knowledge upon a world described by quantum physics and evolutionary biology and a decidedly non-idealistic view of human history.

What in the world did Jesus mean by commanding us to be child-like if we are to be saved, if we are to enter the world of the resurrected? I’ve given the answer often in my writings with regard to our attitudes toward what God has created, what lies inside of us and also outside of us. I’ve generally written in terms of a Christian needing to deny epistemology as a legitimate philosophical specialty, though it’s certainly necessary for physiologists and brain-scientists and instrument designers to study these problems of knowledge denied to philosophers. And it is good for philosophers to be aware of the distortions and biases and weaknesses of the human visual system, also aware of the ways in which we can compensate.

Reading *On Certainty*, a collection of aphorisms by Ludwig Wittgenstein, has put a new light on this issue. As if trying to comment upon the commandment of Jesus, Wittgenstein expends some effort to make it clear that our knowledge starts in childhood with a naive acceptance of what adults tell us and what we see in the world around us. This is not a pure credulity but rather a form of naivetè which is a matter of trust. In fact, it seems to me that Wittgenstein systematically strips away the pretensions of doubt in modern philosophy and creates a photographic negative of what might be called 'naive realism' in a Thomistic context—at least as Gilson understood the thoughts of St. Thomas Aquinas. (This was the area where Gilson disagreed with his friend Jacques Maritain to the extent of claiming Maritain wasn't a true follower of St. Thomas Aquinas.)

This is the meaning of 'naive realism' in that Thomistic context: we are to be child-like in accepting what we perceive as being truthful. It may need some unraveling and some analysis, maybe we'll need to design some instruments, before we can make total sense of those perceptions, but the truth can be found by way of those perceptions seen in light of a small stock of direct revelations, and even those are given to us as the sounds and sights accessible to creatures with ears and eyes and no organs that see into transcendental regions.

A child explores the world directly around him but learns about the greater parts of the world from adults, directly or by drawing out the assumptions underlying the statements of adults. The essence of the adult's statement that the earth is round is accepted as being a matter of truth and the young boy destined to be a philosopher or theoretical physicist will, at some point, wonder at the claim and maybe stare at the globe he got for Christmas and ask why people in Australia don't fall off the earth. Even children with lesser talents in abstract reasoning will, as time goes on, learn that raw truth often requires some effort to be understood in a deeper way so that it can be integrated into the child's greater understanding. It might take many years before the child advances to a more sophisticated naivetè, but it usually happens.

What other option do human children really have? Those who try to honestly impose upon reality some inner scheme will be seen as mentally disturbed, maybe diagnosed as being psychotic in the way of schizophrenia. Yet, many of us modern people are schizophrenic in many of our ways of thought, including our teachers and spiritual leaders and writers and so forth. This is one reason for many throwing away their faith. They walk

away from Christianity when they realize that the sermons or homilies or Sunday morning instruction is in conflict with the knowledge underlying those machines and techniques in the local Medical Center, in conflict with the images being sent back to earth by NASA space explorers, in conflict even with the general concepts of mathematics they might learn as undergraduates in college. Few will be able to unravel this and build up a Christian story of reality on their own. Nearly all, including nearly all clergymen, will need others to build up a coherent story reconciling the Bible and Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*.

I've said often: created being, reality, is a manifestation of certain thoughts of God. We accept what we see as being true; "Things are true," as St. Thomas Aquinas claimed. We have no warrant for a belief that we human animals know something outside of what we are told by way of the thing-like realm of being and the abstract realms of being we can begin to detect by studying that thing-like realm in greater detail and with greater sophistication. We are children learning from the Creator and shaping our thoughts in response to His answers. We're not some sort of natural adults bringing schemes of truths to the task of understanding what lies around us. Any schemes we have are drawn out of our environments, concrete and abstract, by studying our traditions, and by that painful process of growing into a world, becoming truly part of it. We need to refound our Christian faith and we must do so by accepting on faith what is known of empirical reality and to move on to making sense of that knowledge in light of our Christian beliefs. As children take on faith the claims of their parents, we need to take on faith what God is telling us through His Creation.



# 629 Faith in God Gives Us Courage to Doubt All Else

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1549>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/02/26.]

I'm going to slightly misuse a quote from the book of aphorisms, *On Certainty* [152], collected from notes of the philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein:

Doubt itself rests only on what is beyond doubt. [page 68e]

He was writing about knowledge inside of a 'language game', which I think to be something like the active use of a hypothetical dictionary and grammar of what I call a 'worldview'. To start up a game, language or baseball, you need rules beyond questioning, even if they're clearly arbitrary or might be wrong in some larger sense. Doubts arise in the game but doubts about the rules of the game bring it to a halt.

Wittgenstein's words made me focus on an idea I'd been holding at the edge of my mind for years. I think I've even expressed this idea in somewhat cloudy terms. My idea is: It's just because I have faith in an all-powerful, all-loving, and all-knowing Creator that I can feel safe to engage in radical doubt about what I've learned or can learn from entities which are not God. I write 'radical doubt' and intend not any sort of corrosive skepticism but rather the sort of doubt Einstein held about Newtonian ideas on the nature of simultaneity leading to doubt about Newtonian ideas on the nature of space and time. Einstein greatly respected Newton but felt free to question Newton's dynamics based upon knowledge gained well after the death of that great English physicist. (That knowledge was actually of electrodynamics as summarized in what we call Maxwell's Equations.)

And then Wittgenstein speculates:

But mightn't a higher authority assure me that I don't know the truth? So that I had to say "Teach me!"? But then my eyes would have to be opened. [page 76e]

If that higher authority were God? If we were to hold a Christian faith, a faith held in common with Jews so far as the goodness of God's Creation goes? To me, this goodness includes not only rationality but an openness to exploration and analysis and—in principle—understanding. It may take a lot of work over more generations than mortal man will have in this world, but—in principle—we can become truer images of God in our very efforts to encapsulate in our own beings an understanding of God's works as Creator. In simple terms, we enter a conversation of sorts with the Creator when we begin to explore His Creation and to try to understand what we discover. In terms of the quote above, we say to our Maker, "Teach me!"

If our faith is in God and not in any particular understanding of empirical reality—Creation, then wouldn't we be able to—in principle—move smoothly from Newtonian mechanics to Einstein's special relativistic mechanics and then on to a mixture, however tentative, of general relativity and quantum mechanics? Obviously, it's not quite a smooth journey. I commented upon John Polkinghorne's discussion of the difficulty that physicists and bright physics students have in accepting new understandings of reality in Chapter 90, *Shaping Our Minds to Reality*. Polkinghorne was a theoretical physicist and then an Anglican priest, giving him an interesting combination of perspectives.

Much of our empirical knowledge, even at the fundamental level, must be held contingently, waiting for unexpected evidence that, perhaps, matter isn't quite what we might think from our current versions of quantum mechanics, even that our own human natures might be based upon different foundations than we've thought. At the same time, some of our knowledge does come quite close to being absolutely certain, at least in the context of this particular Creation. Though the statement " $1 + 1 = 2$ " can be in doubt when we try to apply it to entities, such as nucleons, that combine in funny ways, it's not in any doubt as a formal truth. Even some of our higher level thought is pretty solid, such as the quantum mechanical explanation of the electrical charge—the accuracy of the calculation of the amount of the charge is extraordinary. General relativity also has a pretty well ver-

ified explanation of basic properties of spacetime. Our understanding of our own human nature is far less solid, though an intelligent evaluation of sociobiology and genetics and the modern social sciences gives us a picture very consistent with man as he has shown himself in history, including that included in the Bible. We need a better understanding if we are to be able to more fully understand human nature as it is likely to show itself in a rapidly changing world and we seem to be on the way to what Pope Benedict XVI called for—a more exact understanding of man, but not due much to the efforts of Christian thinkers. (There are Christians working in these fields but not working as Christians and not working to produce a Christian understanding of the results.)

Some of our knowledge of mathematical and physical reality, including parts of our own human nature, can be treated as fragments without leading to any obvious absurdity. Most of our knowledge is set into an understanding of some larger whole—sometimes even the entirety of what concerns us. Though discussed neither by Galileo nor by his opponents so far as I know, the real problem with Galileo's discovery that the moon and sun and other objects were more like earth-stuff than ideal, unchanging entities is that it cast into doubt the economy of salvation. Where were Heaven and Hell if the universe were made up of just entities of the same stuff as the rocks of earth? Not surprisingly, the pagan view of Creation, simplistically called Aristotelian-Ptolemaic, had been consistent with contemporary Christian understandings of man and of the world. For example, the celestial sphere architecture of the Cosmos allowed Christian thinkers to speculate that Heaven lay on one of the higher and more pure spheres. That pagan understanding had become intertwined with Christian understandings of salvation and no one in Galileo's age, including the great scientist and devout Catholic himself, knew how to understand in Christian terms this strange new world in which there seemed to be no place where Heaven could be.

Faith was needed that Christians had truly heard promises from God **and** that the same God had made this world as part of His plans for us. That faith needed to be of heroic proportions since it would be centuries before enough would be known to build a new Christian understanding of this universe, an understanding which allows also a coherent and plausible restatement of the sinful nature of man and the possible meaning of salvation to such a creature. Faith was too weak, or perhaps the right thinker was simply not in the right place at the right time. We have been missing

a plausible Christian understanding of Creation for centuries. There is a sense in which faith was found sufficient to part of the task: the traditional understandings of the world were retained in a rather jarring context. Christian intellectuals tend to hand-wave their way around the problems while some Catholics, and Protestants in a different way, have returned to what I would call a baptized paganism—a natural state in new missionary territories but a sign of great trouble to come in regions where Christianity had been established for a thousand years or more. We lack a plausible account of salvation, of integration into the Body of Christ, but many of us are sure that Satan has godly powers to drag us into Hell, wherever it might be.

We're now at a point where that new Christian understanding of all Creation can be built, an understanding which allows us to restore the economy of salvation to center stage in our thoughts, thoughts which are rational and make sense of the Big Bang and biological evolution and genes and the nature of communities and so on. Why is it not considered of greater importance to do so? Why is it that I feel so isolated when I'm trying to do what might be the most important task for Christians of our age: that building of a new understanding of Creation which accounts for modern empirical knowledge in the context of a Christian understanding of Creation? This understanding would give us renewed confidence we do live in a world which is a story God is telling of our salvation. That is the sort of confidence which can lead to the building of a new civilization or the reform of Western Civilization if still possible.

I can testify that a strong faith in God and His promises, a faith in the Real Presence of Christ on the altar and a faith in the corresponding sacramental nature of our embodied selves and all that we touch or see, allows me to doubt all the questionable and historically contingent teachings of the traditional Christian stories, allows me to doubt also that non-believers have it at all right when they tell us that modern science testifies to the lack of a purpose in this world.

I can strongly admire Plato and Augustine and Aquinas, Newton and Darwin and Einstein and Dirac. I can see what is truly good in their thoughts. But I can doubt their understandings of the world, even their understandings of their own valid insights. It's God and the small stock of revelations He has gifted to us that I can't doubt. Even when it comes to those revelations, I can doubt that Popes or Councils or the greatest of theologians got it absolutely right. It's awfully easy to distort even the most important of truths, if only by imprisoning those truths in historically

contingent ways of expressing and passing on those truths. Truths can become lies when stated in words and concepts which have changed.



# 630 Nietzsche, Darwin, and Jesus Christ

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1573>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/03/26.]

I'm going to take a quotation from Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* [101] somewhat out of context:

The bad conscience is an illness, there is no doubt about that, but an illness as pregnancy is an illness. [second essay, section 19 from the translation by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, Vintage Books, 1989]

What is the 'bad conscience' to Nietzsche? It's associated with self-denial, selfishness, self-sacrifice. It's a slavish sort of illness allied closely to Christianity. It casts a morbid coloring over the entire being of those infected with this 'bad conscience'.

Nietzsche's concept of the 'bad conscience' arose from his analysis of the aristocratic view that 'bad' is what we should fight against; the Christian view that 'evil' is what we should fight against. In Nietzsche's view, seeing the world in aristocratic good vs. bad is far preferable to the 'slavish' good vs. evil. Sort of. He actually considered both to be defective and the 'slavish' view to be the one which might prove to be a temporary illness from which a better moral view could be born, that is, the slavish moral attitude is "an illness as pregnancy is an illness."

A 'bad conscience' is what I might call unmoored guilt, a general guilt which comes from feelings that I am inherently defective. In my Christian viewpoint, one which might have fascinated and annoyed Nietzsche, a 'bad conscience' or guilt is a gnawing of the insides, a useless activity for a

creature created as a clever ape. We are what we are and shouldn't worry so much about our defects but should rather deploy our energies to look at Creation and the Creator, to imitate God by way of understanding His work in Creation, a work which can be explored and analyzed and about which we can speculate. In more spiritual terms, we should aim to replace our bad consciences, our guilt, by a burning desire to become like Christ, to achieve a proper union with God, by way of enfolding ourselves into the Body of Christ. If we do so, we will be accepting God's offer to bring us into the Body of Christ, to complete and perfect us as individual human beings and also as communal human beings. This could be called a rebirth of sorts, though certainly not the birth anticipated by Nietzsche.

Still, as is often the case, Nietzsche saw into the world, into modern human societies, into the modern human soul, more deeply and more clearly than did his opponents, Christian and otherwise. He was, in my opinion, a doctor of the soul who was brilliant at diagnosing the disease and somewhat askew in seeing and recommending a cure. He himself had a variety of the disease and never saw his own way out of his illness. I also have a variety of the disease and have recommended a real cure above and will discuss it a little more at the end of this essay.

There is a blindness in the aristocratic view of the world as being a battle between 'good' and 'bad', in simplistic terms: think of a battle between warrior courage and any type of cowardice. There is a similar blindness in the 'slavish' view of the world as being a battle between 'good' and 'evil' where evil is some sort of demonic force; in some but not all infected with a 'bad conscience', this shows up in a feeling that sexual activity is inherently evil in some sense, a compromise that 'good' makes with the 'evil' of this mortal realm. A better view, and one in line with modern empirical knowledge of men as well as the moral theology of St. Thomas Aquinas, is that sexual love is a legitimate part of a more total marital love and lust is a distorted, and often exploitive, form of sexual love.

As I currently view history, ancient ideas of being would lead to a radical dichotomy between good and evil. (Despite Nietzsche's claim, at times, that ancient Greeks all had an aristocratic understanding of morality.) Women are virgins or whores, leaving most women in an ambiguous state. Men are celibate or consumed by their desires. Any virgin woman or any celibate man is always on the edge of falling into lust.

Let me continue mining that vein of thought. Reproduction involves us in efforts some of us have avoided. This isn't good, not something I'm

proud of as I head through my sixth decade of life. Yet, there were times when I was almost driven by sexual desire to start a family though I had rational and utilitarian reasons not to do so. A more common reason to avoid starting a family is a poverty in which it would be stupid to have children, at least by modern utilitarian standards. Yet, children were born in the worst periods of history and often as a result of strong sexual desire even unto lust.

Our clearer thoughts are often clouded and even overwhelmed by ordered or disordered desires which force us to have children when it hurts, to rush into a burning building when we hear someone screaming in terror and maybe pain. It's our emotions, we can hope disciplined emotions, which often send us to our heroic acts of self-sacrifice, which despite the thoughts of Nietzsche and his opponents, is often justified by reason deployed over the time-scale of a family-line or the space-scale of a community such as a nation.

We are all imperfectly ordered, even so saintly a saint as Francis of Assisi. How do we head toward a better state of order? How do we heal our outright disorder as well as our ambiguously undordered state?

I don't think it's hard to imagine good Christian leaders thinking to lead their followers toward a state of Christ-like order by teaching them to be ashamed of their natural state of fragmentation and incoherence and incompleteness, to think of this state as being a matter of sin, of rebellion against God. After all, even so clearheaded a thinker as Augustine ended up endorsing the claim that we were created in some state of creaturely perfection and purity and fell by way of a bad decision by a distant pair of ancestors. This despite the fact that Augustine considered a conflicting theory that human beings arose in the same natural world as other animals rather than by way of a special creation. He knew those two theories were in irreconcilable conflict. Modern Christian theologians seem not so clear-headed about the implications of the modern theory of evolution, accepted by the Catholic Church, most Protestant churches, and—I believe—by most Orthodox churches as well.

So, we're clever apes driven by 'imperfectly implemented' emotions which often force our best acts but also force some of our truly despicable acts. In addition, our minds and hands are also disordered in ways that also affect not only the heart but each other. How do we get to a better state of order? Can such a better state exist in this mortal realm?

I do think we could have done better but what happened in Christian

history was good enough to get us to a point where a man with strong faith and an openness to Creation can see the better man in terms of an image from James Joyce's *The Artist as a Young Man*: with left hand on Darwin's *Origin of Species*, we can say, "This tells us how we got to be what we are"; with right hand on the Bible, we can say, "This tells us what we can be and what God calls us to be."

Whether the best way or not, the path taken by the Christian mainstream was the 'bad conscience', feelings of shame and unmoored guilt. Nietzsche clearly saw this path and was optimistic it could lead to a better state of moral order in the future. "Beyond evil and good" where "evil and good" is the view allied with the 'bad conscience'. The birth of a better man. Though having rejected Christianity, Nietzsche probably wouldn't have been too upset if a Christian described that better state as "Christ-like."

## 631 Lost in a Sexually Polymorphous Cosmos

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1590>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/04/11.]

Rod Dreher has published an essay on the Internet, *Sex After Christianity* at <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/sex-after-christianity/>, which gives us a sketchy story of the loss of Christianity in the United States (probably the entire West), a story which might be sketchy but is more plausible than what you might gather from the way most Christians speak and far more plausible than the Nixonian gibberish about the “moral majority.” Mr. Dreher points to some standard scholarly studies of American social views which showed we were a sexually ‘liberated’ people even back in the decades before the 1960s. A strong version of this claim was recently raised by a scientist’s discovery that *Penicillin, Not the Pill, May Have Launched the Sexual Revolution* (see <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/01/130128082906.htm>). Once the dangers of syphilis were thwarted, Americans were hitting the sack with a variety of partners not their spouses, and this by the 1950s, not the 1960s. See Chapter 479, *A Medicine Which Saved Lives and Destroyed Moral Order?* for my take on this situation.

Even mainstream histories of the United States, more than a little white-washed, will tell the tale of Americans being radical individualists, making their own moral and social rules, by the 1700s or so, as soon as a little prosperity freed them from traditional dependencies. From the beginning, we Americans have been willing to give much, our freedom or our souls, in return for a good paycheck and benefits but we don’t readily bow to the authority of family or other human communities, not even Church. Heck,

God Himself has no right to tell us how to think or feel or act, unless He sends us lots of pennies from Heaven and even then. . . In other words, we Americans, and others in the modern West, are little different in our raw moral characteristics from other human beings for all our feelings of being special.

In Mr. Dreher's essay, we can read:

[I]n the modern era, we have inverted the role of culture. Instead of teaching us what we must deprive ourselves of to be civilized, we have a society that tells us we find meaning and purpose in releasing ourselves from the old prohibitions.

How this came to be is a complicated story involving the rise of humanism, the advent of the Enlightenment, and the coming of modernity. As philosopher Charles Taylor writes in his magisterial religious and cultural history *A Secular Age*, "The entire ethical stance of moderns supposes and follows on from the death of God (and of course, of the meaningful cosmos)." To be modern is to believe in one's individual desires as the locus of authority and self-definition.

I would rephrase things, would write of civilization requiring us to shape ourselves to certain habits of mind and heart and hands rather than speaking of deprivation, but the analysis is basically spot-on and the entire essay is good as an analysis of our loss of respect for Christian views of marriage. Yet, there is something amiss. I'll concentrate on the strange gap: the acknowledgment of the loss of a "meaningful cosmos" with also an apparent loss of Christian initiative resulting in the failure to even try to find a newly meaningful cosmos. The best our Christian intellectuals seem able to hope for is to patch-up the old "meaningful cosmos." Why bother with the inconvenient fact, as one example, that our Christian view of human nature in the West comes from St. Augustine's endorsement of the "fall from a state of grace" understanding of the story of Adam and Eve, an understanding he knew and presented as being in conflict with his alternative speculation that men arose within the natural world, not as a special creation in a special state of grace. In this other view, men arose from lower species. We now know men did so arise and we apparently have few thinkers so smart as Augustine as to see we need to radically rework our understanding of human nature. Fr. Stanley Jaki, the polymath scholar, labeled Augustine's

decision to go with “fall from state of grace” as the most damaging and most cowardly intellectual act in history; and Fr. Jaki was mostly a big admirer of Augustine. We Christians did our best to move out of this cosmos a long time ago; we are perhaps only now learning we have to live in the cosmos as God made it and not as we would like it.

Mr. Dreher sees that we Christians must struggle on cosmological grounds rather than moralistic grounds. So there are some other Christians who agree with me on that issue but there are, so far as I know, none who are willing to actually engage my efforts to so struggle, to join with me in assent or respectful debate aimed at some better view. The readership of my blog grows slowly and there are increasing numbers of downloads of my books, even into countries where Christian writings are, shall we say, frowned upon, but I see few signs that others are actively agreeing with my way of carrying out this struggle or trying to develop other ways. Yet, it’s early in this sort of struggle, a sort which is carried out over centuries of seeming peace interspersed by open conflict. In a manner of speaking, God began seriously irritating me about 30 years ago and forced me into a desert 25 years ago. I shouldn’t expect others to be able to re-turn toward God’s Creation any faster than did I. And the initial stages of looking into a blinding light, of learning to tolerate it and responding to it in such a way as to reshape your own self, are—shall we say—painful in ways described well by my confirmation saint, St. John of the Cross.

We have no meaningful cosmos and we have plenty of analyses which tell us this, all from a group of viewpoints describable as baptized paganism. See Chapter 69, *Hellenistic Metaphysics is Too Small*, and Chapter 25, *Broadening the Horizons of Reason*, for my analyses of speeches by Pope Benedict XVI, a man who was far too good for our age just because he had shaped himself to the task of helping us to leave the Christian “intellectual ghetto” as Etienne Gilson, a man of similar outlook and temperament, termed the places where we hide from God and His Creation. In the speech which is the subject of the second essay, Pope Benedict XVI told us: “Modernity is not simply a historically-datable cultural phenomenon; in reality it requires a new focus, a more exact understanding of the nature of man.” In any case, Joseph Ratzinger, as Pope and before that, has failed to accomplish much in this area during his own public career. We can only pray he planted many seeds.

In the above referenced essay, *Sex After Christianity* at <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/sex-after-christianity/>,

Mr. Dreher writes, “You don’t behave this way and not that way because it’s good for you; you do so because this moral vision is encoded in the nature of reality. This is the basis of natural-law theory, which has been at the heart of contemporary secular arguments against same-sex marriage (and which have persuaded no one).” Of course, natural-law theory convinces no one; it’s based upon an understanding of nature, of created being, of God’s way of telling this story which is our world; but our current natural-law theories are based upon an understanding which is centuries old and which ignores modern empirical knowledge—knowledge of nature, an understanding which sounds like gibberish to young men and women in our society, young men and women who’ve been watching documentaries about genes and evolution as well as historical documentaries which present a bad image of Christian civilization by telling the truth. That these documentaries, and much of the teaching in schools, are out of context is not the fault of the modern secularists and pagans but rather that of the Christians who had a great civilization and failed to protect it and nurture it.

Apparently, we Christians had better things to do than preserve the Christian civilization which was the work of multitudes of our ancestors over many centuries. Or maybe there have simply not been enough Christians in recent centuries to form a viable cultural mass. In any case, most human beings, other than speculative thinkers, are not to be persuaded. They are usually to be raised to be part of a story, whether the creation myths and heroic legends of a tribe or the more fact-based, but often ideologically deformed, histories of the modern West or any of its major regions. What’s shocking from this angle is the ease with which such thinkers as Locke and Kant were able to deform a Christian viewpoint into a de-communalized and, consequently, secularized viewpoint. The struggle for salvation became the journey toward the Big Rock Candy Mountain, at least in the United States.

In earlier writings, Joseph Ratzinger wrote of moral irresponsibility on the part of modern Christians who had inherited a treasure of a civilization and then failed to care for it. Etienne Gilson had written of a failure to provide Christian answers to the modern questions (circa 1800) followed by a retreat into a Christian intellectual ghetto. In a similar vein, though it might appear different at first, Hermann Melville spoke of a streak of moral insanity in the American character, an insanity which was a rebellion against God and His Creation not quite good enough for us Americans.

Melville was seconded by Nathaniel Hawthorne and Henry James, Sr. at least so far as Emerson and Thoreau were concerned; these oh-so American philosophers despised communal human nature, that of—ultimately—the Body of Christ. Again, Americans had already turned away from the God of Jesus Christ more than a century ago and perhaps well before that. How many ways can I point out that this was never a Christian country?

In my freely downloadable book, *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53], I propose a general Christian understanding, more exact as well, of human being. This understanding pays no attention to metaphysical categories such as those of vice and virtue, concentrating instead upon the effort to develop a moral order which builds upon our stuff as understood through our best empirical knowledge but disciplines it to our best understanding of God's story. This understanding also assumes that we were born and live to participate in the growth and development of the Body of Christ. It may or may not prove another charge against Christianity that I found myself relying upon insightful analyses of the communal nature of Biblical religions made by the Jewish thinkers Jacob Neusner and Abraham Heschel; Martin Buber also is in the background though not explicitly mentioned.

Let me head in a truly positive direction. . .

Christianity is imperialistic. The human race needs a Christian civilization, not because any Christian institutions can be said to be objectively superior to other human institutions but rather because the Body of Christ is the entirety of what is worthwhile in individual and communal human being, what is to be saved into everlasting form. The Church Herself is an organ in the Body of Christ, the organ of worship and moral conscience. She must serve God's story primarily, serving even the poor not in some knee-jerk, bleeding-heart way but in the way dictated by that story. Politics must play its proper role as well as poetry, the deployment of technology as well as the esthetic aspects of architecture, our worship and the management of our religious communities as well as our ethnic-cultural activities, should be the best they can be by serving God in His freely chosen role as Creator and story-teller. The Body of Christ is so complex a 'network' of individual and communal human beings as likely to be yet beyond the descriptive capabilities of our best modern sciences. Christian theology and philosophy have yet to respond to God's Creation as we now see it and, consequently, have yet to join ranks with 'modern sciences'. When this happens, Christian thinkers will be able not only to make sense of what we

have learned about Creation; they will be able to help shape and direct the future explorations of Creation.

Modern empirical knowledge of human beings plain and simply doesn't seem to fit into our inherited categories. Vice and virtue, emotion and feeling and thought and act, don't seem to provide good structures for a proper understanding of human nature. (Once again, see *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53] for very preliminary discussions of this and related issues.) It's certainly relevant to discussions of any plausible understanding of marriage that modern scientists have found 'male-ness' has more to do with brain structure and brain processes than with bulging muscles or even the penis, but there's nothing in Christian anthropological theories that could make sense of the humorously serious comment a brain-scientist made decades ago: the brain is the primary human sex organ. To Christian intellectuals, a certain human being is male and, thus, God put a male brain in his skull. Very simple. Makes no sense in the context of modern knowledge of individual and communal human being, but it's very simple.

We like simple and don't care for all the evidence that God shaped a world in which time and space are best described by differential geometry rather than the straightforward Euclidean geometry which generated such simple views of eternity and of the physical relationship of Heaven and Hell. We like simple and don't care much for the evidence that God shaped human being out of nonliving matter by way of sometimes violent and bloody evolutionary processes rather than putting the life in Adam by way of an act of magic.

This all does matter to all aspects of a Christian understanding of Creation. I wrote in the previous paragraph about our preference for the simplicity of Euclidean geometry over that of differential geometry. We should note that a Ptolemaic, Aristotelian, Euclidean view of Creation allowed Dante to write his *Divine Comedy* and that view was the best available at the time, accepted by scientists and philosophers as well as theologians and poets. We can no longer speak in coherent or explicit terms of Heaven and Hell—modern Christians are great hand-wavers—just because any efforts to speak thus would lead to absurdities until we learn how to speak of God's Creation in terms compatible with what we know of our Universe, that realm of His Creation which has been explored and analyzed with such courage and honesty and energy in recent centuries. When those who try to proclaim the Christian truths have no way to speak of Christian Heaven,

the world of the resurrected in my terms, is it any wonder than many are losing their faith in the main Christian story of the resurrection of Jesus? How can they believe in their own possible resurrections as part of the Body of Christ? If Christ has not risen from the dead, our sacrifices of sexual pleasures are in vain. If Christ has risen from the dead, where could He possibly be? I have a tentative answer which is more than hand-waving, but no one seems interested in exploring that answer with me, and I have only 24 hours in each of my days.

We Christians have not done our duty. We have not kept that Easter message alive in the language and concepts of the modern world and we can no longer say that Christ rose from the dead, literally, in the flesh and in His divinity, without sounding like actors in a toga movie or outright lunatics. This is our fault and not that of the enemies of Christianity and certainly not the fault of the young men and women who have left the Church in recent years.



# 632 Privacy and the Body of Christ

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1651>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/07/23.]

Bruce Schneier, a prominent expert in cryptography and other areas of security, regularly provides interesting commentary, sometimes technical in nature and sometimes philosophical or sociological. In his blog post of 2013/07/09, *Another Perspective on the Value of Privacy* at [https://www.schneier.com/blog/archives/2013/07/another\\_perspec.html](https://www.schneier.com/blog/archives/2013/07/another_perspec.html), Schneier merely provides a short quote from and link to an opinion piece by Michael P. Lynch at the website of the *New York Times: Privacy and the Threat to the Self* at <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/06/22/privacy-and-the-threat-to-the-self/>.

This opinion piece explores some aspects of what it means to be a person and asks, “What makes your thoughts your thoughts?” after telling us, “[T]he concept of privacy also matters for another, deeper reason. It is intimately connected to what it is to be an autonomous person.” To a traditional Christian, this is actually a contradiction in terms. The true persons, that is—Persons, are Father and Son and Holy Spirit. We can only hope that we will one day receive as gift a more complete nature which will be more truly a state of personhood. Yet, Father and Son and Holy Spirit aren’t autonomous Persons, but rather Persons who fully share all thoughts and feelings and acts. They are one God in the belief of traditional Christianity and yet are truly individuals. Individuals, not autonomous individuals and not individuals who voluntarily become one God by accepting a contractual relationship of sorts. Not by coincidence, this is the older understanding in the West of marriage, to choose one important

example. Under that older understanding, though not always explicitly acknowledged, a man and a woman change by the very act of marrying (not always having a ritual basis in Christian history) and take on a new dimension to their communal human beings. In the modern understanding, the bride and the groom remain what they are and only voluntarily enter a contractual relationship which leaves them what they were before.

See Chapter 156, *Einstein and Bohr's debate on the meaning of reality*, for a short discussion of Einstein's position that things are what they are and are not altered by relationships against Bohr's belief that relationships are primary and shape things. Bohr has won in quantum mechanics but modern advocates of autonomous individuality tell us that human beings are less likely to be changed by relationships than protons and electrons. I could say, only partly tongue-in-cheek, that Bohr belonged to the school of thought founded by St John the Evangelist who taught that we exist because God first loved us.

I'll be proposing an idea I've developed over a number of writings in recent years: those who will become part of the Body of Christ will remain individuals while being truly part of that complete man, as St. Paul expressed matters according to some translations. The saved will be persons analogous to the divine Persons while the Body of Christ will be one as God is one.

Having told the reader what my main point is, I'll move toward it.

Lynch goes into greater detail in his essay, *Privacy and the Threat to the Self* at <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/06/22/privacy-and-the-threat-to-the-self/>, playing off of Descartes' strange mixture of insights and outright errors:

[W]hile Descartes's overall view has been rightly rejected, there is something profoundly right about the connection between privacy and the self, something that recent events should cause us to appreciate. What is right about it, in my view, is that to be an autonomous person is to be capable of having privileged access (in the two senses defined above) to information about your psychological profile—your hopes, dreams, beliefs and fears. A capacity for privacy is a necessary condition of autonomous personhood.

This is insightful but also mostly false from the traditional Christian

viewpoint, at least as I understand it and have restated and enriched it in light of modern empirical knowledge. Traditional Christians should fear to be caught up in a discussion of personhood limited to modern theories of the individual, theories which can be seen in light of the speculations of Descartes or Calvin or the American follower of Calvin—Jonathon Edwards.

We are called to complete ourselves, ultimately, by entering fully into the Body of Christ, though we do this best, at least in this mortal realm, by developing our unique characteristics and talents and then contributing them to that Body. There is some serious uncertainty in some of the speculations of sociobiologists in the early years of this field of research, but it seems certain that many of our ways of perceiving, of feeling, of thinking, of acting, work to the needs of our family lines and not to the needs of any imaginary autonomous individuals. I wrote about the biological foundations of human social ties in Chapter 281, *Social and Biological: Being Honest About the Basics of Human Nature*, and expanded the discussion in Chapter 282, *Do We Need Heart and Hands as Well as Mind to Understand Reality?*, where I quoted Jacob Neusner, who proposes similar ideas about the communal aspects of human being but from a Judaic viewpoint. In his collection of essays, *Judaism in the Matrix of Christianity* [97], Neusner tells us:

The doctrine of emotions in the view of the sages who created Judaism remained always the same. The reason derives from the social realities that give meaning to emotion and definition to the possibilities of feeling. If we begin with feeling, we end up in society. [page 51]

In response to Neusner's claims, I pointed out, "In this way of thought, emotions are produced by ties or relationships and then help to strengthen and shape those ties, shaping them to what might be called a communal heart but also helping to give birth to a communal mind, an intellect." Human communities aren't nominal entities in general, though some might be the sorts of voluntary, contractual relationships possible to truly autonomous individuals. Our brains themselves, some of our strongest desires and most common instincts, tie us into communities existing over the generations of a family-line of organisms, as sociobiologists have pointed out. In various writings, I've speculated that these desires can be turned, and have been turned, towards the creation of communal bonds of a sort which

aren't strictly dictated by biological needs, not even the long-term needs studied by various sorts of evolutionary theorists. We form scientific societies, Moose and Elk clubs, and sports leagues, as well as chess clubs and cruiser car clubs, as well as political communities rising to nearly continental size. This is little different, in principle, from the turning of our general mental skills to abstract mathematics or metaphysics or the composing of symphonies.

In fact, the formation of our selves is an open process of sorts, strongly oriented toward the formation of aspects corresponding to an autonomous individual and to a communal being and also to a being who is a mixture of organism and tools. In recent generations, thinkers starting at least with Michael Polanyi (though Bishop Butler had some insights about this in the 17th century) realized that our tools and our prosthetics can become parts of our bodies in a more constant way. I wrote about this in Chapter 292, *Creation Is Us, It Also Are Us*. In an earlier essay included as Chapter 613, *Does the Body of Christ Have Non-human Components?*, I had raised and discussed the question: "Is it possible that as we form the Body of Christ, we integrate human technology such as the Internet viewed as a fancy memory device?"

Our minds leak out into our tools and our prosthetics, including the printed reference books and the databases we access and the software we use. The more powerful and more reliable parts of our minds are largely shared across communities; see my discussion of Jacques Barzun's insights about this in his book, *The House of Intellect* [7]: Chapter 127, *Intelligence vs. Intellect*.

There is a lot of obscurity in the discussions of the Body of Christ in the New Testament; none of the Christian authors, not even St Paul, seem to have been able to develop this concept very well. In various writings, I've made an attempt to develop underlying concepts and language to start a better conversation on communal human nature. For example, in Chapter 178, *Are Communities a Form of Created Being?*, I write:

Being is at least what we can touch and point to and study by the methods of physics and chemistry and other empirical sciences. I've claimed, partly upon Biblical grounds and partly upon my experiences as a creature, that being is also what moves and interacts and forms relationships and various sorts of narrative streams including the morally ordered narratives which

we can call stories. I've claimed that relationships are primary, not concrete and thing-like being and not even some general sort of stuff. Thing-like being comes into existence as a result of relationships and can be further shaped by relationships. See the Gospel of St. John or the letters attributed to him or his followers. See Chapter 156, *Einstein and Bohr's Debate on the Meaning of Reality* for a debate on this important aspect of being from the viewpoints of two prominent physicists. Chapter 169, *From Abstract Being to Concrete Being and Narratives*, is a more extensive, more recent, more complete discussion of various aspects of being; perhaps it comes closer to a good understanding of created being. I write in a different and perhaps more accessible way of what I mean by 'abstract being' in three shorter essays found in:

- Chapter 172, *Frozen Soul and Other Delicacies*;
- Chapter 173, *Studying Steam When All You Have is Ice*;  
and
- Chapter 175, *More on Matter as Frozen Soul*.

In other words, I think we Christians can't possibly tie our defenses of privacy against government intrusions to a radical individualism and we aren't going to understand human being before we have a better understanding of created being in its concrete and abstract forms.

Let me quote Lynch on his claim that privacy is necessary to our existence as individuals:

[I]magine that I could telepathically read all your conscious and unconscious thoughts and feelings—I could know about them in as much detail as you know about them yourself—and further, that you could not, in any way, control my access. You don't, in other words, share your thoughts with me; I take them. The power I would have over you would of course be immense. Not only could you not hide from me, I would know instantly a great amount about how the outside world affects you, what scares you, what makes you act in the ways you do. And that means I could not only know what you think, I could to a large extent control what you do.

I'll return to the theological issues before claiming a more plausible Christian argument against our government's current abuse of our privacy.

Christians believe Father and Son and Holy Spirit to be truly Persons, remaining individuals even while being one God. They share thoughts and feelings and actions in the most intimate way and yet they remain three Persons, Individuals but not Autonomous Individuals in any meaningful sense. The concept of divine Personhood is manifested in Creation in terms of the incomplete and immature personhood of human beings. Christians cannot accept Lynch's line of argument though we are bound, for other reasons, to take a position similar to his against government invasion of our privacy. In fact, I'd go so far as to claim that neither the President of the U.S. nor the American intelligence agencies have any plausible claims to the authority or right to shape the Body of Christ in the ways implied by the powers over us that they have tried to grab; they haven't just committed crimes against the U.S. Constitution, they have become enemies of God.

Any arguments for privacy, or other goods, based upon autonomous personhood, would bias us strongly toward thinking that God is different from the Trinitarian God of Christian belief, if He exists at all. We would probably rediscover all sorts of philosophical and theological heresies in a more or less natural way once we fell into this false belief that the term 'autonomous person' has any meaning in this world. In this strange age, sociobiologists and other evolutionary theorists who are non-Christians argue against this false belief more strongly than Christian clergymen, but this merely means that empirical science caught up to St John the Evangelist and St Thomas Aquinas just when Christian thinkers and leaders turned onto other paths.

In this modern way of thinking about individuals as being autonomous, the Body of Christ would be only a voluntary gathering of autonomous individuals, busily negotiating their contractual relationships. Communities would have only nominalistic existence, being the result of always revocable, voluntary, more or less contractual, agreements between individual human beings, those truly existing entities. This is, in fact, the way many modern human beings view their marriages and their memberships in all communities, even their Christian church or other community of worship. Neusner in the already referenced work reminds us that salvation in the Jewish and Christian Bibles is in terms of a community. We aren't saved as autonomous individuals but rather as the People of Israel or the Body of Christ. Or both.

Should Christians be strongly opposed to the State's invasion of our

thoughts and feelings and most intimate acts? I would most emphatically agree with Lynch on this practical matter and say, “The Federal government and its agencies should stay out of our private communications.” I’ve speculated about Christian civilization being the true Body of Christ, inclusive of the Church but not only the Church and not subordinate to the Church, though bound to be guided by the Church in analogy to the human being who is guided by his conscience and his religious beliefs. That Body greater than just a hymn-singing choir, that is—that Body which meets all legitimate human needs and desires, would have political aspects but, if there is a political organ, it would not have any right to invade individuals or other organs for the purpose of controlling them or for any other purpose. It would be the human members of the Body of Christ who would share all thoughts and feelings with each other while remaining individuals. Each of those members would also share in the worship activities and political activities and artistic activities of the entire Body. We would all share the thoughts of the most brilliant of mathematicians or theologians as well as the skills of the greatest musicians and furniture-makers but there would be no educational institutions with the power and right to invade our privacy for the purpose of making sure we all think properly.

We can think in terms of dependencies, the true bonds of human communities. The trick is to form the proper relationships of dependencies, as I discussed in a few chapters of this book:

- Chapter 420, *What is Conspiracy?*;
- Chapter 424, *What is Politics?*; and
- Chapter 426, *Who Do You Choose to Be Dependent Upon?*.

There is a pattern here. Conspiracies in the government are a misuse of politics and such are made possible when we are dependent upon the government in ways which are not proper. Improper dependencies make some sense of the information indicating that our governments, or more accurately—gangs inside our governments, have engaged in some large-scale criminal conspiracies against each other and also against American citizens.

In a couple of chapters written in 2012, the year after the ones above, I returned to the more particular issue of the illegitimate expansion of governments into various activities, some outright criminal and immoral in all important ways. The two chapters are:

- Chapter 463, *Prosperity that Never Ends... Oops* and
- Chapter 464, *Why Are the Parasites Killing the Host?*.

The invasion of our privacy by the American national government through various agencies is illegitimate, but so is its effort to make Americans and others dependent upon it for medical care and for education and for a variety of regulatory activities more properly done by other institutions or communities. Many of these efforts to make us inappropriately dependent upon the American government, or other governments, have been strongly supported by leaders of other institutions or communities, including the leaders of the Catholic Church and other Christian churches and Jewish congregations, all of whom should have known better.

In my freely downloadable book, *Four Kinds of Knowledge* [43], I argue, however inadequately at times, for the ultimate unity of created being and, hence, of our knowledge of created being. An overview of my understanding of human being, including a discussion of what we should be aiming to be, can be found in a book I recently released for free download: *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53]. The title of that book was taken from words spoken by Pope Benedict XVI:

Modernity is not simply a historically-datable cultural phenomenon; in reality it requires a new focus, a more exact understanding of the nature of man. [Pope Benedict XVI, in a speech given on 2008/06/07 to participants in the sixth European Symposium of University Professors, which was held in Rome from 2008/06/04 to 2008/06/07 on the theme: “Broadening the Horizons of Reason. Prospects for Philosophy”.]

More of my writings, including some novels, can be found in *Catalog of Major Writings by Loyd Fueston* [52] which includes descriptions and also links for any books available for download.

## 633 Cafeteria Catholics and Ghetto Catholics

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1677>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/08/23.]

From a simple intellectual viewpoint, the problem with “cafeteria Catholics” is that they don’t think in terms of a God of reason, in terms of a Creation which is a well-ordered multitude and unity of manifestations of divine reason. Of course, if they were to place their thoughts and feelings and behaviors in better order, they might choose a set of consistent doctrines which are not Christian.

From an intellectual viewpoint also simple, the problem with many traditionalist Catholics is that they don’t think in terms of a world in which new facts and knowledge emerge over time, forcing our understandings to develop over time in a “communal process” as the historian Carroll Quigley noted. They think the important truths about God’s work are already in their textbooks. Those traditionalist Catholics continue to place their full trust in their textbooks; how could we possibly come to a better understanding of Creation than what those dead guys left us? Because we now know they had wrong or incomplete ideas of life, matter, space and time, and mathematics? Phooey.

Why would new knowledge of Creation affect our inherited understandings of Creation? Then again...

Could it even be that new forms or properties of created being are emerging as God’s story advances or at least new forms are coming into view as human beings explore Creation more deeply and more widely? Nah!

As the so-called “cafeteria Catholics” prefer to adopt some modernist beliefs (or sometimes modern versions of ancient heresies) to mix with the

Christian beliefs they like, so traditionalist Catholics prefer, for example, natural law doctrines which were developed prior to Darwin and Mendel and Golgi, to name just one early pioneer in each of evolutionary theory and genetics and neuroscience.

In a recent book I made available for free download, *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53], I used this quote as an epigraph:

Modernity is not simply a historically-datable cultural phenomenon; in reality it requires a new focus, a more exact understanding of the nature of man. [Pope Benedict XVI, in a speech given on 2008/06/07 to participants in the sixth European Symposium of University Professors, which was held in Rome from 2008/06/04 to 2008/06/07 on the theme: *Broadening the Horizons of Reason. Prospects for Philosophy*].

We need to develop what Pope Benedict XVI called “a more exact understanding of the nature of man,” a more exact understanding based upon the more exact knowledge of our age. That knowledge will include our traditional knowledge in a corrected and enriched form, also historical and literary knowledge and laboratory knowledge; it will be a framework of knowledge which will be Darwinistic and Thomistic and Shakespearean.

Note the name of that Pope Benedict’s talk was *Broadening the Horizons of Reason. Prospects for Philosophy*.

See Chapter 25, *Broadening the Horizons of Reason* for my discussion of the talk, and note that Pope Benedict XVI, for all those who think of him as a crusty reactionary, has repeatedly called for a fresh engagement with the world—against the thought of most traditionalist Catholics and, in fact, most traditionalists of our age. He also has called for disciplined use of human reason in this engagement, and this is where he’s quite opposed to many who would be labeled “modernists”, including those who can be labeled “cafeteria Catholics.”

I’ll be providing a reference to an essay by a traditionalist Catholic who writes a short and insightful critique of “cafeteria Catholics.” Otherwise, I’ll concentrate on a critique of Catholics who consider themselves to be traditionalists, but achieve that state by freezing their minds into the shape of an understanding of Creation once valid but no longer. The first goes out enthusiastically to adopt modern ideas, most of which are at best questionable as is true of most new ideas in all ages of rapid change, and the second tries

to stand in the intellectual ghetto of traditionalist Catholics while criticizing the untoward behavior of the undisciplined or paganistically disciplined modernists.

God's story, which is this world, indeed—all of Creation, is dynamic. Entities and relationships evolve and develop. Surprises occur regularly—wouldn't we expect God to have a richer and more powerful imagination than any of us or all of us together? Wouldn't we expect that divine imagination to provide surprises beyond the expectations of Aristotle or Augustine or Aquinas? Wouldn't we expect such surprises for so long as men live in this mortal realm and explore it?

It's not a world comfortable for those who wish to think in categorical terms, including terms of static relationships. It's a world in which those with conservative tendencies, "I plead guilty," will tend to stick with old ways even when there is a true need to move on to new ways not for the sake of progress but rather for the sake of new truths which are coming into view and also for the sake of the known truths which are deformed when we try to keep them in the forms allowed by our inherited words and concepts.

When we learn of God's work as Creator by way of studying genes or the fossil record or the background radiation of the universe, we Christians can call that "natural revelation," if our faith and courage is strong enough; in any case, we can speak of "empirical exploration and knowledge-gathering." For all practical purposes, all humanistic studies also fall into this category of natural revelations, though we often see those revelations wrongly.

Empirical knowledge can be very certain but can also have a large component of speculation—see my freely downloadable book, *Four Kinds of Knowledge* [43], for more discussion of human knowledge within the context of a unified Christian understanding of Creation. Putting aside those details for my current purposes, I claim there are a variety of Christian knowledge claims covering, for example, human being. To understand ourselves in a more exact way, as Pope Benedict XVI called for, we need to deal with Biblical revelations, a small stock of revelations coming to Christian communities over the previous 2,000 years; we also need to consider the entirety of natural revelation in its best and most plausible form. We need to acknowledge all that we have learned about man from empirical studies in the fields of history and literature and certainly biology, genetic and evolutionary studies and more. We also need to learn from physics because we are made of and for the created realms made from the matter studied by such as quantum physicists and the spacetime studied by gravitational

theorists. As I'll claim repeatedly: the world of the resurrected, heaven if you wish, will be a completed and perfected version of this world and not something entirely different.

Essentially, we need to understand life, the universe, and everything to understand the smallest part of Creation. In particular, and as I noted above, we need to understand all in order to understand human nature—however incomplete and imperfect that understanding might be.

A recent essay spotlighted one of the problems inflicted upon and caused by modern Catholics, but it's been a problem for any group devoted to a well-defined core of beliefs. That essay, *On Faith and Cafeteria Catholicism* at <http://www.thecatholicthing.org/columns/2013/on-faith-and-cafeteria-catholicism.html> by David G. Bonagura, Jr., claims:

Cafeteria Catholicism is one such myth [as discussed by St Paul in 2 Timothy], a product of an age that has made the individual the ultimate magisterium, especially of beliefs and morals. Teachers of this brand of relativism are easily found wherever we look; there are even quite a few within the Church.

Because of the prevalence of this way of thinking, many “cafeteria Catholics” are unaware that this stance is intrinsically self-centered and contrary to the nature of faith. For at its root cafeteria Catholicism strikes at the heart of Christ, his teachings, and the Church that he founded as the means of imparting his grace to us.

If cafeteria Catholics are too individualistic, a trait I've often criticized in modern men of the West, traditionalist Catholics tend to stay together and repeat the well-established ways of understanding Creation which came to them from parents and pastors and teachers.

Bonagura goes on to tell us:

Cafeteria Catholicism, therefore, rejects the unity of faith, the oneness of divine truth, and the fullness of God's revelation. Faith is a free response to the loving God who calls us into a relationship with him. Cafeteria Catholicism seeks to dictate to God the terms of the relationship: I will believe these things about you, God, but first I declare some of your truths and laws null and void in my life.

True enough though I'd say that traditionalistic Catholics tend to say to God, "Please don't confuse us with new knowledge of what human beings are and what space and time and matter are. What our grandparents heard you saying is good enough for us." This doesn't really mean that they will always reject, say, new insights from genetics that might lead to a new cure for a terrible brain disease. It is to say they refuse to build a new understanding of man the moral creature in which his origins lie in the natural world rather than a mythical garden, in which man's sinful state is a result of an apish creature being offered a true friendship with God rather than a result of an act of rebellion by a couple created in that friendship.

Bonagura dealt well with the "cafeteria Catholics." Is he one of those who shy away from our responsibility to enrich and correct our knowledge of even the most absolute truths? Is he one of those who think that our world so well described in some of its important aspects by Einstein and Heisenberg and Darwin is nevertheless bound by understandings consistent with a different sort of world? I don't know. Certainly, in 25 years of frustrating, and increasingly rare, contacts with Catholic intellectuals, I've no reason to believe there are many traditionalists who have the proper, guarded sort of openmindedness as opposed to being closedminded dwellers of the Catholic intellectual ghetto.

The answers to our problems are not always to be found in what we have nor in what lies behind us. Our understanding of stuff and relationships and space and time have changed. For example, too many Christians act upon the Platonic and Neoplatonic understanding of stuff and respond strongly in favor of Einstein in his famous debate with Niels Bohr where he decided that quantum physics must be 'incomplete' if not outright wrong. He had no scientific ground to stand upon but he seemed to be supporting a common-sense view of reality in his claim that things had an existence well-defined by their own substance. In fact, Einstein was defending a mainstream view of Platonists and Neoplatonists, one at odds with Thomistic existentialist views and what might be called the relationalism of the school of St John the Apostle. From a Christian viewpoint Niels Bohr had the far better position.

That school of St John taught, openly in their contributions to the Bible, that relationships create and shape things. The world and each entity in it exists because God first loved it. We can help to shape or reshape ourselves and others by proper relationships, ultimately of love. We can misshape by hate and lust and greed. The strangeness of quantum physics is largely due

to the ways in which substance is created and then shaped by relationships defined by Heisenberg and Schrodinger and by St John long before them.

The traditional Christian understandings of Creation need to be updated as was noted by Etienne Gilson and Flannery O'Connor as well as by Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI). Those understandings need to be enriched and even complexified. Augustine of Hippo did this with respect to both the understanding of human history and also of the psychology of the human animal. Aquinas took on the issue of being and of the relationship between philosophy and theology. If he had lived long enough to have turned to what seems his true calling, Pascal might well have produced a better understanding of abstract being through his mathematical explorations. John Henry Newman expanded the already rich Augustinian understanding of history and tried to teach our deaf selves that when we continue to speak even the greatest truths in terms of older words and concepts, we can weaken those truths or even turn them into falsehoods.

Some might think it a shame but God didn't pay attention to their desire for simplicity. Many aspects of the world are described by way of complex equations and by the complex developments of simple equations. Many aspects of human being have been shaped by the needs of our ancestors to respond, in ways originally described by Darwin the biologist, to a world changing in ways seen quite vaguely by Darwin the geologist.

We prefer simplicity and we prefer the comfortable and well-organized ideas we were taught by the textbooks of our youths. So it is that thinkers defend both the truths and the speculations which have come down through the many traditions of mankind, including the Catholic traditions and the earlier traditions which were used by the Fathers of the Church. They defend by using arguments and exhortations drawn from the powerful works of Augustine and Aquinas, John of the Cross and Francis de Sales, without realizing fully that those arguments and exhortations were developed within understandings of Creation no longer fully plausible, though still plausible in light of a proper historical analysis. The correction of prior understandings can be seen in the development of the Christian mind over the centuries. In fact, Augustine's understandings of many specific matters were corrected or enriched or simply set in a new overall understanding of Creation by Aquinas. Surprisingly, most traditionalist Catholics know history well enough to know that many of the great thinkers of Christianity, including Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas, were attacked by the traditionalists of their own ages for being heretics but don't seem to have

learned a certain humility from seeing what happens to the work of even the greatest of thinkers. We build monuments to the prophets of past centuries even as we persecute our own prophets—though modern institutions seem to prefer to persecute by simply ignoring any prophets, serious thinkers who have moved away from the herd in response to what interests or bothers them in God's Creation. (Aquinas is said to have understood prophecy to be a process of coming into a certain alignment with God's thoughts rather than a process of listening to dictation from the Almighty; in any case, that's how I understand prophecy.)

Many centuries ago, some coherent views of the 'geography' of Creation were developed according to the best available thoughts of human traditions and one of those views provided the settings for Dante's great poems, *Inferno* and *Purgatory* and *Paradise*. Why is it that no one in the mainstream, certainly not in the traditionalist communities, has bothered to produce a new understanding given all that we know about our mortal world and all that could be extrapolated about the world of the resurrected? More strongly still: Why is it that no one in the mainstream, certainly not in the traditionalist communities, has bothered to produce a new understanding, as did Dante in his day, given all that we know that is wrong in the old understandings of even the most concrete and directly perceptible forms of created being. It is those old understandings which once provided concepts used in our discussions of heaven and earth and hell, of the 'location' of God. We have no corresponding new understandings, only a desire to stick to some grand understandings of Creation without being able to actually discuss any matters outside of the secularized interests of our overly politicized age. If your noblest goal is to be respectable or regain respectability in the public squares of a paganized world, if you don't think it necessary to talk of Creation and salvation in your ideas of politics and law and economics, then you've become the enemy you think to be fighting.

A little thought will lead to the fear that young Christians listen to vague, handwaving talk of heaven and pay attention to the more disciplined efforts their elders make in the more important matters of politics and technological development and financial matters. Those children learn about the hard facts being gathered by scientists and space-explorers and quickly learn who has hard-edged, verifiable facts. They see medical miracles based upon the principles of genetics and sometimes evolutionary biology and learn man is a natural creature.

We and those children need a story which will make good Christian sense

of all this and provide a setting for valid elements of traditional thought and maybe for some thoughts we'll pass on as parts of a new tradition. Heaven is only mentioned and never described or at least intelligently discussed as part of the same Creation as this world. Dante provided a brilliant artistic view of the Medieval understanding of hell and purgatory and heaven by simply taking advantage of the thoughts of scholastics who had dared to challenge the traditions they had inherited. We have turned heaven into a ghostly sort of region, a land of fairy-tales. We realize at some level the old ways of talking about Heaven are wrong and yet we make no efforts to produce new ways; we retreat into ghettos and seem to hope that God will just act as we wish and stop surprising us.

True it is that mortal men can never speak with certainty of heaven but true it also is that we have a duty to speak with the most plausible speculations, allowing for the hints in the Bible and for the chaotic materials and relationships of this world. The Catholic principle is that grace completes and perfects nature rather than destroying or replacing it. This means that we can speak, we are duty-bound to speak, as heaven as being a completed and perfected version of this world. We are also bound to speak in terms of our best knowledge, our best empirical understandings, of this world and its mortal creatures. See Chapter 191, *What are the Thermodynamic Properties of Heaven?* for an early, somewhat playful, and somewhat unreliable discussion of one aspect of this issue.

When it comes to our Christian beliefs, we are lazy and prefer the understandings or stories built up in past centuries by men with greater faith and far greater courage than we have. If we are child-like, it is in the way of a barbarian child bereft of a higher imagination.

## 634 Trying to Get the Story Right

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1687>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/09/04.]

Chapter 633, *Cafeteria Catholics and Ghetto Catholics*, and Chapter 52, *Reality Bites Back but Maybe It Started Nibbling Many Years Ago*, provide an understanding of the nature of reality which is the background of this article along with my understanding of the nature of human rights. That latter understanding will be developed in this chapter in the course of responding to some recent, well-argued essays by the political philosopher Hadley Arkes—see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hadley\\_Arkes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hadley_Arkes) for some basic information on this important Catholic thinker, a recent convert from Judaism. Professor Arkes writes often on moral issues such as contraception and abortion and sexual norms. The four essays I'm responding to are:

- *Hobby Lobby: A Victory, So Far* at <http://www.thecatholicthing.org/columns/2013/hobby-lobby-a-victory-so-far.html>,
- *Religious Freedom in Search of Its Argument* at <http://www.thecatholicthing.org/columns/2013/religious-freedom-in-search-of-its-argument.html>,
- *Religious Freedom in Search of Its Argument—Abroad* at <http://www.thecatholicthing.org/columns/2013/religious-freedom-in-search-of-its-argument-abroad.html>,  
and

- *Another Disaster for Religious Freedom in the Courts* at <http://www.thecatholicthing.org/columns/2013/another-disaster-for-religious-freedom-in-the-courts.html>.

In the first of those essays, Professor Arkes speaks of the confusion about the state of the embryo from the earliest stage:

But if this was a victory, it was a melancholy win, revealing also the edge that cuts against the religious in this country. According to Judge Tymkovich and his colleagues, the Greens assert, among their “sincere beliefs,” a “belief that human life begins when sperm fertilizes an egg.” A “belief”? That would surely come as news to the authors of all of the texts in embryology, who report that point as one of their anchoring truths.

There is certainly a major problem with a judge who can’t see a simple fact, even if that judge might well argue coherently that that particular fact doesn’t generate a “right to life,” but I’m not an activist as such but rather a Catholic thinker working on a long-term project to produce a greater understanding of all of Creation. I’m writing this essay to argue for that need for a greater understanding as a setting for all our lesser understandings, including those of human being in all its aspects. In other words, we need to come to new understandings in light of modern knowledge as well as the truths from traditional Christian thought of life and the universe and everything before we can speak coherently of the value of human life or of human rights in general.

I’ll start with an inconvenient insight of the same general field of study as those books on embryology which Arkes points to. Those books do let us know that a human life begins at conception but they also place that life in the context of evolutionary and developmental processes which have not yet been integrated into the Christian story. As a consequence, they haven’t been integrated into any Christian political thought of our age though these unresolved questions have entered the minds and souls of many in the form of a rather cloudy sort of skepticism. That sort of skepticism, as opposed to an honest and well-formed skepticism, can readily become a disease of mind, of heart, and of hands.

I'll ignore that ugly aspect of our age in this essay, though you should keep it ever in mind when thinking about these issues of what might seem merely intellectual arguments.

Who was the first man or first woman? For simplicity, I'll write only of the first man.

Assume, for argument's sake, that we can identify an Adam, a first man. What biologically based argument is there for saying that Adam had 'human rights' now that we know his parents were not modern human beings and had no such 'human rights'? Surely, we can't extend human rights back to all apish creatures who were our ancestors; we wouldn't even know if we should keep going back to our other ancestors—rat-like animals, reptile-like animals, and back to membranes filled with self-reproducing chemicals. It's obviously absurd to think human rights can be traced back before that first hypothetical human being, who almost certainly didn't exist. But if he did exist: by what process did he receive such rights? He had parents who weren't fully human, cousins who weren't, maybe siblings who weren't. Could we claim his parents had, perhaps, 75% inalienable rights, 75% of a right to life?

If there was no true Adam, what is the source of our rights? From a natural standpoint, the source of our rights seems to be our reluctance, far from absolute and weaker than that of wolves and other creatures, to kill members of our own species. Even if our instincts against killing other members of the human species were stronger, it wouldn't provide much of a justification for placing absolute value on human life, certainly not from conception. It would provide a strong justification for placing very high value on human life, but not absolute. Something has to provide a bridge from "very high" to "absolute". Such claims can't be justified by either the actual real-world relationships between human beings nor by anything that could conceivably be discovered about our state as unique animals descended from ancestors common also to apes and then from ancestors common also to rats and raccoons and ultimately from some sort of ancestor common also to bacteria, slime-molds, and a lot of critters not giving much sign of being possible ancestors of creatures with Lockean rights.

Arkes provides a quote from Pope Francis' recent encyclical, *Lumen Fidei*:

faith was. . . understood either as a leap in the dark. . . driven by blind emotion, or as a subjective light, capable perhaps of

warming the heart and bringing personal consolation, but not something which could be proposed to others as an objective and shared light which points the way.

Notice that Pope Francis doesn't claim we have rigorous arguments that can't be denied by this-worldly arguments. Rather do we have "something which could be proposed to others as an objective and shared light which points the way." More specifically, I'd say we have a story based upon facts though necessarily disciplined to some preliminary understanding, itself to be clarified as the story emerges. The story which we modern Christians inherited is in bad shape. It was a story which, when it was healthier or at least more robust, was in some deep sense the foundation of Western Civilization, the Christian civilization which was the greatest of all works of mortal man. In some sense, that Christian story, that understanding of God's Creation, **was** Western Civilization.

Is there a version of this story we can tell which is built only from empirical knowledge without Christian beliefs? I don't know. If there is such a story, it might not be clear about the role of human rights or the path they'll take in the future. Will they move closer and closer toward becoming absolute rights we should honor in all other human beings? I don't know. I do know that it's not possible to justify much of anything by simply taking convenient facts from modern empirical knowledge and joining them to premodern Christian understandings of Creation. Well, maybe you can join them in some sense but it could be pretty ugly. See my freely downloadable book, *Four Kinds of Knowledge* [43], for my understanding of how Christians, and maybe others, should view these issues of knowledge.

This is, as I noted in Chapter 52 , *Reality Bites Back but Maybe It Started Nibbling Many Years Ago*,

a world where stuff is ephemeral, is created by relationships and can be shaped or reshaped by relationships. This is where quantum physics meets the school of thought associated with St John the Apostle.

We have fallen from a world of tightly defined categories subject to syllogistic reasoning or any other forms of classical logic. We have fallen into a Darwinian and Einsteinian world in which reality tells us what reality is and we have to understand it in various ways. First, we must try to understand

the stuff and space and time and concrete entities and relationships. Then, we must make some greater sense of it in light of all the developmental and evolutionary processes which dominate, that is, we must try to tell a story of the universe and a story of life on earth which includes a story of the human species.

We need to see rights evolving and developing over time, probably parallel to the evolution and development of complex social and political relationships mediated by common stories, such as the Homeric stories. Such a story can be found in my freely downloadable book, *Human Rights: An Evolutionary and Christian Perspective* [47], but it is in the context of Christian beliefs. I'll reprint the entire short chapter, *Introduction*.

I want others to respect me by not taking my life and by not placing constraints upon my other rights as generally recognized in the Anglo-American traditions. I certainly want powerful institutions to also honor those rights won by historical accident but also by hard work and sacrifice on the part of our ancestors, some of whom were working for other purposes—such as the noblemen who sought to secure their own rights when they forced King John to sign the *Magna Carta* which was gradually extended to all Englishmen.

I want to be safe not only from attacks mounted by American and foreign criminals but also from attacks mounted by American politicians and government employees who would gain prestige, power, and money by restricting my rights and those of my fellow-citizens. I want to know that if I'm accused of a crime, I'll be treated with respect by police and court officials, that I'll be allowed competent legal counsel, that I would get a fair trial if it came to that. I would like to think I could receive justice if I were wronged by even the richest of financiers or the most powerful of corporations.

I would like to have my rights to life, liberty, and property guaranteed against the inroads of greedy bankers, ambitious politicians, or self-righteous religious leaders.

I also believe this world to be a narrative, a rich and complex story being told by God. As a Christian who has tried to respond to God's Creation in the context of the most basic Christian beliefs as summarized in the various versions of the

traditional creeds of the early Christian Church, I think this world to be centered upon the Crucifixion of Christ, the willing self-sacrifice of the Son to His Father. The story is so complex because of the creaturely nature taken on by the Son of God—human by accident though not by necessity nor was this foreordained in any way understandable by the mind of a creature. Being human as well as God, Jesus Christ has a creaturely nature, a nature of a social being, an apish creature made for life in an overlapping complex of human communities.

Some human beings will be resurrected to part of the complex of human communities which we call the Body of Christ, the home or social environment, if you will, for the Son of God. This Body of Christ is not something that will form only in the world of the resurrected, just as the members of that Body will not form only in that world of the resurrected. Where will those members come from? They are us, at least some of us, members of the human race in this mortal realm. In parallel with that, I conjecture the entire Body is under formation in this world and that raises some interesting possibilities for the members of that Body.

In Part I, *Natural Human Rights: Reality or Dream?*, I develop a sketchy view of man as a mere creature, and mere as well as creature is what man is, what he is born to be. I deny that human rights can be well-founded by the usual ways of modern liberalism, including the loose, question-begging language found in the American *Declaration of Independence*.

In Part II, *Can We Find a True Foundation for Human Rights?*, I move on to claim that we, at least we Christians, are warranted in speculating about rights appearing as the Body of Christ develops in this world of evolutionary and developmental processes.

In Part III, *Created Being and the Foundations of Human Rights*, I provide some of my weblog essays. These are but a sampling of the work I've produced to establish a new understanding of created being, a foundation which allows me to speak, in the way of radical understandings of quantum physics and St John the Apostle's understanding of God the Creator, of relationships being primary over substance, of relationships

bringing stuff into existence and shaping it. This provides the justification for speaking of the Body of Christ as forming in this mortal realm and of developing the sorts of relationships not to be perfected nor completed on this side of the grave. Human rights are one aspect of those relationships proper to the members and organs and entirety of the Body of Christ. . .

The task for those who think it possible, or at least desirable, to treat human rights as being absolute but not founded upon “beliefs”, is to secularize these or similar arguments, which means they become indeterminate, ‘scientific’ arguments. This is to say, we can extrapolate from what has happened so far inside of this world, but I don’t see how we can extrapolate far enough to reach absolute truths, absolute prohibitions against killing other human beings as one example. I’m not sure there would even be any absolute truths to reach if this is a world fully understandable by secular thought. Any effort to secularize our arguments so that they can be fully acceptable to non-believers would likely lead to a repeat of a cycle from robust believer to deist to pagan or atheist. We’ve done that once, and one reason we went through it, was the failure of Catholic intellectuals and Church leaders to courageously deal with the many questions raised by all this new empirical knowledge. It’s about time to deal with those questions and move on with a new Christian understanding of Creation.

As I see matters, natural law theories of human rights were set in the context of Western Civilization. This was, so to speak, a Christian sea and even the Deists such as Locke and Jefferson were like fish swimming in a water which was invisible to them. They, and far too many Trinitarian Christians then and now, thought their beliefs to be truths of a world transparent in such a way that truth and values can be seen without the aid of what I call a story, a morally purposeful narrative understanding of this world or even of all of Creation.

And so came the true fall of man, the acceptance of the illusion that human rights could be stated in a way that depended upon human reason independent of the influence of human beliefs.



# 635 A Small Suggestion that We Return to an Important Thomistic Concept and Word

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1704>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/10/02.]

In his catechesis for the general audience of 2013/10/02, Pope Francis had this to say:

The Church is holy because “she comes from God Who is holy, Who is faithful to her and never abandons her to the power of death and evil. She is holy because Jesus Christ, Saint of God, is indissolubly united to her; she is holy because she is guided by the Holy Spirit which purifies, transforms, and renews. She is not holy by our merits, but because God makes her holy”.

Everything comes from God and is holy to a significant extent. The Church is holy by intent, ‘intent’ being used in the Thomistic sense of a purposeful, goal-oriented, growth process. An acorn intends to the state of ‘oak tree’ and a man may intend the state of sainthood. This is to say that the Church is holy because She intends to (purposefully grows toward) the state of being the central organ, the organ of worship and of moral conscience, of the complete and perfected Body of Christ in the world of the resurrected. Clearly, this sort of growth process is consistent with various developmental problems, even cancerous growths within the Church. This sort of growth process can also chew up many of the individual ‘cells’ of the communal organism at one time or another. We might well be able to understand the problems of the Church over the years simply by

remembering our own growth problems and diseases. At times the Church can be infected by horrible diseases, as is truth of any other living, growing entity, even one growing toward such a glorious state.

# 636 We Christians Don't Do Truth But We Do Poor People and Immigrants

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1713>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/10/07.]

Whatever he means to be saying, Pope Francis sometimes seems to be strongly implying exactly the title of this essay: We Christians Don't Do Truth But We Do Poor People and Immigrants. He's in line with a good number of Catholics, including many of the bishops and Cardinals of the West and most certainly the leaders of most Western Catholic organizations in fields of corporeal charity and social justice. There are perhaps a still higher percentage of non-Catholic Christians who speak and act to devalue truth in various ways. And I'm sure most of those Catholics and other Christians of similar viewpoints do value the truth in some far region of their hearts; I'm also sure that they are at best only barely aware that they can't speak coherently to that truth.

We are in a bad situation. We have no truth to witness because we, as a Christian people, haven't valued the truth enough to have kept hold of it. We have chosen not to go through the difficult task of re-understanding God's Creation in terms of all that has been learned about this concrete realm and all that has been discovered about abstract realms from which, in my way of speaking, the concrete realm has been shaped.

We are, in fact, missing a great opportunity. A radically honest understanding of our new knowledge about Creation is in line with the understanding of Creation by St John the Apostle and those who followed him, listened to him, and helped him to produce the Biblical works attributed to

him. This is what modern physics and mathematics tells us: relationships create and shape stuff and things. Evolutionary biology adds: relationships shape living things in very complex ways.

God didn't create the world and then decide to love it, or at least parts of it—as we would gather from nearly all Hellenistic thought and also the thoughts of Einstein and those modern Christians who accept his rational, pagan thought as simply “common sense.” God first loved the world, all of it and all things within it, and the world came into existence.

God didn't create complex things and living things which fit cleanly into categories of the sort which can be listed in clean, schematic ways. God created simple relationships which gave rise first to simple things; complex relationships and things, including those of living things, came by way of evolutionary and developmental processes.

None of this is the dreams of philosophers; the deepest beliefs of our culture show up in our most basic understandings of reality and can be found in the plot-lines of television shows and the assumptions about, say masculinity and femininity, which drive the ‘meaning’ of books used to teach children how to read and, hence, how to think in terms which might mature into abstract reasoning. As a result of Christian refusal to deal with these very basic issues, modern culture has become so many alien regions to those who believe in the Bible and the Christian Creeds.

We feed the poor and we speak gibberish to our own children when we try to explain to them why the Bible teaches the ultimate truths, despite all those regions of space so empty of angels and all those disconcerting facts about human sexuality which show up in the science news. After all, we preach sexual morality from a Medieval and Hellenistic stance that men and women are categorically such when most modern adolescents, if not always their parents, are aware of scientific evidence that such isn't true: see Chapter 299, *Sex and Categorical Reasoning in a World of Evolution and Development* and Chapter 304, *What Makes a Male, Genes or Developmental Accidents?*. We preach resurrection and don't try to develop any images of what this could mean in terms of modern understandings of those realms of Creation we can explore: see Chapter 52, *Reality Bites Back but Maybe It Started Nibbling Many Years Ago* for one of my many discussions of this issue. We should learn how to bring the truth to a more exact form in this mortal realm of evolution and development and then we can preach the truth in a coherent manner. See my freely downloadable book, *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53] for a discussion of one sort of

created being where we need a more exact understanding based upon the more exact knowledge we have of empirical reality.

The God who allowed Himself to be nailed to the cross didn't teach us to expect religious liberty or tolerance and He never led anyone to believe that poverty and suffering can ever be eliminated in this mortal realm. He did teach us to help our neighbors and also to preach the truths He gave to us in terms of Jewish culture of 2,000 years ago. Over the previous thousand years or so, Jewish belief had developed out of the paganism of the Semitic peoples, a paganism which I understand as having some monotheistic tendencies. It was not a case of God revealing a schema of truths for all time although He did give a couple of absolute truths; it's even a bit of a puzzle as to what God revealed to Moses about His own nature and more of a puzzle as to why more polytheistically inclined forms of Semitic religion continued to survive for centuries, showing up in the early books of the Bible in terms of mixed theological language as well as a struggle for power between priesthoods which developed into a split between the 'Samaritans' and the followers of the cult in Jerusalem. (The winners in Jerusalem may well have unfairly attributed polytheistic tendencies to the losers in the northern territories.)

It's a puzzle, not because of any skepticism imposed upon a clear story of God vs the idols, but rather because the events of those centuries leading up to the birth of Jesus of Nazareth were as confusing, as chaotic or factual, as more recent centuries have been. God as a storyteller hasn't gotten more sloppy over the years, but it is true that the world has changed. Men have changed; the environments to which modern men respond when shaping their own selves have changed; human acts and thoughts and feelings over the century have left their very particular marks in human traditions and cultures. Our minds are different from the minds of those who lived with Moses or with Jesus of Nazareth or with Thomas Aquinas; our minds are not just ahistorical human minds which happen to be attached to men who live in the 21st century and which are filled with more modern facts.

Those 2,000 years of Christian history are a narrative of the Body of Christ emerging, in its aspects of mind and heart and hands. It is a story being told by God in His freely chosen role as Creator. Men of the caliber of Augustine and Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas and John Henry Newman and Pierre Duhem and Stanley Jaki have tried to teach us respect for the thoughts God manifested in Creation, thoughts we now know a little better than did the contemporaries of Jesus of Nazareth. It is by responding

to those manifested thoughts that we shape our minds to accord with the mind of God, that we learn to understand Creation as the manifestation of thoughts of its Creator, that we shape our own minds as being participants in the greatest of all human intellects—that of the Body of Christ. This process of understanding Creation is part of the growth of the Body of Christ, part of our efforts as individual human beings to be better images of our Lord Jesus Christ, part of our efforts as communal human beings to be better images of the Creator who is Father and Son and Holy Spirit.

First, the thinkers with powerful intelligences and courageous spirits strike out into Creation, responding to all the wonderful and dangerous things and relationships. Then, the universal teachers begin to put the findings, the firm knowledge and speculations, of those great-spirited men into forms where the teachers at ordinary colleges and seminaries can begin to teach those who will in turn teach at high schools and at the individual communities of worship. The preachers and popular book-writers and poets and novelists, the musical composers and sculptors, the architects and urban-planners, the parents and uncles and aunts, can then begin to do their work in helping the youths to properly shape their minds. This process is suffering from logjams at every step; as a consequence, even some of the greatest and most absolute of truths is stated in terms of human knowledge which is implausible and sometimes downright false.

I've done my best to blow some of those logjams apart but the dangerous thoughts of a truth-seeker don't register on the minds of modern men. Apparently, we modern Christians are the images of a God with a poorly developed mind and a great indifference to His own Creation including the truths which are the raw stuff of that Creation. I doubt that to be the God of Jesus Christ, but what do I know: I'm convinced Francis of Assisi would have lived out his life as a playboy if Augustine hadn't struggled so hard in his studies of human history to find God's teachings. If somehow, a faltering Western Civilization had been re-energized while Francis was partying, then it would have still been a pretty paltry revival if not for the efforts of Aquinas and Galileo and a host of others who struggled to better grasp what was in the things and relationships of Creations, things studied by philosophers and physicists and composed by musicians and erected by architects.

I don't mean to denigrate St Francis for it was he, even more than St Dominic, who did re-energize European Christian Civilization, making possible St Thomas Aquinas among many others, architects and political

actors as well as philosophers and theologians. But I would suggest that Christ is mind as well as heart and hands. Aquinas is as much a true image of Christ as is Francis.

We who have inherited such a magnificent civilization and have failed to even try to protect and nourish and advance it have much to answer for. I equate human civilizations with early versions of the Body of Christ as it develops in this mortal realm. If we don't care for our human communities, most certainly that magnificent entity of Western Civilization, then we are failing to do our duty to Christ and to our fellowmen. Far too often, we modern Christians starve and stunt the Body of Christ and think to be doing the entirety of our duty by feeding the poor from the four corners of the world. We truly are the products of an age of textbooks filled with glossy images as well as numerous guides for the idiots and the clueless who are us by our own choice.

We failed to keep Western Civilization healthy and flourishing. We fail to give our children a reason to believe, have failed to build the structures of behaviors and belief and feeling, the physical and intellectual and spiritual, which would support a robust Christian civilization.

From at least the latter stages of the Enlightenment, we Christians of the West have used up the resources of our civilization by way of morally irresponsible acts and failures to act. The bank accounts are now almost empty.

I'm stuck between a rock and a hard place. On one side are alleged conservatives and traditionalists who seem to have forgotten that they're supposed to be listening to the Creator and the vast majority of the Lord's words come in the form of His acts-of-being in Creation, His creation of a world in which time and space are best described for now by Einstein's General Theory of Relativity, matter by the quantum physics of Schrodinger and Heisenberg and Dirac, human being by Darwin. Choose your favorite empirically oriented literary exegetes, historians, musicians, and painters and the picture is reasonably complete.

And the hard place? Well, there are the liberals who will to go to Heaven and to take everyone with them. Except for the good feelings they seem to feel at the very mention of Heaven, or other words, they often seem embarrassed by the very suggestion of a salvation granted by God; they seem to prefer the generosity of goodhearted men who have outgrown that tribal-god stuff. This mortal realm is as much a mystery to them as is any other realm, including Heaven. Surely, God made a mistake in putting us

in a place of such suffering because He's going to be merciful and save all of us in any case. Why? Because it's too painful to think of other possibilities, often too painful to think. So it is that they join with somewhat like-minded conservatives to preach the simplicity of it all—remember all those guides for the idiots and the clueless. The liberals of Christianity watch God walk a tight-rope, not a step allowed to left or to right, that we might have the freedom to treat the world as being what we wish it to be.

In the end, my main criticism of Pope Francis and many other modern Christians, including the American bishops and the Catholic charitable workers, is that they know darned well that each and every member of their flocks has a duty to feed that poor child in Haiti or New York City but don't seem comfortable with any claims that child's mind should be shaped to accord with Christian truths; he'll have too many rap lyrics to memorize and too many complex sports to understand.

We have religious liberty to protect us Christians from the refusal of governments to do poor people our way, from its apparent refusal to protect all men from any excessive claims of God. Maybe we went overboard when we protected ourselves and others from fanatic inquisitors? Maybe we protected ourselves from all claims to truth? Especially when those claims were, rightly or wrongly, made on behalf of the God of Jesus Christ?

In Chapter 494, *When a Government Oversteps Its Proper Domain*, I dealt with some of the very serious problems created when modern Christians began to misunderstand modern politics and their relationship, as one particular example, to the government of the United States. I believe American Christian leaders were and are deeply irresponsible in teaching their sheep to accept dependence upon governments which have taken on the characteristics of parasites and cancerous tumors. Yet, my still stronger claim is that it was truly unwise to support any government programs in areas where there is substantial moral differences within the population being served, those differences being more explicit in our time largely because liberty developed in the Christian West at the same time that various sorts of Christians turned away from strong versions of their own faiths.

For another but overlapping view of the problematic impressions made by Pope Francis, see the article, *What Is Pope Francis Saying to the Right?* at <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/what-is-pope-francis-saying-to-the-right/>, by John Zmirak, a Catholic writer of traditionalist tendencies. For a recent interview in which Pope Francis states his goals in his own

words, see *The Pope to Repubblica: How the Church will change under my watch* at <http://rorate-caeli.blogspot.com/2013/10/the-pope-to-repubblica-how-church-must.html>".



## 637 What Christ Was Lacking

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1719>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/11/07.]

In Colossians 1:24[141], St Paul writes: “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. . .”

I suspect, partly on the basis of my own few experiences, that most modern efforts to understand these difficult words of St Paul are within the modern way of thought which sees salvation as individual rather than as communal. The Bible presents matters differently. For Jews, salvation comes to those who are members of the People of Israel; for Christians, salvation comes to those who are members of the Church. Modern Christians, most certainly those who are Americans, both Catholic and Protestants, have fallen strongly under the influence of a radical individualism even to the extent that some Catholics and many Protestants think it possible to be a Christian and a libertarian—I admit freely that there is a proper part of Christian political thought which could be labeled libertarian but the entire way of thought called ‘libertarianism’ assumes a view of human nature, and of the nature of created being, in opposition to Biblical teachings that man is both fully individual and also fully communal.

We continue to exist as individuals in these communities of salvation, but we take on the communal being of the People of Israel or the Body of Christ, a term I prefer to ‘Church’ because I think the Church in the sense of an ecclesiastical organization is but one organ of that Body though the most important organ in some ways.

We Christians can understand this in terms of Trinitarian theology. As Father and Son and Holy Spirit remain individual Persons even as They are one God, so we remain individual human beings even as we come together

to form one Body of Christ in which we are united with the Christ as the perfect and complete man. Each human being who goes on to share the life of God is the Body of Christ in a true and absolute sense just as the Father is God in a true and absolute sense and so are the Son and the Holy Spirit.

See Chapter 477, *What is the Role of the Christian Church in the Public Square?*, for my early views on the relationship between the Church and the entirety of the Body of Christ. I've continued to explore this topic of the true nature of the Body of Christ and will continue this exploration for a while.

What Christ was lacking and is lacking, in His suffering and in other ways, is His brothers and sisters. Christ was complete in His own individual human nature allied with His divine nature and divine Person, but He became one of us and took on our needs and desires. Without us, He is somewhat like a human being with some of his limbs torn off, bloody and mutilated; less graphically, He is incomplete in His communal human nature.

The Son of God chose to be dependent upon other human beings, chose to take up a human nature incomplete in its communal aspects during life in this mortal realm. He took upon Himself a human need for human community—for us, at least for many of us.

We perhaps fill up what lacked in Christ's affliction in various ways, but certainly by becoming members of human communities and, most especially, of the Body of Christ. We become the friends of Christ, members of the greatest of all communities and one in which the Son of God is Himself a member.

# 638 We Need to Act in the Spirit of St Benedict, Not Just to Mindlessly Repeat His Acts

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1745>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/12/17.]

Folks who would be conservative, who would preserve what is good and even holy in the heritage of Western Civilization, still don't get it. At least not fully, but some are trying hard to figure out what to do in a decaying and possibly collapsing West and some of those are risking their futures in experiments in ways of living which might allow them to provide a greater moral order for themselves and their children.

It's certainly true that things are going badly in the West, in a multitude of ways including the sacrifice of traditional truths and beliefs and behaviors to political scheming and mere, mindless change-mongering labeled self-righteously as 'progress'. Parents and others feel a need to protect the children though few claim that or act as if a complete separation from the mainstreams and centers of human life would be good for those children or the world they will eventually inherit.

In the article, *Benedict Option* at <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/benedict-option/>, Rod Dreher tells us that:

Christians have been here before. Around the year 500, a generation after barbarians deposed the last Roman emperor, a young Umbrian man known to history only as Benedict was sent to Rome by his wealthy parents to complete his education.

Disgusted by the city's decadence, Benedict fled to the forest to pray as a hermit.

Dreher summarizes the historical mess resulting from the collapse of Rome:

Rome's collapse meant staggering loss. People forgot how to read, how to farm, how to govern themselves, how to build houses, how to trade, and even what it had once meant to be a human being. Behind monastery walls, though, in their chapels, scriptoriums, and refectories, Benedict's monks built lives of peace, order, and learning and spread their network throughout Western Europe.

We have to be a little careful here because the more immediate change brought about by the collapse of Rome was the loss of contact between communities as barbarians began to control major regions and much of the roads just as we can still see in some countries such as Afghanistan and some countries in Africa. Initially, a lot of knowledge and skills remained intact. The more general damage, where knowledge and skills became quite local and often restricted to monasteries and maybe communities clustered around cathedrals or royal estates, came afterward and probably—at least in my opinion—as a result of the global breakdown, that loss of safety on the roads connecting the somewhat intact Italian cities to those of Western and Central Europe, as well as points east and south. Even at the beginning of the development of great trading enterprises as Europe started slowly to increase wealth and standards of living, the roads could be guaranteed as safe only in small regions where the king's men or the duke's men held sway. Early capitalism (pre-industrial) began to explode when the kings and other men of arms were able to guarantee safe movement through much of the Western and Mediterranean regions of Europe so that the merchants were able to move the English wool, perhaps already processed into raw cloth by craftsmen in the Lowlands, to Italy in exchange for silks and spices and even aesthetic objects.

In other words, fairly extreme localization was a result of the breakdown of Rome and, by the grace of God, St Benedict and his followers were able to retain much knowledge and skills in their communities, holding them in treasure for return to better times when Europe began to re-form, eventually

on a greater scale than the Roman Empire though never so centralized. The Benedictines also advanced knowledge, certainly in the production of spirits old and new, and those monkish fellows and the laity who lived in partial community with them played a major role in teaching and guiding Europe in the great project of building a Christian civilization which we know as the West, a synthesis of Jerusalem and Athens and Rome, but also including the peoples and traditions from barbarian Europe—Germanic and Celtic and a few others. That true prize, a civilization making it possible for the many to be at least tentatively part of the Body of Christ and also making it possible for various creative thinkers and doers to advance that Body in its mortal form, could be gained only with the communications, even communions, which started to connect various regions of Europe into something describable as a whole, a very complex and often self-destructive whole.

Civilization is built upon foundations and with bricks which come from created being, from human responses to the thoughts God manifested in this thing-like world. Increasingly, as the human race has advanced, civilizations—especially that of the West—have drawn upon the abstract being from which thing-like being was shaped, the abstract being which we can come to know and understand because of that advance. The foundations and bricks of a civilization are the human individual and communal minds and hearts and hands which are the manifestation of human responses to Creation over the course of true (conscious and recorded) history as well as the preceding eons of biological evolution. Our civilization is us and our decay is really the decay of our individual and communal selves in the West, not the decay of some ‘civilization’ out there and independent of us.

The material aspects of Western Civilization are manifestations of our inner selves, increasingly barbarian and—not coincidentally—increasingly incompetent no matter how much shock and awe can be generated by our armies which can no longer defeat a determined and intelligent counterforce of desert nomads armed with rifles left over from the Korean War period. Those teenagers walking down the street with smart-phones glued to their ears are a sign of exploitation in a collapsing West, not a sign of good technology wisely used. I’m enough of a nerd to wish I’d had time to learn a bit more about the intelligent use of computers (especially the use of that gray-haired language, LISP, to write self-editing programs) and modern metal-working equipment, but this smart-phone stuff just leaves me cold, leaves me wondering, “Why bother?” Much of our technology is

just more grease for our slide down the ramp, stuff to help us become more complete barbarians who are somewhat clever at using advanced technology we no longer understand—chimpanzees are capable of some levels of such cleverness.

If we retreat from Western Civilization, we can carry a far smaller chunk of that civilization than Benedict and his followers were able to do. We lose far more than Benedict and his earlier followers did because there is more to lose and it's interconnected. The reclamation effort would be far greater than it was during the early Middle Ages (after Augustine and Gregory the Great and Benedict and up to 900 or so). We in the modern West no longer work only with stone and wood but rather with engineered materials, no longer work only with pen and paper but with computers, no longer work only with horse and wagon but with planes and trains and submarines. Like it or not, this technology and the cultural uses of that technology and even our attitudes toward it are part of us, part of the man of the modern West. There is no road back to, say, early 19th century man so that he can begin a wiser movement forward—if you believe that he would even be likely to be wiser in that situation. Without modern technology, billions will die, others will be enslaved or at least reduced to primitive farming and handcrafts.

Much will be lost, even much of the internal richness of life possible to a civilized human being. We may well have misused much of our technology but that technology and our misuse of it was a reflection of our misshaped minds and hearts and hands, themselves misshaped by inappropriate responses to Creation; in a sense, we've already lost much of that internal richness I referred to above. If at all possible, we would be better off struggling to reform and recover, however impossible the task might seem. We would even be better off helping along the processes by which the center of the Body of Christ might shift, as I think it will, to the Pacific Rim or perhaps to Russia, that a greater Body might begin to grow. Yes, I do claim that the Body of Christ in this mortal realm is the greatest and most inclusive of civilizations, of which the Christian Church (as an ecclesiastical organization rather than a home for the Christian's complete life as it was for St Paul) is only an organ though the most important organ, the organ of worship and of direct communion with God and the organ which gives the rest of the Body of Christ a focus for fulfilling the purposes God gave to us. I would interpret the current events and trends as indicating it be time to allow the various great and simple peoples of Asia to integrate themselves into the Body of Christ; I would fear and hope they will come to dominate

over Western Christians become fat and lazy and stupid. I would rather an alliance but we're doing little to make our Western selves attractive allies or partners.

I realize, and Mr Dreher stated this, that many of these modern followers of St Benedict are trying to remain in contact with the greater part of modern Western Civilization and plan to let their children come into such contact when old enough that their moral characters have been properly formed. That's not good enough, though some might have to choose such a path. Benedict's true children will be trying to restore the greater part of the Body of Christ to health and not just moving out to the outer regions of that Body, however much they try to remain in contact with that sick Body. Again, as that Body of Christ returns to health and begins to grow and mature, it may well move beyond the West. We would be wise to cooperate with God if He wills this or something else we might find disturbing to our pride (hubris?).

The spirit of St Benedict would have us serve God in forming the Body of Christ rather than struggling to protect our individual selves, though children—to be sure—must often be protected from harsh realities.



# 639 God is Three of the People Around Us

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1754>. It was finished and uploaded on 2013/12/27.]

*Scientific American* published an article about research on the relationship between prayer and cure of diseases: *Scientists Find One Source of Prayer's Power* found at <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=scientists-find-one-source-of-prayers-power>.

The results seem plausible and the interpretation of the results emphasize the natural but don't deny the possibility of the supernatural. I'm probably more inclined to deny the supernatural when it comes to cures of diseases than is the average agnostic or atheist who is trying to respect the beliefs of others. I deny the supernatural mostly because my view of God as a Creator who works through acts-of-beings makes unnecessary the view that God sits on His throne watching us and occasionally choosing to intervene by way of a divine invasion of our mortal world.

The first paragraph of the article tells us:

The religious find strength through God; this we know. But a new study conducted by Prof. Malt Friese and Michaela Wanke suggests that even non-believers can get in on the action. In a forthcoming issue of the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, they present evidence showing how and why prayer might increase anyone's ability to resist temptation. Though we can all agree that to do so requires self-control, the authors propose that the source of such control might not be supernatural. Instead, it might come from something more

earthly. Something accessible to even the most devoted atheist: social connection.

I agree, so long as this last sentence is not taken in a reductionistic sense. The last paragraph of the article does provide some qualification against the necessity of such a reduction:

This does not rule out the possibility that prayer has other effects on resisting temptation, and the spiritually inclined could see the hand of God as another causal factor here. But as the holidays approach, it reminds us all of where we derive so much of our day-to-day strength. Interacting and connecting with the people around us.

I still largely agree with this statement and would even support the idea that we who are practicing Christians connect with God as much through our community connections as by way of personal prayer and worship. Even the lukewarm, or outright non-believers worshiping because of spouses or parents or children might well connect with God through their fellowmen more than some of us can imagine.

To a certain extent, this article in its efforts to be fair to those who truly believe in God makes a mistake also made by far too many Christians in the modern world. It seems to assume God is out there somewhere, perhaps Jove or Jupiter sitting on His throne and watching as things happen on Earth. In Christian belief, God is everywhere including the ‘insides’ of every human being. As Augustine of Hippo said 1500 years ago: God is more deeply inside of us than we can ourselves reach. He is a Creator, immanent as well as transcendent, inhabiting—in a manner of speaking—each bit of created being. He creates, from nothing and also by shaping what already exists into other created entities.

Mostly, this line of thought should lead a Christian, or those seeking to understand Christian thought, to meditate upon the Body of Christ, the ultimate community of those who will be resurrected to share the life of God through full communion with Jesus Christ. In this community, the resurrected will be like the God of Jesus Christ in an important way: each member of the Body of Christ will remain fully an individual and yet also be fully Christ, the perfect and completed man.

I’m not attacking the work described in this article, nor am I attacking the article as a summary. [This underlying research] “reminds us all of where

we derive so much of our day-to-day strength. Interacting and connecting with the people around us.” This is true from a Christian perspective though we are bound to add: “And Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three Persons who chose to associate Themselves with all of us mortal human beings.” Moreover, we are also bound to add that each man, woman, or child who accepts the invitation of God (and maybe some socially bound to those who do so accept) will be members of a human community which is also divine by way of perfect communion with God.



# 640 The Decentralization Necessary for Solving Profound Problems in Christianity

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1757>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/01/04.]

From a *Catholic News Service* article, *Pope orders new rules on relations between bishops, religious orders*, as published on the website of my diocese (Springfield, MA), <http://www.iobserve.org>:

Pope Francis said he has ordered a revision of what he called outdated Vatican norms on the relations between religious orders and local bishops, in order to promote greater appreciation of the orders' distinctive missions.

Further on, the article tells us:

“I also know that the bishops are not always acquainted with the charisms and works of religious,” he said. “We bishops need to understand that consecrated persons are not functionaries but gifts that enrich dioceses.”

In passing, I'll note that part of the reason for the Pope wishing to take away control from local leaders, bishops, is the claim that some 'foreign' religious orders are conducting a “novice trade” in countries such as the Philippines. This implies that there will be greater controls of specific sorts at the level of the Vatican; I'll ignore this complications to make my main point, one not explicitly made by Pope Francis, yet implied by his general

position: centralized controls, at all levels of a complex institution such as the Catholic Church, must be relaxed if we are to encourage the sort of explorations and thinking processes which will lead to solutions of the current deep problems of Church, the separated Christian churches, nations, Christian civilization, and the entirety of the human race.

In optimistic terms, our current deep problems are related to changes being forced upon us by new knowledge of Creation and the closely related development of extraordinarily complex human relationships; truly are these problems also opportunities though the current generations aren't likely to see the emergence of benefits from taking advantage of those opportunities.

Well-ordered freedom is necessary for the individuals and communities of the human race to move forward in a way compatible with 'progress', a movement I interpret as being the formation and maturing of the Body of Christ.

We need order, so there have been times when the bishops have needed to gain a greater control over institutions including religious orders ideally left to move with a great deal of freedom.

We need freedom, so those bishops including the Pope, should be wise enough to relax controls when appropriate and to the extent which is appropriate.

We should think through and generalize from this situation. This movement between establishing control and relaxing control relies upon the sort of judgment not always found in the leaders of centralized institutions, especially when those leaders are from countries or classes climbing out of barbarism or sinking into it or when they—take notice, my fellow Americans—are from a political class which has been corrupt and incompetent for generations.

# 641 Enriching Our Moral World: Simplicity Is Digested Complexity

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1762>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/01/06.]

It's natural for most human beings to seek simple understandings. They correspond at least roughly to the simple (or elegant) understandings which are a goal of many theorists in the sciences which have a large mathematical component. Einstein pointed out that a theory should be as simple as possible but no simpler. Closer to ordinary sorts of common sense, these sorts of simplicities correspond to the rules and aphorisms which can guide us in our efforts to understand our world and our own selves, in our efforts to make our moral decisions, in our efforts to help shape the characters of boys and girls, in our work as carpenters or engineers. Simplicity can be real in this way, so long as stability reigns in social structure and technology and scientific understandings of men and our world, and so forth.

We can glide through much of the day and through the years, not having to constantly expend large amounts of mental and emotional energy. The world outside our own country becomes such a simple landscape of white and black; those who act as Americans wish them to act are good and the others are bad and we might have to invade them or at least refuse to do business with them.

The world doesn't always seem so simple and, in reality, isn't so simple to those who need to go below surfaces and behind the customs and prejudices of a particular people in a specific age. Euclidean geometry and Newtonian physics had been domesticated in our machine shops and our classrooms

and our technology and even our literature and, then, along came technology and popular knowledge at least touching upon the non-Euclidean geometries of Gauss and Lobachevsky, the curved space of Riemann, the curved spacetime of Einstein. That would have been bad enough, but our very understanding of matter was upset by Planck and Einstein and Heisenberg and Schrodinger. This was actually part of various turbulent waves disturbing poetry and creative fiction as well as understandings of history, including that of the Bible and the great religions of mankind. The physical and social worlds of humankind were suddenly beyond our understandings in those years leading up to the Century of World Warfare. The creative scientists and artists had been dealing with this turbulence for decades before others were forced to deal with it.

Truly had the world been turned upside-down and it has remained a complicated and complex place filled with strange entities. Man returned to being a stranger in a strange land.

I'll dare to be repetitive: the world isn't really simple, nor is matter or space or time, living creatures or the creatures we call stars or planets or volcanoes.

Yet, I'll go on record predicting the world will once again be simple, but only after generations of work by scientists and mathematicians, historians and poets and novelists, composers and sculptors and painters, theologians and philosophers and spiritual masters, teachers and politicians and inventors of games and amusements. They will simplify by drawing forth schematic understandings and well-defined behaviors and wise aphorisms from all this blooming buzzing confusion. Things and relationships will fall into place, symmetries will seem to arise by magic, patterns of various sorts and various levels of complexity will be assembled from the symmetries and even the remaining bits of confusion.

The simplicities, the symmetries and patterns, which allow us to make sense of a very big and messy world of evolutionary and developmental processes, which allow us to live our lives without constantly having to engage in lines of moral reasoning or mathematical calculations, will once again dominate. That might not happen for a few centuries, and it be possible that it will never happen. That is, it be possible that we've destroyed mankind's last chance for true moral and intellectual and cultural order in this mortal realm, though that is unlikely to one, such as me, who believes this world is the story in which the Body of Christ develops and matures as much as He can this side of the grave.

Simplicity of the sort I discuss is best seen as communally digested complexity—deep and dense knowledge encoded in various symbols and words and ways of speaking. Deep and dense but elegant and sometimes even beautiful in some of the structures, such as the music of Mozart or the confidence-game of plain language in the works of Mark Twain.

I already noted that Einstein told us a theory should be as simple as possible, but no more. One example of Einsteinian simplicity was an elegant equation governing the possible forms of his theory of gravity, the General Theory of Relativity. Aesthetically, that equation can be typeset to be as beautiful as a line of Egyptian hieroglyphics or a painting by Rembrandt of some respectable Dutch citizens just sitting around in highly tense leisure. To understand the hieroglyphics, we must know not only a straightforward translation but also a good bit about Egyptian life, perhaps commercial or political or military or liturgical aspects of that life. To understand the painting by Rembrandt, we must know a lot about his reasons for arranging the men and the objects as well as a good bit about Dutch life, perhaps commercial or political or military or liturgical aspects of that life. To understand Einstein's simple equation, a few symbols telling us much about a highly plausible and well-tested encoding of the structure of spacetime and the ways in which matter shapes that spacetime and moves in it, we must know a bit about Riemannian geometry and the tensor calculus, partial differential equations and the nature of gravity. That knowledge was itself based upon several layers of modern mathematical knowledge, the calculus and the very rigorous 'analysis' which justified the calculus, Newtonian dynamics, Maxwell's partial differential equations which described static and dynamic electromagnetic fields, and still more. All of this is expressed in forms made more elegant, more dense and more symmetric, by way of reasoning drawn from a variety of fields of algebra and other fields of thought going out so far as the mystical and obscure ponderings of ancient Greek philosophers. Simple? Yes, that is, it's simple once you've reached maybe the third or fourth year of graduate school in mathematics or a physical or engineering science which is highly mathematical. Similar statements can be made about understanding Egyptian hieroglyphics and Rembrandt's paintings, the Bible and American history.

The situation is little different in other fields, some in which the mathematical concepts of simplicity or elegance apply and others in which well-defined symmetries might not apply. Knowledge of history and other social sciences and various fields of literature and literary studies won't allow the

greatest of human thinkers to construct always valid rules or theorems or models, but the elements of the structural understanding of human being which never comes together will give some understanding that allowed, for example, a Carroll Quigley to see signs of another decline of Western (Christian) Civilization back in the 1930s, a Jacques Barzun to predict, back in 2000 (see *From Dawn to Decadence* [9]), the imminence (though not “tomorrow-ness”) and depth of one phase of that decline (the coming closing of public schools as this country because we Americans will need to send the children back to work and because they’ve been rendered ineducable by the ways in which they are raised). These were hardly lucky guesses. Read political commentators from the 1800s about how the sorts of leaders Americans prefer are incapable of dealing with complex reality or the more explicit predictions of collapse first into barbarian mentality and emotions by the likes of Jose Ortega y Gasset (see *The Revolt of the Masses* [60], published in 1930). I also take very seriously the sad joke from the early 1900s (found in an anecdote of Albert Jay Nock) that the United States is the first country in history to pass directly from barbarism to decadence without ever passing through a stage of civilization in between; this is important as the United States was the prosperous frontier region of Western Civilization which seemed to have inherited the mantle of leadership of that civilization. Think about this in the context of human history, of human failings as understood in various ways.

We Americans clearly had better things to do than to advance or even just maintain Western Civilization; more accurately, few are the Americans who rise above Ortega’s description of a barbarian child growing up in the city: we simply accepted all this technology as well as the boring stuff in books as being part of our environment; we don’t understand it and aren’t capable of fixing it if it breaks, let alone advancing it. True to our barbarian selves, we would never put in a major effort to even learn the history of mankind, certainly not the effort that we would put into or have our children put into sports.

I’m not attacking sports which is also an important part of human civilization, but I am mounting an attack upon an unbalanced, ‘barbarian’ life. Tribes organized to develop their boys into hunters and warriors have sports and certainly great athletes even if they don’t have a Superbowl. Those tribes may even have some impressive poetry and music but not at the level of Goethe or Beethoven; nor do they have more than primitive theology or philosophy or engineering—though it is remarkable how quickly

conquering barbarians pick up sophisticated understanding of military engineering after conquering a people with siege-machines and catapults or other throwing machines.

On a personal basis? I grew upon in a neighborhood where there were almost daily pick-up games of baseball or football or basketball or ice-hockey. I'm happy about that though I wish I'd spent less time watching professional sports on TV in my late-teens into my early 30s.

Simplicity, of a legitimate sort—the elegant symmetries of mathematical sciences and also the general ‘lessons’ of history and literature, is digested complexity. Generally speaking, if there is a pattern, there is a symmetry, though not necessarily one meeting the standards of abstract mathematics. In fact, some dictionaries define symmetry in terms of “fitting together” or similar concepts. Being more objective rather than speaking as if the world exists to be processed by our minds: symmetries allow an organism or a larger eco-system or an entire universe to come together. The liver doesn't devour the heart but rather has (mostly) mediated relationships of a well-ordered sort, symmetries of exchange and of mutual support. Similar comments can be made of healthy economies and polities—more generally, of human communities and parts or aspects of those communities.

We can even ponder a plausible evolutionary reason for the human inclination to seek ‘simplicity’ of various sorts, a reason true to the nature of created being: it takes too much effort to think every thing through, certainly to think every thing through from scratch. We need manners to make it easier to deal with each other, rules of thumb to deal with basic plumbing or electrical repairs, rules of thumb to set-up experiments on a Martian rover so that we can get quickly to the interesting and important issues of a ‘higher’ sort.

Some generations of men are called to create simplicity out of complexity; this can often be the building or expansion or re-formation of a civilization or a part of a civilization, such as a culture or a major activity such as banking or manufacturing or researching the nature of life. Before this process can occur, before complexity can be reduced to simplicity, that complexity has to be recognized, explored, raised higher and broadened and deepened. Before Einstein could create a greater and more symmetric system of dynamics, Maxwell had to produce equations describing electromagnetism which pointed to a great problem: there was a constant which seemed to say electromagnetism had a maximum speed. In addition, various contradictions coming from the study of inertia and an ether which could

carry the electromagnetic waves and there was an older insight that an infinite universe of a static Euclidean structure would be bathed in dangerous radiation and would be a giant fireball rose again.

Darwin started a process which has recently led to a possibility of understanding man as God created him, of seeing man as necessarily a true citizen of this mortal world if he is to be a true citizen of the world of the resurrected. This should have been obvious to traditional Christians who have, mostly, claimed that grace doesn't destroy or replace nature (the world), it completes and perfects nature (the world). Even the nasty aspects of this mortal realm likely correspond to some harshness in the world of the resurrected, a harshness by the standards of soft mortal men, a harshness which comes from the sheer dynamic nature of the God whose life we must share if we are to live with Him.

My work has been an effort to provide a coherent narrative of God's Creation, to simplify the complexity which surrounds us in the 21st century, to deny the possibility of simplifying by simply declaring, "It's all so simple." To even pretend this is so in the early part of the 21st century, we have to hold one set of beliefs while we're in church, another when we're in philosophy class, another in physics class, another when we're in evolutionary biology class, and radically different sets of belief when we work or purchase, when we vote or go off to war.

In *The House of Intellect* [7], Jacques Barzun tackled this issue from a viewpoint different from but compatible with the viewpoint of evolutionary biology, explaining why and how we 'simplify' our understandings and our responses to our surroundings. He told us:

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

This simplification covers not only intellectual matters and manners. Carpenters, child-bearing and child-raising mothers, nurses and doctors,

water-pipe layers, all inherited the past in customs of the heart, habits of thought and feeling. Much knowledge is encoded in those customs and habits, both knowledge which has been systematized and knowledge which is entirely in the form of experiential rules.

Knowledge which is so well-organized is simple; we don't have to think about most of what we do, which is a good thing for the most part. Some will learn to avoid thinking even when proper and some will be missing or will fail to develop the skills of thinking. Others will move along when dealing with settled situations and will stop, pay closer attention, and think about those situations which don't seem to be covered by all those simple rules.

The Christian may, quite unwisely, 'know' the world is simple because all the complexities of the ancient creeds and modern confessions or other dogmatic statements can just be taken as what our fourth-grade Sunday School teacher or eleventh-grade confirmation teacher or preacher said they were. 'Consubstantial' means what our teachers explained it to be: "one in being." At this point, anyone who's read any competently written history of the concept of 'being' will wait with bated breath, knowing we approach very complex messes; Christian theologians, as one example, have often held a pagan understanding of 'being' which is in conflict with the Christian belief that God is not only Creator or source (oh-oh) of being, but perfectly free to have created or not and to have created a variety of worlds and—as I would say—even a variety of Creations. God is not 'being' in the same sense as we are; Aquinas most clearly but other philosophers and theologians in vague ways have claimed God is a pure act of being and **not** substantial being Himself.

Similarly, politics was very simple, certainly in the small New England town where I grew up. There were ways things were done, even ways in which dishonest politicians would act if they won an important office. Enemies, inside the United States and in foreign lands, could be easily identified—they were just who they were and they were obvious, at least by the time our leaders called us to enlist that we might save freedom and truth and justice, surrogate mothers and Apple electronic gadgets.

The incompetent use of overwhelming advantages of American wealth and power led to little good and much harm as if the real goal of the Cold War was to keep it going so some could have exciting careers and others could make lots of profits.

Korea.

Vietnam.

Latin American.

Iraq.

Afghanistan.

Terrorism—see Chapter 495, *Quietly Charitable or Quietly Murderous But Always Quietly American*.

Libya.

Egypt.

Palestinian hellholes.

Numerous countries which can't feed themselves and are just one crisis, perhaps a petroleum shortage or price-rise, from humanitarian disasters which might equal the great wars of the 20th century.

These disasters, and others—including the American economy and educational systems and . . . , are the result of thinking the world to be so simple. Just feed the hungry and build hospitals for the sick and soon any random country in Africa would become settings for so many cities resembling Paris and so many suburbs resembling those of Orange County in California.

All we have to do is strive to make those stupid or evil people into middle-class Americans and the world will be such a wonderful place. Or a collection of disasters and hellholes.

All we have to do is declare that, for example, evolution is just so compatible, just **is** so compatible, with Christian teachings, and we'll understand it all and know it all. Or we might drive many young people away from Christianity and isolate ourselves from the most glorious of civilizations, one built by Christians as a home for Christians and their Church.

The world isn't simple, though it might be simple in many ways in a century or more if we Christians do our duty by God and man.

## 642 A God Intelligent Enough to Design Isn't Kool

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1765>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/01/13.]

I wasn't surprised that Roy Spencer wrote this blog entry, *Science and religion: Do your own damn Google search* found at <http://www.drroyspencer.com/2014/01/science-and-religion-do-your-own-damn-google-search/>, expressing his feelings at being treated shabbily in an article, *What Catastrophe?: MIT's Richard Lindzen, the unalarmed climate scientist* found at [http://www.weeklystandard.com/articles/what-catastrophe\\_773268.html](http://www.weeklystandard.com/articles/what-catastrophe_773268.html), which describes "less credible skeptics, such as climatologist Roy Spencer of the University of Alabama (signatory to a declaration that 'Earth and its ecosystems—created by God's intelligent design and infinite power and sustained by His faithful providence—are robust, resilient, self-regulating, and self-correcting')". I'd already read that article at *The Weekly Standard*, having been referred there by some link out there in the World Wide Wilderness.

I have problems with the viewpoints typically labeled as "intelligent design," but—a big but—the real crime committed by Professor Spencer is likely—he thinks certainly—that he is audacious enough to actually believe in a world created by an all-powerful God who remains active in His own Creation. I stand on that common ground with most Intelligent Design advocates, while feeling that God as Creator of all that is not Him doesn't need to play the role of a Zeus to tell the story which is this world; at the same time, I also don't think a true theist could ever rule out the possibility of the Creator acting more directly in this world. A Christian has to believe

He did act directly in the Incarnation and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In any case, notice there is no indication that Spencer's scientific work has been at all affected by his acceptance of some set of beliefs labeled as 'intelligent design' in a statement he signed. His scientific arguments against any certainty, but not against any possibility, of man warming the atmosphere with greenhouse gases have to do specifically with lack of direct cause-and-effects and the poorly understood but very important role of cloud cover (the IPCC models 'warm' the earth's atmosphere largely by way of cloud cover being changed by greenhouse gas levels). I'm not trying to make any independent scientific argument but only pointing out that the IPCC models are efforts to encapsulate a complex and chaotic system or set of systems and, having recently read several books on modeling written by experienced mathematicians, there is great reason to be skeptical on very fundamental principles of such models and some reasons to be skeptical on the grounds of specific known details of the IPCC models.

Let me switch to talk a little about what the Intelligent Design community gets right. First, I'll repeat a claim I, along with many others, have often made: Western Civilization and all its great accomplishments rest upon Christian belief in an all-powerful God who chose freely to create this universe and all else which might exist in Creation. Those great accomplishments include science and historical analysis and modern technology and other fields of human endeavor which have stressed greatly the Christian faith of Westerners, a faith apparently far weaker than might have been thought even a century ago. God clearly seems a bit far from His own Creation even to many who still actively practice their Christian faith; many others have simply decided that modern knowledge and modern human attitudes have at least made the God of Jesus Christ, maybe all possible Gods, implausible.

To be sure, Newton himself made it possible for his followers to believe in a God who created a world which mostly worked without His involvement—this view of God sends the Almighty to some distant realm but allows Him to operate in the gaps or interstices of a world largely determined by laws which can be expressed in mathematical form. (It's far from clear, from what I understand, that Newton really advocated a "God of the gaps".) More recently, the God of the gaps has moved on to the frontiers of modern cosmology and become the God who operates at singularities—see Chapter 623, *Not the God of the Gaps Nor the God of the Singularities*, for my discussion of this issue in the form of a favorable response to *Bangs*,

*Crunches, Whimpers, and Shrieks: Singularities and Acausalities in Relativistic Spacetimes* [31] by John Earman, a philosopher of science, who wrote, “Speaking purely personally now, it strikes me as bordering on the sacrilegious to see God’s creative force as able to operate only at a singularity or ideal point.” More importantly for this line of discussion, and stated in my words from that essay, “There are philosophically distinct forms of cause-and-effect,” and God can act by way of cause-and-effects well beyond the possibilities of God as conjectured in Intelligent Design Theory.

As much as I disagree with some of the tenets of Intelligent Design as currently understood, I’d say that its advocates hold far lesser errors than many of their opponents, including many who formally—and perhaps only formally—hold a version of the Christian faith closer to what I support. That is: it is a far lesser error to misunderstand the relationship of Creator to Creation than it is to advocate, or act under, the view that God has been aloof from His Creation since that instant (or non-instant in my view) when He brought something into existence from nothingness, that something being Creation. It is certainly far less an error, even in the secular streams of Western Civilization, to propose or to even speak as if God doesn’t exist or as if He were not all-powerful. Many who attack advocates of intelligent design, including those such as Professor Spencer who don’t seem to have any improper behavior in their scientific work, are some variant of atheist, and not always an intelligent variant.

Let me address the issue of Intelligent Design by first pointing to the common beliefs of all Christians, beliefs which in their specificity have to be suspended at times when biologist or Biblical exegete does their work. I would say they have to be suspended, not because we can or should, suspend at any instant our belief in the God of Jesus Christ, but rather because any specific form of that belief is conditioned by empirical matters of culture and personal thinking styles and so on. We should realize this is an age when nearly all Christian understandings of Creation rely on such rags as pagan views of a decline from a Golden Age, Medieval physics and biology, and ancient understandings of infinity.

A Christian believes in the teachings of the Nicene Creed even if restated by a later tradition; those teachings are necessarily expressed in terms of human words and concepts which change over time. A Christian most certainly cannot believe in a God who is somehow apart from His Creation, who is uninvolved in the workings of that Creation. That leaves open a lot of possible territory for beliefs, though I’d say that some Christians, in-

cluding most Catholic theologians and philosophers over the past 500 years or more, nearly all Protestant theologians and philosophers, have developed metaphysical views and sometimes scientific overviews of God's work in Creation which are more compatible with pagan beliefs in a God who is effectively co-existent with that Creation, however much the first chapter of Genesis or the scientific story of the Big Bang are glorified—quite falsely—into a creation from nothingness. This error is likely one of the errors, along with the nearly universal misunderstanding of the human mind and how it forms, which have led to the lesser errors of the sort of Intelligent Design and the greater errors which limit the work of God to what is convenient to a particular ideology (or corrupted worldview), including that of, for one example, liberalism and its belief in a truly freestanding individual, standing free of all but voluntary and contractual relationships with other men and with human communities and sometimes even with God.

Let me break this flood of ideas down just a little by first referring to Chapter 162, *What Do I Mean When I Say, "God Creates Truths"?*, where I wrote, "My claim is that the fundamental stuff of Creation is what I call the Primordial Universe, the manifestation of the truths God chose for Creation. It is the Primordial Universe which the Almighty brought into existence from nothing and other phases of Creation, including particular and thing-like phases, are shaped from that Primordial Universe," and I went on, essentially, to argue that we have not transcendental minds which can ascend to transcendental truths. We can only know what we can learn from the thoughts which God manifested in Creation. If God hasn't put it into Creation, sometimes by way of revelations to our eyes and minds, we don't know it and can't know it.

We should not underestimate the effort needed to figure out the thoughts of God in His freely chosen role as Creator whether we are theologian or philosopher or physicist or machinist. See my freely downloadable book, *Four Kinds of Knowledge* [43], where I explain there are only two kinds of knowledge: knowledge of God in His transcendence and knowledge of God in His freely chosen role as Creator of this particular Creation.

In Chapter 580, *Restricting God's Thoughts to Freshman Mathematics*, which I originally published back in 2008. I criticize certain arguments presented by the Intelligent Design community:

Do these thinkers imagine God's thoughts and the possibilities open to Him as a Creator to be so limited? Math is hard.

Physics is hard. Philosophy and literary studies are hard. Understanding God's acts of Creation is all of that plus one hell of a lot harder. Anyone who thinks the Creator's thoughts and acts can be understood by simply applying a few equations from Probability Theory 101 is deluding himself and insulting God.

In other words I used above: "There are philosophically distinct forms of cause-and-effect," and God can act by way of cause-and-effects well beyond the possibilities of the God (a Zeus of sorts) as conjectured in Intelligent Design Theory.

The immediately relevant point, drawn out of a complex mixture of points, is that belief in the God of Christ is a fundamental part of the same Western Civilization which has led to modern science and technology and the promises of better human communities which underlie the past 1500 years of history in Europe and in regions influenced strongly by Europe; yes, even those regions exploited, sometimes brutally, by Europeans or their offspring such as Americans. And the promises remain alive, though largely rejected by mainstream thinkers and leaders of the West and largely ignored by the United States which was the most plausible region for a new center for that civilization.



# 643 Repeat After Me: The Church Has Accepted Evolution and Our Ancestors Were Sex-Crazed, Killer Apes

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1782>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/03/01.]

I distort for the sake of modern men who have trouble focusing upon reality. Apes are our cousins, not our ancestors; the terms used for the common ancestors of men and apes seem to change every few years or so. And those ancestors were only killers part of the time, perhaps less often than modern Americans would desire for themselves—see Chapter 495, *Quietly Charitable or Quietly Murderous But Always Quietly American*. The sex-crazed business is perhaps less of an exaggeration for us and for our ancestors.

Sin is a part of this mortal reality. The Church has admitted evolution is a part of this mortal reality. Our ancestors weren't pure creatures born in a state of grace but rather had the usual bundle of traits for a morally aware creature: some noble and some useful and some despicable and well-described as 'sinful'.

What sense are we to make of this statement from an article at the *Catholic New Service* website, *Cardinal outlines possible paths to Communion for divorced, remarried*, and found at <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/1400852.htm>:

From the first moments of creation, the cardinal [Walter

Kasper] said, God intended man and woman to be together, to form one flesh, to have children and to serve him together. But sin entered the world almost immediately, which is why even the Bible is filled with stories of husbands and wives hurting and betraying one another, he explained.

Let's try this one again.

We are the products of messy and often bloody processes of evolution and development. There was no time in this mortal realm of Creation when there were any human beings in a state of grace such that they had a choice to first sin or to remain sinless. In other words, specific sins were always options from the first morally self-aware human but sinlessness was never on the table. Moreover, our last common male ancestor most likely lived thousands of years, or more, apart from our last common female ancestor.

When our ancestors became aware of sin, they were in a state of sin because it was the state of a human animal. Our ancestors didn't fall so much as they entered into a long communal process of listening to . . . Spirits? No, gods. . . A God. An incarnate God who offered a share of His life, a life which promised sinlessness.

The invitation came to share a life which was outside of the struggles of this mortal realm where we, in fact, often face the need to risk sin to do our duty to others or to remain truly alive. This world is preparation for an everlasting and sinless version of . . . this world. It is not a place where the peace of sinlessness was ever a possibility.

Heaven may well have many who were quite the sinners on earth, not hateful sinners but rather sinners pursuing the good things of God's world too aggressively or too often or simply in the wrong way.

Heaven may not have many honest-to-God Puritans because the sheer abundance of a life shared with God would be repulsive to them.

I have to admit I can't understand the state of mind of someone who can accept evolution as the story of life and of the origins of human life and then talk as if there were a story of a fall from grace into sin of the same but different human race which had evolved and which lived in a messy and bloody world. There is but one human race: the sex-crazed, killer apes, so to misleadingly speak.

But I did write a novel about a modern man who was quite divided in mind as he attempted to meet all the irreconcilable expectations of his life: *A Man for Every Purpose* [37].

Convinced to the depths of my mind that there is one created reality, though awfully complex and multi-layered, and, hence, one story of the human race which includes the truths of the Bible and those of empirical knowledge, I can only work to produce a draft version of that story. As it turns out, I produce only some commentary and a few stories which end up being no more than snapshots of these complex processes of development of a species at a certain stage of evolution and mostly in a state of civilizational decay.



## 644 Is the Invisible Hand Really the Hand of the Body of Christ?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1798>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/04/03.]

Is the invisible hand justly celebrated by Adam Smith really the hand of the pilgrim human community, of the Body of Christ forming—however imperfectly and incompletely—in this mortal realm?

Yes, though the language is far from optimal and that language can lead to improper concepts regarding the Body of Christ and its relationships to human beings in this mortal realm, this empirical realm of facts which we Christians can't continue to accept when we go to the hospital to be scanned for cancers and then ignore in our worship of God and our efforts to understand God in His freely chosen role as Creator. The Invisible Hand is actually Invisible Mind and Invisible Heart as well as Invisible Hand(s) of the Body of Christ at work on forming itself, something like the self-organizational processes which seem to bring brute matter to life and to organize some brute matter (say stars and other objects as well as gaseous matter) into galaxies and into various complex groupings of galaxies.

The formation of the Body of Christ in this mortal realm is mostly a natural process though it has its aspects which could be labeled 'mystical' without too much damage to human understanding of Creation, of the actual work of the Creator as opposed to fairy tales and dreams preferred by far too many Christians—in recent centuries, even including theologians and philosophers and ecclesiastical leaders. Once those fairy tales and dreams were something different, corresponding well to the best understandings of empirical reality. We've kept them too long, like an eccentric lady who keeps threadbare curtains up and rickety unsafe furniture in her house when she

could do better, at least repairing the old stuff which is no longer suiting the purpose of a human habitation; a complete refurnishing is often the better course of action, but a refurnishing which respects the context of that particular house.

The Body of Christ, in its preliminary forms in this world of evolution and development, is all of our communities even though many of those communities wage various sorts of war against each other and exploit each other in less violent ways. For now, the Body of Christ is somewhat of a colony of organisms rather than itself an organism, as jellyfish and some other creatures are also colonies of organisms, though amazingly well-evolved and well-developed for life as if truly cells or organs in an organism. As I said, the pilgrim Body of Christ doesn't form in a smooth way, not even so much as does a community which is a jellyfish. Human beings and smaller human communities are too ornery and contrary for such processes of aggregation to proceed smoothly.

I've claimed before, and still claim, that the fullness of a good human life will be found in the world of the resurrected and, thus, the Church, the center and source of our direct relationships with God, is Herself an organ and not the entirety of the Body. Our activities as actors in the economy and the political realm, in music and other arts, in scientific and literary pursuits, in farming and woodworking, are legitimate parts of human life; we would be mutilated creatures if this were all torn away from us; if we were to sit in choirs in heavenly churches for time without end, we would soon be so bored as to be praying for the end of time.

As the Body of Christ forms in this mortal realm, however incompletely and imperfectly, all of its organs and other parts form in a way that suggests a bit of independence of parts and whole—at least in this mortal realm. We Christians have had to admit the incompleteness and imperfection of our organs of worship, our churches, even the Mother Church in Rome and the equally ancient sacramental churches of western Asia have sinned greatly and erred greatly as communities and as gatherings of individuals. Protestant and other Christian churches have done no better. The pilgrim Church moves through this world, advancing at times in Her reluctant and unsteady obedience to God and regressing at other times; at times, the Church in Rome and all other Christian churches I know of have been no better than filthy images of the Church in Heaven. The same can be said of the other developing parts of the Body of Christ, organs and other parts which are the communal analog to the various parts of individual human

being. Our political and economic systems also decay to exploitive class-based systems. Our local communities in the modern world seem to vaporize as soon as one generation decides to seek something more exciting, such as a country-club and night-club life.

The economy, the realms in which we make our livings and—for many—act in the most meaningful ways is a central part of our lives, even if our economy is restricted to a family farm. Even an impoverished writer such as myself, is still working as if living in a world with a better publishing industry and more demanding readers. Like the butcher, I don't write out of pure benevolence but rather because, perhaps with God's help, I worked myself into a state of being where I'm a thinker and writer, paid or not. Whatever comes of, or from, the works I'm publishing for free on the Web, I'm fulfilling a role which is at least potentially as important as the great public roles of our day.

We human beings are forming various communities in this mortal realm. Some human beings are not obviously God-centered and many seem to be actual enemies of God, at least enemies of any God compatible with the teachings of Isaiah and Jeremiah or the very Person of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God. Those human beings also are playing a role in the formation of the Body of Christ, even if they are playing a seemingly negative role; the biological world has plenty of parasites and microbial invaders of other life-forms. I have discussed the issue of human predators before, especially in Chapter 448, *Predators, Producers, Sheep, and the Love of Liberty* and in lesser detail in other chapters and other writings not or not yet included in this collection.

Rather than trying to justify either HIV or government-employed professional murderers, rather than even wishing they not exist, we should recognize they are part of the story as much as a pretty songbird or a dedicated nurse. Sad, but the story has sad aspects. If the story were radically different, the creatures in the story would be different—human beings are the result of evolutionary and development processes in a world with pirates on the high seas and pirates on Wall Street as well as medical and religious missionaries around the world. We wouldn't exist if the world had been either one where human beings were a special creation beginning with Adam and Eve or if it were a place without disease and famine, war and crime.

What's amazing in this world of brutal struggles is the good that emerges, even from great nastiness. The persisting good is order, in the

physical things and structures of this universe such as galaxies, in the environment of earth where multitudes of living organisms and physical things all shape one another. There is no need to assume any changes in human moral character, either in its makeup or its strength. The forms of imperfect and incomplete order within the evolving and developing communities of the Body of Christ are sufficient to help us modify our manifested natures, though we might remain potentially murderers and adulterers in our dreams. They are also sufficient to sometimes gather us into armies serving criminal governments or into hateful and perhaps genocidal mobs.

We may not be able to build Heaven on earth, but a productive and morally well-ordered barbarian village is nothing to sneer at; a civilization, however minor, is a great wonder. We must keep alive the awareness of the imperfections, cruelties and outright crimes, of those villages and civilizations, whether communal or individual, but we court disaster if we forget the good that was found even in Rome with its gladiator contests and its brutal conquests. I speak mostly of long-lived communities because truly perverse communities, such as Nazi Germany, will self-destruct because they don't honor even our basic needs and most primitive moral instincts of the sort discussed in some of our great literature and certainly in the Bible.

Human communities are for real as they move toward order as part of a general movement within this universe. These communities aren't just voluntary, contractual gatherings of freestanding human beings. We human beings remain individuals even as we become truly communities; think of this as analogical to the Christian belief that God is Father and Son and Holy Spirit, each of whom remain individuals while also being one God. We remain individual human beings while also becoming one Body of Christ.

This shows in Adam Smith's great example though I'll rephrase it in terms of a more fully Christian morality rather than using language consistent with Adam Smith's Deistic outlook: the butcher doesn't provide you with meat out of his benevolence but rather because he has taken on a role in which he makes a living and provides certain products and services for others within his community or other nearby communities. Though there are some exceptions, individual human beings nearly always feel most complete and best satisfied when fulfilling such a role with some competence.

We are tied together by our human natures, individual natures which are made to be part of certain types of communities. We are first tied together by bonds of dependency before those of love. To be stable and satisfying, those bonds of dependency must meet our basic needs and the

desires which lead us to satisfy our needs. Bonds of love might develop or might come to be before or at the same time as bonds of dependencies, but it is those latter bonds which are more important and must be accepted before we can form true communities, before we can become the Body of Christ.

As sociobiologists, such as E O Wilson, have told us, our desires for forming certain basic sorts of communities and capabilities of doing so exist in the genes of the individual human being, though I would add soma and environment to make a more complete picture. We desire to form communal relationships. We engage in tentative relationships, often the accepting of dependencies upon others, and grow in communal being, communal mass, communal muscle, communal intelligence or intellect. For a variety of reasons, most of which have to do with the human brain and the mind it can make, we human beings form ever more complex communities, sometimes as a result of lesser activities which include not only economic and political activities but also those involving sports and music and stamp-collecting.

We desire communal relationships. If we succeed in forming good relationships, we begin to create communal stuff and to shape it. As the perfect and completed man is Christ, so the perfect and completed community is the Body of Christ. This way of discussion comes from the ancient Christian principle that grace does not destroy or replace nature, grace perfects and completes nature. What we are in this mortal realm tells us much about what we shall be in the world of the resurrected; in principle, it would tell us the entirety if our minds were powerful enough and if our hearts were pure enough to properly guide our minds.

So it is that when we see complex and well-ordered human communities form as if by magic, we're really seeing the natural side of a process by which the Body of Christ is developing.

I'm going to step back a little and explain part of what is going on behind the scenes when I write my books or essays. It's something to be found in my writings as both side-comments and as major statements. The entire small book of select writings, *Making Peace with Empirical Reality* [49] and Part II, *Making Peace with Empirical Reality*, from which that book was drawn deal with some of the basic issues of accepting empirical reality as the manifestations of a lot of thoughts of God, some of those thoughts being mathematical, some being story-telling, others being analogous to other categories of human activities. See my book, *Four Kinds of Knowledge* [43], for an overview of my understanding of the necessary, but dangerous and ulti-

mately untrue, fragmentation of human knowledge, a fragmentation which can deform our human beings if we accept it as literally and necessarily true.

Our ways of thinking and speaking, if only concessions to the weakness and smallness of the human mind, work their ways into our hearts and minds, become our attitudes and thoughts. If we use radically different knowledge for our ways of speaking of our Christian beliefs than we use for speaking of the universe, then the universe is no longer part of God's Creation in our thoughts. We will have bracketed our religious beliefs and will only think inside those brackets on Sunday morning for an hour or so and maybe during our weekly Bible readings and daily prayers. We need technical language for theology and Bible study as well as for economics and physics, but there has to be a bit of overlap and bridges which, at least for the philosophically minded, allow smooth movement from one realm of human thought to another. Modern men have built more walls than bridges inside their minds.

We need a Christian civilization which is a rich variety of compatible cultures; we need such a group of cultures each of which teaches us to speak about the empirical world in such a way that it is part of Creation. We also need a rich variety of understandings of the ancient creeds (and their Biblical foundation) and corresponding practices; we need these varied ways of speaking and thinking of the transcendent God in such a way that He is not only Father and Son and Holy Spirit in one God but also, by His own free-will, the ever-present Creator of this world. This means that we must think and speak of God in His freely chosen role of Creator in such ways as to recognize He works through processes described by modern empirical scientists, through social and cultural and political processes described by modern empirical scientists and exegetes of traditional literary works, theorists and experimenters and practitioners who are firmly planted in empirical reality.

From the time of at least Augustine and Jerome, through Anselm and then Albertus Magnus and his student Thomas Aquinas, there were important thinkers whose works embodied an open and honest recognition of empirical reality—though necessarily within the context of their times. Now it is easy enough to re-interpret some of these works in ethereal ways, but that is not how they were written. With the persecution of Galileo, who was actually an orthodox Catholic thinker of an Augustinian sort, the hierarchy and intellectual mainstream of the Western Church began to sep-

arate themselves from an honest and courageous and faithful respect for God's Creation. It seems odd at first but makes sense upon contemplation that the Church soon lost the skills of speaking of Heaven, the world of the resurrected, in ways other than vague dreams or gushing allusions which make no sense in terms of the only part of Creation we know or can directly explore, the part in which we are born and are shaped, the mortal world which is the embryo of the world of the resurrected.

In general, theological talk in its academic forms and its more accessible forms deals with creatures and worlds which have little or nothing to do with the only part of Creation we know. Human sin is explained in sermons and homilies and spiritual works as the result of acts by a human couple which never existed—it is likely the last common male ancestor and last common female ancestor of the human race lived tens of thousands of years apart. Matter and time and space are discussed in ways drawn from pre-modern thought, much of it originating in ancient Greece. What saves the Catholic Church from utter disintegration are the large number of priests who exercise greater sense and wisdom than could come from the very defective scripts they are taught in seminary. I would imagine similar comments could be made of other Christian churches.

The invisible hand is a rather misleading way of speaking of some aspects of the formation of the Body of Christ, ultimately a community of friends of Jesus Christ which is well-ordered in various ways, some moral and some seemingly having little to do with morality, but all the order works toward both moral and utilitarian purposes. The mind of the Body of Christ forms by encapsulating this order. It is the mind of that Body and the objective relationships which arise in this moral realm which are of concern. The hand of the Body can only act by instinct unless guided by the mind in developing proper habits and customs, moral and otherwise. This most certainly does not often mean a group of experts gathered in the conference room of some resort hotel nor in the meeting room of some bank or government agency. It nearly always means businessmen planning expansions during a period of growing populations or a group of parents organizing a baseball league for young boys or girls or an international and loose-knit community of scientists pursuing an understanding of some interesting phenomenon which might or might not have commercial application. These are purposeful activities but not attempts to plan from the top down.

Most especially in the past century or so, we've seen how much harm can be done by those sorts of planning processes and the subsequent efforts

to control a seeming chaos as it organizes itself. We saw that harm in the devastation which was Russia after the Bolsheviks had ruled for decades and we saw it in the design and construction of the national highway systems of the United States and other countries, using taxpayer monies to benefit the military-industrial complex but also large corporate employers in general and also mall developers. This led to massive damage to an admittedly inadequate Main Street, where many of those taxpayers lived and worked and purchased goods and services. It's true that Main Street was likely inadequate to modern needs, but it was crucial to the lives of so many small towns and so many neighborhoods of large cities. We would probably be a country with less junk filling our garages and basements, a country more stable, a country filled with happier and stronger families and church communities, if we'd let Main Street grow and change to meet new needs. That mall down the street and the huge aerospace factory in a nearby town are not the result of any Invisible Hand but rather the result of the velvet-gloved Iron Hand of would-be tyrants, small or great.

# 645 Sainthood as a Popularity Contest

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1813>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/05/05.]

In his spiritual biography of John Henry Newman, *The Spiritual Journey of Newman* [74], Fr Jean Honoré (a future cardinal and Archbishop and member of the committee which supervised the writing of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [121]) told us that Newman had seen the problems the Church was having in dealing with the questions raised in the modern world—along with all Christian churches in my opinion. And he thought, as do I in a more qualified way, that Newman knew how to address those questions.

So there is reason to believe that Newman had responded more openly and more truly and more honestly than other modern Catholic thinkers to God's story which is this world. I raise the question:

Why hasn't John Henry Newman been yet recognized as a saint?

I know the standard answer: the miracles haven't yet come about. I also know enough statistics to know the canonization process has very likely become a popularity contest, unless one accepts as a matter of non-revealed faith the strange theory that God performs miracles as some sort of indirect message that so-and-so is a saint. Spontaneous remissions of cancer and spontaneous healing of decayed joints and the like seem to occur at random, unless we make a lot of assumptions that few—if any—competent Christian theologians would support in any but a highly qualified, hand-waving argument. The God who causes the rain to fall on the fields of

good men and bad men may or may not intervene directly in response to prayers for healing by the pious who adore the—pardon me—rock stars of the Catholic Church. Or—far more likely under Christian beliefs as well as those of modern scientists, those healings might be just as random as the similar unexplained recoveries which occur to the best and the nastiest of human beings of all sorts, even to those who hate God. Who's to say? We can say the pious, especially those who have the piety of superstitious peasants, will pray to a dead rock star more often than the typical admirer of Augustine and Aquinas and John Henry Newman. And there are far more of that first sort of pious Catholic than there are of those who value reason, perhaps even overvalue it.

I can't find the quote with simple Google searches, but, sometime in the past few decades, a modern thinker not friendly to Christian beliefs somewhat famously noted that Newman was unusual among Christian thinkers for sounding sane even when discussing and supporting the strongest of Christian beliefs. Those who believe that the God of Jesus Christ is truly the "God of Reason" who created this world have to see much good in that. There was once a time when Christianity produced great thinkers who were taken seriously by non-Christians; in recent centuries, the number of Christian thinkers in such a position is small and includes Etienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, Joseph Ratzinger, and not many others. This might be partially a sign of anti-Christian bias but it's also a sign that Catholics and other Christians rarely go forth from their intellectual ghettos without leaving their minds behind and presenting only hearts and hands to the larger human world. Or else, if they take their minds and express opinions, they sound like lunatics.

So, the possible saints who appeal to the pietistic, often the baptized pagans—to be both cruel and fair, attract a lot of prayers for healing and some of those who are the intended beneficiaries have certifiable remissions of an unusual but far from unknown sort. I'm not arguing against the canonization of John XXIII and John Paul II, though I think it was too early to have definitively decided if both men, or either one, really was a proper exemplar for the Church as She moves forward, independent of any personal holiness found in them. I am arguing against the system which raised John Paul II so quickly to recognized sainthood while the cause yet lingers of the man who tried to warn the Church about how and how not to respond to the modern world.

Let me make very general statements under simplifying assumptions of

the statistical nature of extremely unlikely medical recoveries. Most controversially, I assume that extremely unlikely (but not impossible) medical recoveries happen and there are no doctors or parents or spouses or Catholic Curia bureaucrats who can determine if God intended a particular such recovery to be an endorsement of a particular cause for sainthood. I do tend to believe it morally irresponsible and blasphemous for those Roman functionaries to pretend to be able to determine such a matter. If they could do so, they would be able to explain why God typically doesn't bring about such recoveries and why it is that unlikely events of all sorts inflict so much suffering on the innocent and guilty alike. To put it in other words: it is the height of dishonesty to think I or any Roman functionary can go through descriptions of unlikely events and take credit—in God's name—for those which meet with our pietistic approval. Being willfully dishonest about God and His relationships with us or any part of Creation is blasphemous.

I'll suggest that our better and more truly pious strategy for recognizing sainthood is to look for signs of one who was in some special communion with God and fellowmen and was also serving God and fellowmen, probably restricting such to those who will be good public exemplars. Such a strategy would use knowledge which human beings can gain with an appropriate effort and wouldn't allow any hubristic claim that we can accept any events in God's Creation which meet with our approval and ignore any which lead to that yucky suffering stuff, unless the person suffering is a would-be saint of masochistic tendencies—and there seem to have been more than a few true saints with such tendencies as well as nearly all other admirable and undesirable human tendencies. Even Newman, hyper-rational by current standards of Catholic thought and most Christian thought, was a self-flagellant for some (probably short) period.

Let me take the issue of a Catholic "rock star" who is generally popular but especially among those with what has been labeled an "Italian peasant piety"—by many including Jean Honoré when speaking of Newman's followers who turned on him because of his commitment to human reason. The "rock star" is being investigated for sainthood as the investigation of John Henry Newman, who died more than a century ago, lingers while they wait for miracles. If there are, say, a hundred extremely unlikely medical recoveries among pious Catholics each year and the photogenic pope has 15 million praying to him while Newman has 15,000 praying to him, then there is, with simplifying assumptions I won't state, a  $(15,000,000/15,000 =)$  1,000 times as great a chance of any extremely unlikely medical recov-

eries occurring to the photogenic pope. In most years, none of those cures will be attributed to a fellow such as Newman and that for reasons having doubtful connection to his holiness or his importance to the Catholic Church, to Christianity in general. I think the ratios are worse than that and the odds still greater for various reasons having to do with the difference in those inclined to be sure that the popular pope is a saint vs those inclined to be sure Newman is a saint.

I'll be uncharitable and claim that those inclined toward some form of piety are inclined to emphasize the human heart and perhaps concede a great importance to the human hands while downgrading the importance of the human mind. Human being, most especially human communal being which is ultimately the Body of Christ, is truly God-like only when there is a proper development of mind and heart and hands—at which point there will be no distinction between thinking and feeling and doing as is true of God. It is, in fact, the mind which works more in the future than the present and thus guides the processes by which individual and communal human being is incorporated into the Body of Christ. It is the heart which points in that direction but the current confusion has led modern Christians, Catholics and others, to ignore the importance or the very existence of communal human being and so it is that so many see Heaven as some sort of perfected amusement park in which individuals go about seeking pleasurable experiences for time without end. This has given us the extremely confused idea that Heaven is a place which any human being could enjoy if he were put there. Following Newman, as historian even more than as theologian and spiritual guide, would have helped us to avoid these mistakes which will take many generations to work out of the thoughts of Christians—many generations once the cleansing of thoughts begins and I see no reason to believe it will begin any time soon.

“Is so-and-so a saint?” Should this be decided by a popularity contest? Should it be decided by a multi-generational effort to determine if someone was not only personally holy but was truly serving God in an important way or was maybe in a conversation with God which is of public importance? Suppose that conversation with God involved a movement toward special knowledge of how Christians should respond to a complex and turbulent world of opportunities and problems? If some of those opportunities would turn into problems if Christians didn't respond properly?

Perhaps I'm missing something, but it seems to me that someone who had insights which could have guided the entire Body of Christ to develop

properly, to have matured, to have traveled toward a state of completion and perfection, just might have been a true saint, one in a communion with God which was more direct and deeper than what the rest of us experience in this mortal realm.

I'm raising this question not so much to question the canonization process—that is a purely secondary consideration.

My primary aim in raising this question to try to put a stop to Christian pep-rallies in a world where we've utterly failed to properly deal with the problems which have been eating into the Catholic Church and all other Christian churches and has demolished Christian civilization. John Henry Newman proposed a general attitude toward Creation which would have allowed these problems to have been avoided or at least greatly mitigated. To be sure, the very inclination of Church officials and the bulk of religious and priests and laymen to participate in these pep-rallies celebrating themselves as much as they celebrate the alleged saints leaves me wondering if anything but a century or more of harsh experiences will wake the leaders and teachers of Christianity up so that they can begin to do their job. Almost all that we have done in shaping hearts and minds and hands of the younger generations, almost all of our cultural stuff we have bequeathed to them, will need to be purged, burned out of them, during the process of re-establishing Christian civilization. We have little reason to feel good about ourselves.

At this time, I'll just claim that there is plenty of evidence that Newman did his job as an historian of Christian doctrine, as a teacher, as a writer. If the leaders of the Church, or even a number of local leaders, had truly paid attention, they could have truly solved, to some significant extent, the problems emerging in Newman's time, problems he addressed in the specific ways of such a historian. His work could have been expanded and corrected so that we could have paid proper respect to modern biology for what it can tell us about what God is saving and to other modern sciences for what they can tell us about Creation, including what "What does it mean to be saved?" and that question I once proposed: *What are the Thermodynamic Properties of Heaven?* which is the title of Chapter 191. Such questions must be asked for us to make proper progress in the maturing of our own minds and our communal mind in the Body of Christ. There is even a psychological reason for such speculations: it keeps in our mind the truth that there is but one Creation and one Creator and the truths of Heaven are perfections and completions of the truths we can discover about this

mortal realm.

Historians have a major role in the reformation of Christian civilization or perhaps a long, painful process of building a new Christian civilization from new foundations. Philosophers, poets, novelists, physicists, biologists, politicians, teachers, parents, and so on have other roles. Popes have still other roles and their greatness as popes, which is certainly part of sainthood for men in that role, can only be determined over a long period of time. I'd suggest that, at this time, we have only hints going either way as to whether John XXIII and John Paul II were great popes in the same sense as Gregory the Great and Leo the Great. Each came into the papacy during times of trouble and met more problems emerging. We now know what Gregory and Leo accomplished. We know those two men and John and John Paul were all holy men. So were most popes, including those **not** canonized. Most weren't considered for sainthood not because of lack of holiness but rather because they lacked the courage or toughness or perhaps the proper understandings to do the needed job.

We know that John Henry Newman, John XXIII, and John Paul II were holy men. We know that Newman did his job, and we know that the problems he saw continued to develop because of a failure of Church intellectuals and teachers and leaders to understand or act upon his insights which he largely derived from his studies of the development of Christian doctrine (among other accomplishments). We do not yet know if John XXIII and John Paul II did well at the jobs they took on, though we know that John XXIII was revered for daring to try to bring the Church back to the world God has created and similar comments can be made about John Paul II as well as comments about his efforts to reunite Christian churches, starting with Western and Eastern Sacramental churches. Yet, as I noted, the Catholic Church is dealing with great problems at this time and it's far from clear we've found the way to deal with those problems. Newman, and others, pointed in the right direction but we're—at best—wandering off to the side and through brier patches while celebrating how wonderful we are. And we like photogenic popes as much as we like to build memorials to dead prophets.

## 646 Maybe the Catholic Church is Part of Creation?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1822>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/05/13.]

The Body of Christ is the entirety of human being, the entirety of a community including both individuals and lesser communities which is Christian civilization, I also claim the Catholic Church to be the central organ of the Body of Christ, not the whole ball of wax. To all appearances, the various Christian churches participate to various extents in this organ, but I'll not go into any detailed speculations here on the specific natures of the Orthodox churches, the various Protestant churches, and those few which don't fit into those standard categories.

Why would we think the Catholic Church came into existence in some sort of complete and mature state if the Body of Christ, the fullness of Christian community, is evolving and developing in a complex and seemingly chaotic manner? Why would we think the Catholic Church came into existence in some sort of complete and mature state if Jesus Christ Himself grew and developed in His human nature?

As I've pointed out again and again, as an echo to plenty of thinkers over recent centuries and a few from earlier centuries: we live in a world of evolutionary and developmental processes. All creatures in this world grow and develop, most certain is this true of complex human communities of all sorts.

Jesus of Nazareth, the human nature of the Son of God, was born a human baby, one who would grow and mature by way of specific responses to the world around Him. The Church was also born at an early stage of maturity, far from Her adult state, and has gone through various phases

more distinct than the changes human beings go through from infancy to the states of toddler, child, adolescent, and so on. The Bible tells us the Church was granted certain, mostly limited, powers but powers which might well expand with Her knowledge and understanding of Creation, that very peculiar group of manifestations of divine thoughts. The Church has to change and mature in various ways just to Herself discover or learn from explorers the deeper and richer understandings of created being. History is consistent with these claims I'm making: the Catholic Church grows and develops *mostly* in the way of other human communities; this applies also to all of the separated children and brethren of the Church.

History tells us the Church has changed, has developed in various ways, just as history told us through John Henry Newman and others that Christian doctrine has developed over the centuries. Christian doctrine in its revealed core content hasn't changed but the totality of doctrine has been enriched and complexified. Even the core doctrines have changed in the way of understanding just as a man's understanding of moral principles change, are enriched and completed, as he grows toward adulthood and—fallible creatures that we are—can often need more enrichment and completion even after that.

Yet, there are ever those who wish to freeze the Church, prevent Her growing and maturing, so that She be some sort of image they idealize as the true Church. One particular distortion is the exaggeration of the infallibility of the Church and the far lesser infallibility of individual popes. As I implied above, the Church's developed faculties for finding or even seeing new truths is rarely up to the task when the world around Her changes in fundamental ways, perhaps because human beings have developed new ways of living or perhaps because human beings have discovered something unanticipated in the modern world. Sometimes the first possibility was forced upon Christians as when the Roman Empire fell and a long, slow process of developing Western Civilization began; sometimes it happened as a result of more open-minded and enthusiastic responses to new opportunities as has happened in the modern world with the freeing of so many from lives limited in ways not good. We've also seen changes come upon our world in recent centuries because of discoveries about the earth in regions formerly largely unreachable from Europe and because of discoveries about the nature of time and space and matter and also about human origins.

The Church hasn't responded well to the world as it has shown itself richer and more complex with each passing year. Sometimes the world and,

indeed, all of Creation seems to be changing with each passing day, in the reality of human communities or in improved human perception and conception of created being in its fundamental aspects or sometimes in aspects of complex, higher-order non-human entities.

Maybe the Church had, and has, no power to declare herself infallible in a more general sense? That is, maybe there is much that the Church and the clergy and other servants of the Church must learn by proper responses to God's Creation? The Church moves through spacetime in this universe, responding well or not so well to the entirety of Creation, or perhaps trying to not respond at all. All the while, the Church and other human communities and individual human beings are changing as is our understanding of Creation.

My view of the Church is far from being entirely new, as I implied by my reference to Newman's historical works on the development of doctrine. In a positive way, I can pull up one of my favorite quotes: The truth emerges in time through a communal process [Carroll Quigley]. I would suggest the more positive statement leads us to believe that the man is already showing in the child, but also leads us to realize the process isn't so predetermined as we might think. That is, the Church will mature into certain powers as does a human being, but there is still much of great importance that is to be determined, some of which might well be determined by human choice. More importantly for now, the 6 year-old has not the powers of understanding that the 12 year-old has and both are short of those and other powers of their 55 year-old self.

The pope or any bishop or, indeed, any Christian leader who seems to have any legitimate authority should be regarded as an historical character, as a man and a woman playing a role in a complex story being told by God. The Church, as I've said above, should be seen in the same light as the entirety of the Body of Christ, Christian civilization: as an entity yet being formed. We can only struggle to understand what emerges to view or to sometime anticipate the glorious reality of the Body of Christ and its central organ the Church when the maturing is complete, when the Body of Christ is perfect and complete.

We Westerners (and probably most modern peoples) of the early 21st century are out of sorts with reality. We can't make any progress in solving our various problems nor can we recognize opportunities. Our institutions, being rigid and bureaucratic after generations of successful growth and then irrational growth, are in worse shape than we are as individuals. Our com-

munities in general are in bad shape—and that includes the Catholic Church and other Christian churches and probably nearly all major religious communities.

We got into this sort of condition by not responding to reality, to the thoughts of God manifested in His Creation. Hubris set in as it always does to some extent in temporally successful peoples. We believed our own worldly fables, including those told by Catholics and other Christians. And we had become dependent upon institutions, some being true communities at one time, which had grown rigid and bureaucratic. Many of our institutions are self-serving and no longer do their job.

We Christians know the Church will survive, and likely many of Her separated children as well. We don't know what She will look like, though She will remain an organ or member of a Christian Civilization embodying and allowing something like the fullness of good human life. Since we don't know what the Church Herself will be in a generation or more then we also don't know what role the Pope will take on nor the role that God wishes the Pope to take on, which often seems to have differed from the role preferred by popes of a given age.

The Church isn't some sort of eternal neo-Platonic entity set into this world of evolution and development nor is the Pope the only human being (other than Jesus of Nazareth) with a fully predetermined role. The Catholic Church and all Her separated brethren and also the People of Israel and other peoples are living a story, a series of events which could be labeled random when we look out the front window or a mixture of random and factual when we look into the (sometimes very distorted) rearview mirror.

# 647 Does the “Real Presence on the Altar” Make Sense or Is It a Mystery Beyond Human Thought?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1916>. It was finished and uploaded on 2014/12/04.]

## 647.1 An Overview of What I’m Up to

I’ve tried to concentrate on the general speculative, or ‘metaphysical’, task of making sense of created being, abstract as well as concrete, in light of Christian beliefs. I’ve tried to avoid too much in the way of theological speculation and certainly have and will avoid questioning the basic truths of Christianity—they are the basis of true human thought and of all possible true understandings of Creation. Since there are contexts in which histories and texts are understood, as well as languages and speculative systems in which those histories and texts are stated and then understood, this doesn’t mean a slavish acceptance of, for example, the traditional understanding of the Christmas story as being history in the same sense as the story of the missionary activities and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; the Christmas story seems, to this author, to have the literary feel of myth whereas even those stories of the mission of Jesus which raise questions of detail have an earthy, historical feel to them.

Since my work has led to much effort in understanding the Body of Christ, I’m being forced to deal with the Sacraments which are the most

important human means of forming that Body and working toward salvation.

I’ve spoken often in sometimes vague terms of the need to understand the way in which we have both individual and communal human being, as images of the one God who is Father and Son and Holy Spirit. The Sacraments, as well as the sacramental relationships of mundane reality, would seem to be one of the glues by which the local (the individual) is bound into the global (human community and ultimately the Body of Christ) while continuing to exist as an individual.

Consider this essay as an effort to provide another part of the general framework by which Creation, at concrete and abstract levels, can be seen and understood as a work of the God of Jesus Christ.

## 647.2 The Real Presence in Light of Modern Knowledge

In a world where Christians respected God’s Creation, this should be a primary test of a particular form of theology: can the revealed truths of the Bible be stated in terms of that Creation and, in particular, in terms of what we know of the world in which we live, the world into which Jesus of Nazareth was born, the world in which that same Jesus spoke of His own divinity and spoke of the bread and wine He was sharing with the Apostles being His own Body and Blood.

Does it all make sense in Christian terms? Is Creation unified in its basic being or are there some truths for this mortal realm and other truths for the world of the resurrected? Could there then be an infinity of worlds with an infinity of different bodies of truth?

Maybe we should treat Christian revelations as fairy-tales which are somehow more true than the concreteness of this world? Or maybe we should be more consistent Modernists and treat those revelations as being fairy-tales in a more complete sense, communicating only some vague, abstract truths?

The path I’ve chosen is to respond to reality as revealed by modern empirical knowledge, that of physics and chemistry and biology and also that of history and creative fiction.

The Council of Trent taught (with some proper qualifications) the language of a substantialist transformation of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ—‘transubstantiation’ was the term they approved. Apparently, Aquinas himself used such language while teaching that God isn’t substance but pure existence, a claim made even earlier in human thought without the supporting network of ideas which Aquinas created in his *Summas*. There is a deep inconsistency which became a great problem when modern science, especially quantum physics, cast some doubt upon the understanding of matter as substance.

It can be said of the *Summas* of Aquinas that the *Summa Contra Gentiles* (or lesser *Summa*) was a system which began with created being and moved toward God while the *Summa Theologicae* (or greater *Summa*) began with God and worked its way down to created being. This isn’t a situation where we can envision a God who sits on a throne and looks down upon a world of substance which He rules externally, Zeus squeezed into a Biblical form. (See Chapter 574, *Proving the Existence of Zeus*.) To move forward, we need to recognize that modern empirical sciences have provided views of spacetime and of matter which are fully consistent with the radical understanding of St John the Evangelist: the world exists because God first loved it. Or: relationships are primary and stuff (substance) comes from relationships.

Whatever happens when bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ, it shouldn’t be described primarily as a change in substance, transubstantiation is the word chosen to bear such a heavy burden. What happens when bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ is a change in God’s chosen relationship to stuff in which the Son of God is already present. All things were made through that Son and, since relationships create stuff (in the sense of “creation from nothingness” and also in the sense of shaping some stuff already existing), then all things come into existence as the result of the relationship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and the relationships God chooses to have with contingent being—what He chose to create. We are told by St John that all things are made through the Son of God and are thus of God.

Creation is shaped from truths God manifested as the very abstract being which I often refer to as the ‘raw stuff’ of Creation and, as such, is something of an image of the Almighty. Seen as thoughts, these basic truths are an image of the mind of God though not the entire mind for sure; seen as love, these basic truths are an image of the heart of God though not

the entire heart for sure; seen as acts of creation, these basic truths are an image of the hands of God though not encompassing the entirety of what His hands be capable of.

From the abstract realms of Creation, God created a world sufficient to be the home of a creature with which the Son of God could share a nature, emptying Himself to become one of us.

So, by the Holy Spirit, the Son of God was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.

The Son of God was already, in a sense, the entirety of man, already the perfect man or Body of Christ—at least in the sense of ‘nature’ as used by Christian metaphysicians though not the entirety in that He chose to have, even to need, companions born into the mortal realm. In a similar sense, He had been that perfect man or Body of Christ before (ontologically or temporally) God laid the foundations of Creation. I write with some qualification, “in a sense,” to communicate that we are on dangerous grounds here. Some ways of writing and speaking will prove ever dangerous and some will prove to lead to outright heresies. We should not avoid dangers because following God’s thoughts through exploration and analysis of created being isn’t an activity for those seeking security and certainty—those can be found more readily in the over-simplified pietistic or heretical versions of Christian thought.

When Christ was conceived, “was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man,” He took on a particular nature, entering the strange state of being one Person but having two natures, divine and human.

Christ took on a particular created nature and yet remained God and Creator, remained the Son of God and retained His divine nature; the manifested thoughts constituting the raw stuff of Creation were yet His thoughts as well as the thoughts of Father and Holy Spirit. Since God is a unity and so is each of Father and Son and Holy Spirit, the raw stuff of Creation is also divine heart and divine hands as well as divine thoughts.

We’re now in position, if somewhat a sketchy position, to *describe* the Real Presence of Christ in the consecrated bread and wine. In fact, under my understanding of knowledge as itself being an encapsulation of some greater or lesser part or aspect of reality, an ‘explanation’ isn’t possible and it isn’t desirable to be seeking such an illusion in this age when we know from modern neurosciences that St Thomas Aquinas was correct in saying that human nature in its higher form, mind or soul as you will, has innate properties and components but those are in a primitive state and

need to be better shaped by responses to the external and internal realities in which we live. We are not born with immaterial organs named ‘mind’ or ‘soul possessing a grasp of mathematical truths and logical truths and moral truths.

The Real Presence is a more open communication between Christ as yet present in all of Creation including the bread and wine as offered by men to God. As Christ took up a human nature, so He takes up human food as His own, food already incorporated as His Body and Blood and to be shared with all those who come to His table, even those who come in faith and hope and love but can’t directly share because of one problem or another. We who receive communion as individuals are being bound more tightly into the Body of Christ; our communal human nature is being strengthened as we eat what we are becoming and what is increasingly us.

### **647.3 What Have I Accomplished?**

The above is far from ‘radical’ or ‘modern’ enough to satisfy me as being a fully acceptable and plausible restatement of a modern Christian understanding of the Real Presence of Christ, yet it is a movement toward an understanding in terms of modern empirical knowledge and speculative understandings of at least this particular world, this concrete level of Creation. This is to say that the above explanation indicates something about some ‘glue’ which can bind the local (individual) to the global (communal or even ultimately Body of Christ) without obliterating or obscuring the local. Much more needs to be thought and said and done, but that will be the work of a multitude of thinkers, including poets and musicians and artists, over a number of years. When this work seems to be reasonably complete and when Creation seems to be simple after all, it will undoubtedly be time to start developing a still richer and more complex way of understanding Creation.



# 648 Body-killing Men and Soul-killing Men

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1946>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/01/09.]

Some young men who think to solve problems with machine-guns killed some men, of ages unknown to me, who think to advance human enlightenment by sneering at all things of which they don't approve. They don't approve of God or those who claim, falsely or truly, to serve God. The intellectual and moral midgets at the French magazine, *Charlie Hebdo*, published cartoons insulting to Muslims, others insulting to Jews, and still others insulting to Christians. Some Muslims killed some of the midgets. Just as would be true with the murders of pimps or drug-dealers or child-abusers, the French police should investigate with energy and others in the judicial system of France should prosecute with proper aggression. To be sure, there were at least two innocent victims that I'm aware of: a security guard and a policeman shot execution style as he lay injured on the sidewalk, perhaps trying to surrender.

On the whole, I consider men who murder bodies to less my enemy, less the enemy of anyone wishing to be a friend of God, than those who murder souls and minds.

I can't speak for God but He might be inclined to favor those who have a deformed understanding of the Almighty over those who commit sophomoric blasphemy under the Modernist delusion that it is intelligent commentary. Nowadays, there seem to be a lot of people of no great intelligence or other talents who have been encouraged to believe they are creative or insightful. They think to lead mankind on a better path by application of the principle of the corrupted, secularized, surviving strain of the Enlightenment:

We tolerant intellectuals of the modern West are what human beings should be and we'll do our darnedest to make every human creature into our images.

Some of those moral and intellectual midgets work by way of nasty and sneering cartoons. Some make blood-filled movies or movies depicting moral commitments as jokes—except those moral commitments which serve the needs of our political and financial elites. Others worm their way into power in the United States government or one of its international agencies and use military and financial weapons to destroy those who seek to defend their own traditions, especially if those traditions are from the earlier, Christian phase of the West.

## 649 Was Dante a Pioneer of Radical Individualism?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1959>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/01/26.]

Ten years ago or more, I read *Inferno* [1], the first volume of Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. It didn't make too much of an impression on me, seeming to be at least in part a matter of Dante taking shots at some of his enemies, a lot of people he didn't admire (often, for good reasons), and a few friends who led disordered lives and didn't even try to repent or reform.

After the past 9+ years of working out my worldview, a Christian understanding of created being, which necessarily included an understanding of human being, of its relationships to God, and, hence, of salvation and damnation, I wished to read all of *The Divine Comedy*—Singleton's prose translation with heavy annotations. In a not so short sentence: I wished to see how much sense Dante's theory of salvation and damnation made from the viewpoint of one who had struggled with both Christian teachings and with modern empirical knowledge and had produced a worldview which makes sense of both as compatible and mostly overlapping descriptions of the same world.

Dante doesn't seem to have believed in the main teaching of the Bible: the Old Testament teaches that the members of the People of Israel will be saved as members of that community and the New Testament teaches that members of the Christian Church will be saved as members of that community. In Dante's *Paradiso* [2], even those saved to live on the outermost realm of Heaven live as a gathering of individuals who are not in communion with the other souls who made it to regions closer to the center of Heaven; they are gathered together as they might have been at the hearth

of a warm and well-run tavern. (That outermost realm is the everlasting home of souls who lived good lives but didn't live up enthusiastically to their vows or presumably other serious commitments.)

Looking back, I can see that Hell and Purgatory were little different in the presentation of human beings as individuals—though I could appreciate a presentation of the damned as those who refused to properly engage with their communities and are bound not to ever do so. In any case, Dante's poetic masterpiece doesn't so much as hint of that ultimate community which is the Body of Christ, or rather it presents communities as mere gatherings of the 'true' human beings who are individuals.

On the other hand, I teach that we human beings, at least those who will achieve full membership in the Body of Christ, are like the three Persons of God and that Body, as I said, is like God. This is to say that, as true images of the Trinitarian God, individual human beings remain fully so while being also fully the Body of Christ. Each and every one of those who are saved to share God's life for time without end. Dante has no such sense. Certainly, he can't be blamed for not seeing much that history and modern biology and other sciences has brought into view or into more clear view in the past few centuries. Evolutionary biology and history and sociology supports the idea that we have a strong communal component to our human being—we aren't just individuals who travel in groups or enter into voluntary relationships of a contractual type, though perhaps tinged with deep feelings.

Dante seems to me to be someone already on the path toward Hobbes and Locke and Jefferson and Nock—all admirable men, but dangerous men whose ideas are worth investigating and contemplating and whose ideas on human being must be rejected by any who have a Biblical faith or who are making sense of modern empirical knowledge of men and their various communities.

I'd even say that it's pretty clear an individual human being of the sort found in Hobbes and other Liberal thinkers, finite in many ways and only displaying some of the virtues and gifts of human being even as we know it in this mortal realm, couldn't tolerate life without end. We don't have enough to draw on and would soon enough be praying for an end to time.

Dante is simply wrong that an individual human being could forever be satisfied, let alone in a state of bliss, by adoration of God—when that worshiper has to rely on the stuff of an individual. We can see the way to a solution when we posit a rich and complex Body of Christ in which we all share in the gifts and accomplishments of St Paul and St Augustine

and Alfred the Great and St Thomas Aquinas and Blaise Pascal and John Henry Newman and Leo Tolstoy and Flannery O'Connor. But that's still not enough. Not to fear. The Body of Christ has more—Jesus Christ, Son of God and true God. We can share in the fullness of God's own Being and live God's own life along with the Son and, through Him, the Father and the Holy Spirit.

As individuals standing outside of God and adoring Him, we would not be able to tolerate life without end. It is only by sharing God's own life that we could enjoy life without end and we could share that life only through full membership in the Body of Christ and full communion with its Head: the Lord Jesus Christ.

At <http://www.unz.com/author/peter-frost/>, we can read some of the articles and essays of Peter Frost, a paleoanthropologist who is well-versed in genetic issues. Frost has been writing for some years of the ways in which ethnic communities have characteristics which reflect their unique histories. One of the strong findings of modern research is that the ethnic groups which have inhabited much of Europe in recent centuries have personality characteristics consistent with their political and economic and cultural systems; these characteristics, especially a stronger sense of individual self which can be extreme in some, are said to be especially strong in northwestern Europeans, but seem to exist throughout Europe, possibly because of migrations of related peoples into all regions of Europe over the recent millenia.

The more recent immigrants from Asia and Africa to the countries of Europe and North America seem to have different characteristics, sometimes consistent enough with 'Western' characteristics that assimilation is possible at least in the public marketplaces, economic and political. Many of the more recent immigrants from eastern Europe and some from east Asia and southern Asia exhibit behaviors consistent to some major extent with the political and other systems of Europe, even the most Liberal (collectivist or classical) of countries. Even European styles of collectivism rely on pulling together mobs of individuals rather than the long-term development of complex, often kin-based relationships—Marx and Dante have similar assumptions about human communities so far as I can tell, though I admit I haven't studied either writer too much and have no interest in doing so. Combining ethnic groups which have evolved in radically different environments can work but problems might develop between Europeans and even those groups of Chinese and Jews who have more respect than

most Europeans for the accomplishments of Newton and Shakespeare and Mozart. (“Damn it, there’s some guys in tuxes playing crap music. Somebody must be broadcasting the national championships of the Women’s National Mud-Wrestling League (WNMWL).”)

In other words, as I stated above, there is now even scientific information that all that shallow speculation found in Locke and the classical liberals of the 19th century and forward is wrong but was worth pursuing but only with regards to some human beings at the extreme end of the spectrum for northwestern Europeans, themselves seeming to be at a fairly extreme end of the spectrum for mankind in general. Other peoples with equal or better accomplishments in politics and economics and culture and science aren’t even interested in the ways of the West. And they shouldn’t be.

And these wonderful northwestern European traits in their more moderate form showed up at least by the time of Dante, as did a blindness to their uniqueness and also the contradiction between an unqualified acceptance of those traits and the Biblical teachings on salvation as well as modern; the contradiction between radical individualism and the modern scientific understandings of human being are just as strong and perhaps more clear. Those northwestern European traits are Wonderful so long as we realize we are at the extreme end of certain human characteristics and then go on to understand, and act as if, other ethnic groups can be much different. We should also remember that many from that northwestern European population, or the European population in general, have far weaker individualistic traits. A Libertarian or even less extreme Classical Liberal society will suit only a small percentage of those descended from northwestern Europeans. I imagine most would rethink their commitment to Libertarian or Classical Liberal doctrines if they were to find themselves on a planet or even a continent populated only by Libertarians and Classical Liberals; in fact, I think they would find it hard to build a free marketplace in a human gathering bereft of the sorts of communitarian commitments and constraints they mostly despise.

This evolutionary stuff, including gene-culture co-evolution, is for real. The Bible is for real. Neither evolutionary thought nor the Bible should just be mined for verbal bullets to shoot at our enemy of the moment, only to be put back in the closet until another such opportunity. Both evolutionary knowledge of human being and Biblical knowledge of that same human being have to be fully accepted in understanding the fullness of human life or fully rejected. We ignore at our own peril the Biblical and

Christian-theological teaching that persons are individuals who are also their community, fully individual and fully their community.

See my freely downloadable book, *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53], for a little bit more on human being as I understand it. More will be coming, God willing. See Chapter 516, *The Struggle Between the Individual and the Community in the Body of Christ* for one of my recent efforts to move beyond that book.



# 650 Individuality, Freedom, and the Real Conflict Facing Modern Christians

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1981>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/02/26.]

The modern man of the West knows in his bones that he is an individual, born an individual, a clearly defined entity which stands in some sense above not only the confusing and often chaotic world around us but also above our bodies, our organisms which are also confusing and chaotic at times. An individual human being can be a chimera with the DNA of multiple human individuals—twin embryos can merge in the womb. A woman can be a genetic male because of a faulty switch which is supposed to begin the masculinization of the embryonic body. Statistically, men are more likely to have homosexual desires if they have older brothers—speculatively, the mother’s womb develops some sort of resistance to the masculinization process.

One of my favorite problems of this sort, because it shoots down the modern form of ‘free-will’ is the well-established fact that, when we move a finger or leg, the movement control regions of the brain begin to act before there is any activity in the regions of the brain associated with conscious thinking, including conscious planning. This is not an argument against our freedom, including our moral freedom, though it is an argument against free-will as usually imagined. That is, it’s an argument against the delusion that a human organism is controlled by some self-contained, subsistent entity that is the real us, an entity which rules our bodies.

Our individuality, which is clearly tied to our various sorts of freedom,

cannot be associated with our DNA or with the conscious regions of the brain. Our individuality is a matter of our entire being, which starts with our bodies, our physical being but extends out into what seems to be not-us, human communities—past and present and future, as well as the non-human regions of Creation. We are free as being certain types of organisms, as are nearly all living creatures—viruses are almost mechanisms rather than organisms but even bacteria move with apparent freedom. To be sure, the human capabilities for certain sorts of awareness, including an explicit awareness of past and present and future, and for planning give us the possibilities of greater freedom though there is a lot of anecdotal evidence that many human beings don't have, or at least don't exercise, the sort and level of freedom which would allow them to be self-governing as citizens or as full participants in the marketplace or even as parents.

We're creatures embedded in a particular universe and in very particular and very small environments inside that universe. We're strange creatures by most traditional understandings, at war with ourselves as taught by the Biblical prophets and St Paul and the Jewish sages of the early Christian era, yet the details of DNA and sexual battles (mostly unconscious and sometimes fought at the level of parental DNA) are eerie. Some of our DNA and some of our body mass comes from bacteria and even viruses. To a pure Platonist (not a description applicable to Plato himself), there doesn't even seem to be any 'human being' which could be part of any realm of the Real.

And that is the sort of problem that everyman faces. We have a self-understanding, and an understanding of our world, which doesn't look plausible in light of modern empirical knowledge and we try hard to hold on to those understandings as we face up to those bits and pieces of modern empirical knowledge which come to our attention.

It won't work. As a result of our indifference toward or rebellion against what-is, we have become confused and fragmented creatures—see my novel, *A Man for Every Purpose* [37]. Those under 40 or so are in a still worse condition. They have been raised under conditions where few adults even held an inherited and defective understanding of their human self or of the world. The young of the early decades of the 21st century seem unformed, somewhat in the way of a two year-old who is just beginning to explore her environments, but there is no sign they are so exploring. They accept the condition of an unformed human being in a chaotic world and just turn to video-games or cellphones.

There is no readily available understanding of human being or of our world. It can't be found in television shows or movies or popular music. It can't be found in the bare facts of science documentaries, bare facts presented as if that's all there is of human being and the world—just bare facts. It can't be found in the fairy-tales of Catholic CCD or Protestant Sunday Schools, teachings which are fairy-tales not because they speak of the Creator and His purposes for us and for the entire world, teachings which are fairy-tales because they come from understandings of the world which were once the best the human race could do but no longer make sense.

We can read a very confused, and seemingly honest, man on this issue: *We're All Zombies* at <http://www.unz.com/rbonomo/were-all-zombies/>. Robert Bonomo tells us:

As the Christian myth begins its third millennium, is the zombie meme telling us that this religious story is no longer viable? Are billions of "zombies" eating flesh and drinking blood but finding no nourishment? The vast majority of Western people have a profound belief in science and science tells us that the story of Jesus is not to be taken literally, yet our churches insist that the "myth" of Jesus is historical. The Christian software no longer works as the science "virus" has rendered it useless.

Myths are other people's religions and for Westerners in need of spiritual "food" the Eastern systems of yoga and Buddhism, which don't depend on dogma that contradicts science, seem to be more palatable to their scientific worldviews. Unfortunately, those "programs" were written for a machine other than modern Western man.

And again:

Science can give us answers to almost all our questions, yet in the end its meaninglessness is disquieting. Science gives us technologies and deep understandings of the mechanics of the universe, but it's unwilling to breach the topic of meaning. We are asked to live for clichés, consumerism, hedonism or fundamentalism. Rejecting science is absurd but embracing it is deadening.

If we were able to understand our own religions in the same spirit that we decipher the religions of others (myths) while embracing science (with its limitations), than maybe we could find our way to a new myth that would shed meaning on our cold world. But myths emerge, they are not consciously created, and for the moment we wade in the void of knowing how but not why. We consume but are never filled, we seek but we do not find.

We are all zombies.

No, we're not, but we are victims of some number of generations of cowardly, faithless, dishonest leaders, priests and ministers as well as philosophers and theologians as well as businessmen and local political leaders as well as politicians and doctors.

I can imagine the pain of the inhabitants of the Mediterranean region in the fifth century who saw all meaning decaying along with the stability and nobility of Rome. I can also imagine one man, Bishop Augustine of Hippo, setting out to make sense of that decay in light of his Christian faith and then dying not even realizing he'd made such good sense of it as to provide a narrative for a still greater civilization than even the Roman. Yes, the West was founded by one man setting out to counter claims by pagan thinkers he admired, claims that Rome was falling because it had become Christian. In doing so, Augustine made such good sense of it that his basic narrative lasted for nearly 1500 years.

We need a major effort by Christians to address the claims not of those who would be our enemies but rather of those who were and are simply good historians and physicists and biologists. We need to make sense of their claims in light of Moses and Jeremiah and, most of all, in light of the man-God who walked the earth and whose story is told in the Gospels.

We of the modern world can't possibly understand ourselves without serious knowledge of not only human history proper (disciplined writings of facts and narratives) but also our species history. We have to be inspired by Augustine of Hippo, historian and theologian, and we have to be strong where he was weak—in science and metaphysics.

We can even come up with a coherent and morally well-ordered understanding of the freedom we enjoy, not the false freedoms of a subsistent individual somehow independent of his proper and improper desires and not the false freedoms described by reductionists, such as advocates of the selfish-

gene viewpoint. Even when it comes to the biology of the human being, for example our tendencies to seek relative independence from communities or to naturally subordinate individual self to community are largely found in our bodily based feelings and emotions and those bodily based human traits are not uniform across the human species; each of us has a history of particular ethnic lines within that human species. Each of us also has a cultural and family and personal history. We are individuals but not made for standing free of either our communities or our environments.

We, as individuals or as communities, have no freedom to change much of this, some freedom to change some of it; little of true importance can be changed in the short-run. We do have the freedom to act according to our customs and the habits and thoughts we've developed through our own efforts and the efforts of our parents and other teachers and guides. This is where human conscious types of moral intelligence are truly important: we can form habits and shape our future selves. Otherwise we remain dependent upon either inadequate habits and ways of perceiving reality or else force ourselves to attempt the heroic effort of deep analysis for each and all of our difficult moral decisions and many of our less difficult moral decisions.

Our freedom comes as a result of proper formation of self, a self which is both individual and communal. Our freedom comes when we act as that properly formed self. Our moral habits, as well as other good habits, are encapsulated in those movements of finger or legs which begin before we consciously think about that scream of pain toward which we move or about that drink too many which has been placed in front of us by a generous buddy at the bar. This is true also in our vocations and our avocations and our daily activities of the most casual sort.

Freedom can't be found by pursuing the false dreams of radical individualism which don't correspond to true human being, other than perhaps to that of some extreme individuals, most of whom are probably found in the extreme ethnic groups of northwestern Europe and the descendant populations mainly in the Anglo- regions of the world. Freedom won't be real and certainly won't be stable if it is, in fact, a freedom to pretend to be something we really aren't. No wonder we are so confused and fragmented, so many in the younger generation are simply empty.

We have given up our particular cultures, especially those of us who are the mush produced by the melting-pot called America. We have no greater civilization which can provide us with a narrative that tells us what it all

means, where 'it' includes our own human beings. Western Civilization has decayed, almost gone away. Christ remains as Lord of Creation but His Church is in ruins and its leaders are without clothes. We are free individuals, that is, we are atoms being freely slammed and banged about by forces and even the most social of those forces are external to us, enemies.

After all this talk about individualism and freedom, I'm going to retreat to a basic, Socratic question: What is freedom? I wrote this essay under the assumption we best seek freedom as if answering the question: how can we better shape ourselves to be what we should be. We start with what we already are: poorly integrated organisms with both individual and communal being. I should stress that it is both individual and communal being which is poorly integrated.

We gain freedom by shaping ourselves properly to what lies outside of us, the objective reality which is typically, and properly for the most part, perceived as opportunities and problems. But, that by itself, should make no sense to modern men, including most Christians trying to be faithful to the traditions of their faith for they are bound to think and feel that, at conception or at least some time before adult awareness, there will be that subsistent entity which is a human being, an entity defined as a self-aware individual. It is that subsistent, self-aware entity which desires the good or what gives purely physical pleasure or something else. It is that subsistent, self-aware entity which is an atom, a plaything of a hostile world, a world in which we are aliens.

I stand against all this confusion and all this failure of Christians and others to resolve this confusion, to give us a meaning, a narrative which brings all this horror, as well as all this beauty and pleasure, into moral order. I'm advocating a worldview, an understanding of all created being and its relationship to God, which is Christian all the way down. What is good and beautiful and true, what is conducive to good order, is found in all of Creation and is there because Creation and all that is found in it is the manifestation of certain thoughts God chose freely for the very specific Creation and this still more specific world He chose to create, to create from nothingness and then to create in the way of shaping. Some of this goodness and beauty and truth is in human being in partial and imperfect states, but most of it lies outside any individual human being, outside of any communal human being—even the pilgrim Body of Christ. Ultimately, the goodness and beauty and truth are found in God, but we find them in each thought and all thoughts the Almighty has manifested as created

being.

We move toward the completion and perfection found only in the world of the resurrected and we move as individual members of the pilgrim Body of Christ and as that Body in its entirety, but we move as beings existing as acts-of-being of the Creator, as objects of His attention and of His love.

That places a heavy burden upon Christians who would carry the Good News to all men. We have no Good News because our Jesus isn't true to the universe of evolution and genes and curved spacetime, which means our Jesus isn't the true Jesus Christ. Christians have no plausible understanding of the universe, no narrative telling other men or even our own selves what it all means. Our main failure is not that of not reading the Bible or not praying, though we may be also failing in those matters. Our main failure is not reading the revelations found in our own human beings, in the stars, in the strangeness and the beauty of modern mathematics. We don't understand created being in this universe and we think we can jump to the meaning found in Christ who is God but also perfected and completed man, man as found in reality and not in our imaginations.

Here is what St Thomas Aquinas had to say about the importance of knowledge of Creation, empirical knowledge of created being:

[J]ust as a disciple reaches an understanding of the teacher's wisdom by the words he hears from him, so man can reach an understanding of God's wisdom by examining the creatures [God] made... [Page 17 of St Thomas Aquinas' commentary on 1 Corinthians. Translated by Fabian Larcher, O.P. in unknown year and originally made available at website of Ave Maria University. It is now available online at <http://dhs priory.org/thomas/SS1Cor.htm> and in print at <http://www.theaquinasinstitute.org/in-print/commentary-on-the-letters-of-saint-paul/>. Both of those are edited and corrected copies unlike the one I had downloaded and lost which was Fr Larcher's final draft at his death.]

Some Medieval Scholastics were said to phrase it: "Most of what we know about God comes from knowing His effects in Creation."

Radical individualism and some other defective lines of thought in recent centuries developed and spread so widely because of a vacuum of

sorts. Western Civilization was deeply, if quite incompletely and defectively, Christian. Western Civilization was founded upon what might be labeled the Augustinian understanding of human history and its relationship to the more specialized Christian understanding of human origins and human moral nature and much else culminating in an understanding of salvation, of the relationship of this world to its Maker. This last understanding, once rethought in terms of those lesser understandings, had then re-absorbed those lesser understandings.

Earlier men of Western Civilization were individuals with some substantial freedom and also members of various communities with their own sorts of freedom. Ultimately, individuals and communities were part of the Body of Christ.

No longer can we provide meaning by an appeal to our inherited understanding of what-is, not because it wasn't true. It was true and is true, but the individuals and the various communities have to be understood in terms of reality, in the best terms available to men of any given age, not in textbook terms drawn from prior and less adequate understandings of created being.

Any understanding of "what it all means" in the mainstream of the Catholic Church or any other part of Christianity is centuries out of date and can't be taken seriously—one of the reasons so many no longer take the Catholic Church or other Christian churches seriously. Christian theologians and philosophers attempt to speak about human moral nature or—somewhat equivalently—about human origins by, at best, squeezing selected bits of knowledge about genes and evolution into old frameworks of knowledge. (The totality of any such consistent frameworks would constitute what I call a 'worldview'.)

We hear of one view of human origins and human moral nature in homilies and sermons and theological or spiritual books. We hear of other views in popular or academic works about science and history. Too many will wave their hands spasmodically and claim, "There is no conflict." There is, though it isn't a conflict between religion and science but rather a conflict between science of past centuries and science of our own time—using the term 'science' in the broader sense of "disciplined study of facts" and including history and some philosophy as well as physics and biology. Mainstream Christian worldviews are based upon the best of human empirical knowledge as of, perhaps, 1800 in Etienne Gilson's quite knowledgeable and intelligent understanding of the history of Christian thought. (I would tend

to put the break nearer to the persecution of that orthodox Augustinian theologian Galileo, the early 17th century though the rebellion of Christians against God and His Creation had been developing for some time before that.)

I think I've laid a good foundation for a new understanding of Creation in my various books and other writings, but few seem interested. Some prefer to join in the fun as barbarian children party in the ruins of Western Civilization. Some prefer to watch in horror and to write learned commentaries of the decay in light of the inherited understandings which no longer work. And others, such as the blogger I quoted above, Robert Bonomo, simply express their confusion and perhaps their pain.

Readers, learn from what I've done and spread the word. Perhaps you can do better or perhaps join in the work to which God has called me.



# 651 We Must Understand Matter in Empirical Terms to Understand the Christian Sacraments

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1989>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/03/17.]

Matter, your own living flesh and blood or the bread and wine brought to the altar, is an essential element of any Christian Sacrament. More than that, it's the most concrete part of a sacramental world. Even non-sacramental Christians accept baptism as a Sacrament though perhaps refusing to use the term, but I'm going to write about one of the Sacraments they don't accept—the Eucharistic Rite.

In a Sacrament, God operates upon matter, sometimes through an ordained priest and, in the case of baptism, through any human being who uses water and the proper Trinitarian formula. Under Catholic teaching, no minister and no Rite celebrated in a church is even needed for a wedding since it's only God and the man and the woman who are parties to the formation of a marriage bond—a formal wedding is no guarantee the bride and bride-groom made the proper commitment to each other and the lack of a formal wedding doesn't necessarily weaken any such commitment which forms a wedding bond.

But it's that Eucharistic Rite I wish to discuss with Holy Week approaching. The Bible tells us that, on Holy Thursday, Jesus Christ changed bread into His own Body and wine into His own Blood. In addition, the Lord instituted a sacramental priesthood to celebrate this Eucharistic Rite

(and to do much else) after He ascended into Heaven.

That much is clear, but the question remains: How was it possible for even God to have changed bread into the very Flesh of God incarnate and wine into His very Blood. Such an act would seem to be more magic than what we might expect given the work of Darwin and Einstein and the like. On the other hand, Catholics claim to have a doctrine of transubstantiation, but that's really just a pointer toward a Platonic way of looking at the world as made of substantial entities which form relationships with each other or with God. Or fail to form such relationships. This is a viewpoint in which God is seen as acting upon substance in the way of a Zeus, a God who resides upon Mt Olympus, or in Heaven, and looks down, sometimes choosing to carry out some sort of magical act, to heal someone or to turn bread into the Flesh of Christ, wine into the Blood of Christ. Transubstantiation once made sense in terms of Christian understandings of Creation and was developed for that purpose. It no longer makes sense and can only be held as a superstition, however much sense transubstantiation might have made or seemed to have made.

Consistent with my teachings about what it means to understand Creation, I look for an understanding of the Real Presence on the Altar, the bread has become the Flesh of Christ and the wine His Blood, in terms not necessarily consistent with any existing human schemes of knowledge but rather in terms of an understanding of Creation which reflects the best empirical understanding of that Creation and also in terms of Christian revelation. We have to take what empirical science tells us and what the Bible tells us, dropping speculative theological theories which no longer work and going beyond the limited speculative scientific theories. We have to develop new speculative theories more appropriate to our current understanding of Creation, including our understanding of the mundane, thing-like being which presents itself to our eyes and ears, our noses and our fingers.

Aquinas had this to say about our efforts to understand "God's wisdom":

[J]ust as a disciple reaches an understanding of the teacher's wisdom by the words he hears from him, so man can reach an understanding of God's wisdom by examining the creatures [God] made... (Page 17 of St Thomas Aquinas' commentary on 1 Corinthians as translated by Fabian Larcher, OP and now available as an online document at the website, <http://dhs priory.org/thomas/english/>, of *Priory of the Immac-*

*ulate Conception*, which is a Dominican House of Studies in Washington, DC. It might still be available as a downloadable pdf if you search the Internet.)

Most certainly, if we are to understand Creation and God's relationships to individual creatures, we must understand the matter of this world, this very concrete realm of Creation. We must examine "the creatures [God] made." We must understand what physicists have discovered about protons and pions and neutrinos and we must eventually move on to a more exact understanding of what the biologists have discovered about living flesh and blood and the evolutionary/genetic foundations of that living stuff.

Yet, modern sacramental Christians, even many priests or other theologians, go to Mass seemingly unaware that they have a fundamental lack of understanding about the sacraments they celebrate because they have an inherited understanding of matter at odds with modern scientific discoveries but also at odds with Biblical revelation. Matter exists and then forms relationships. Can that be, from a Christian viewpoint? Are we conceived and then God chooses to love us? Do we develop into specific human beings and then our mothers choose to love us? No, the love comes first and works to create from nothingness when God initially acts and to create in the sense of shaping when God continues to act upon us and our mothers also act upon us.

So, what happens upon the altar when the priest calls upon the Holy Spirit to consecrate bread so that it becomes the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ and wine so that it becomes His Blood?

Catholic theological works, and undoubtedly those of other sacramental Christians, will teach that sacraments involve God working in a special way upon matter, possibly matter which is a living human animal. So, again, we need to have some plausible and coherent answer to the question: What is matter? I've given the answer by discussing the love which God and our mothers feel for us. Having given the answer in an intuitive form, I'll provide links for more explicit and (somewhat) more disciplined discussions.

See two of my early blog essays included as chapters in this book: Chapter 156, *A Christian's View of Einstein's and Bohr's Debate on Reality*, and Chapter 157, *Quantum Mechanics and Moral Formation* for short discussions of the primacy of relationships from the viewpoint of modern science and philosophy recognizing the discoveries of modern science and also—quite consistently—from the viewpoint of St John the Evangelist.

In Chapter 74, *Rules or Context?*, I deal with the issue from the viewpoint of the human mind and how it's formed—as an encapsulation of those relationships we discern behind or beneath the concrete stuff we can directly perceive.

In Chapter 256, *Evolutionary Thomists Don't Do Ontology*, I discuss the issue in responding to the somewhat conflicting thoughts of the theologian Metropolitan John Zizioulas of the Greek Orthodox Church who sees the change of matter into the Body and Blood of Christ as occurring as a result of a point-like, Platonic change of the ontological status of that bread and blood. I present it as being the result of a change in the relationship of God toward that bread and blood on the altar, a way of thinking that allows us to see that matter—bread and blood—in terms consistent with modern understandings of matter. The major difference between my answer and that of Zizioulas is that my answer recognizes the modern discovery that we live in a world of what might be called 'existential relationship', a world of evolution and development and not one where Platonic Forms or Reals are shadowed in pre-existing chaotic forms of matter. Rather than our world being populated by entities which are feeble shadows of ideal entities, Forms or Reals, our world and the entities in it are the result of God acting through evolutionary and developmental processes working over multiple levels of reality and all grounded upon the "raw stuff" of Creation, a realm in which God manifested the truths He chose for Creation. It is the Word of God, Christ, who gave that raw stuff from Himself and it is that raw stuff which is still present in all created matter, including the bread and wine on the altar. That bread and wine becomes subject to a new relationship, to a re-creation to become the Son of God Incarnate in a more direct way than other matter. Essentially, that Body and Blood is loved by God in the way that Father and Son and Holy Spirit love each other in their one Divinity. Or so I would speak to make greater—though still provisional—sense of the Real Presence on the altar in this year of 2015.

# 652 The Body of Christ: Churches and Political Communities

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1998>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/04/07.]

Based on greatly expanded knowledge about human being, individual and communal, even Christian churches which have passed through periods of excessive claims to authority have come around to acknowledge there are many realms of a complete and perfect human life which lie beyond their institutional understanding and authority. I've discussed this in various places in my writings—download *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53] for a discussion of this issue. Since I consider salvation to be a full and perfect human life (individual and communal) lived with God, I have concluded that the Body of Christ is more than the Christian Church, though it remains the central organ of that Body. The Body of Christ, as I see things, is more in the nature of a completed and perfect human civilization with the Christian Church as the central organ, but not a central organ which controls the rest of the Body.

The Body of Christ also has organs corresponding to the political and economic activities of men, the musical and literary activities, and so on; I would even propose that the activities which we know as the empirical exploration of this world and more (all of Creation, in my opinion) will continue in some completed and perfected form in the world of the resurrected. We will be sharing God's life and learning to participate as He continues as Creator and shaper of all and all of our knowledge-gathering pursuits, all of our most active pursuits, all of our empathetic and compassionate

moments, will continue and will be perfected and completed as we learn to join the Almighty in His dynamic existence, His true life. Creation will not end with us magically joining God in some other realm of divine being; rather will this world be completed and perfected to be the fullness of Creation. Will we even expand beyond that so that we could share in the divine freedom which could have created a different Creation? Who knows?

My way of thinking would invalidate nearly all existing Western understandings of the relationships involving religious and political thought as well as the more concrete relationships involving religious and political institutions; this includes all of our inherited understandings: secularist or providentialist, Christian or non-Christian or anti-Christian. I don't claim to know what the proper relationships and understandings are; my respect for God and His freedom as Creator, as well as my respect for the complexity and richness of Creation, leads me to believe that we have to discover those proper relationships and understandings by way of living our lives, sometimes experimenting with changes to our ways and sometimes being forced to take on changes. (The dual of secularist and providentialist will be explained below in a discussion of a learned article about a learned book about the way the Founding Fathers probably intended to treat the problems of "church and state.")

Narratives of those complex relationships remain valid under my way of thinking, those from the Bible or other historical or partly historical narratives including those from peoples different from us or societies different from ours. Not only the Bible and other religious works but the more serious sorts of novels remain valid, if valid in the first place—such as, for example, O E Rolvaag's novels which tell of the weakening of Lutheran faith as the Scandinavian immigrants to the Dakotas made their peace with a country where Lincoln is a greater prophet than Isaiah and also a greater source of revelation than Jesus Christ.

In Chapter 320, *In a Complex World, the Community Must be Smart for the Individual to Be Smart*, I claimed that much of our more profound and more demanding thinking takes place at the level of communities; in the case of a solitary thinker and writer such as myself, this might mean a conversation of sorts with thinkers over the centuries including a few living thinkers I'm not in direct contact with. If you manage to tear anyone out of his greater communities and force him to take on the role of some sort of pure individual, you will have a very vulnerable and manipulable creature, especially in recent decades when parents and other adults have allowed

this to be done to their children.

Over the years, I've contacted serious thinkers about my thoughts, most of those contacts being made when my ideas were very primitive, to be sure. Those contacts sometimes resulted in some initial success but I'd soon find that nearly all of the best of these thinkers were actually scholars, speaking a bit unfairly—derivative thinkers wishing to restore a respect for Edmund Burke as they understood him or for some other thinker(s) they had studied in a disciplined (and usually highly constrained) way. A couple of those thinkers had no interest in me when they realized I felt driven to develop my own ideas—they just wanted pliant disciples to build up their reputations or to serve their journals or other organizations. The major exception was Stanley Hauerwas, the Episcopalian theologian, who appreciated the sort of effort I'm making though he was not fully sympathetic to my inclinations to what he perceived as “natural theology.” That's actually a misunderstanding of what I was up to but it was the same misunderstanding I held in a less coherent form at that time—circa 2006-2008. And it was Hauerwas who gave me some bits of good advice, especially that I should have greater respect for metaphysics and especially for the work of Aquinas. (It was, in fact, my process of “making peace” with Aquinas which led to the maturing of my ‘empirical’ bias, that is, my respect for the freedom of God as Creator.)

The publisher Jon Stock of *Wipf & Stock* (at <http://wipfandstock.com>), acting upon the advice of Professor Hauerwas, also published two of my early books with early versions of my thought and those books flopped completely; the largely academic customers of *Wipf & Stock* weren't at all interested.

I've been forced to strike out from an impoverished Christian base-camp to explore interesting and important realms of God's Creation and my fellow-Christians aren't much interested in my particular activities or, far more dangerously, aren't much interested in those realms.

After entering the Catholic Church, I learned quickly but had to constantly re-learn that the members of that Church—including its ecclesiastical and intellectual leaders—have no interest whatsoever in Creation, that is, they have no interest as Christian thinkers. True it is that they have some shallow, modernist interest in the more colorful discoveries of science but such an interest is pagan, that is, it treats the universe as something shallow and transparent rather than as a complex and rich manifestation of certain thoughts of the Almighty.

When we split Universe from Creator, science from theology, we deny the greater unity which Christians must acknowledge. We are left with only a sort of loose, almost flabby, collaboration which is hardly even that on moral issues. ‘Is’ has been split from ‘ought’ and mathematical truths have been split from empirical facts.

All of this background is necessary because Creation is what it is and not something which can be ‘reconstructed’ in our minds by way of some simple human schemas or sets of axioms. I’ll move to a somewhat more focused discussion of the issue of religion vs science, God vs Creation. (Both uses of ‘vs’ are deceptive and ultimately wrong, as I pointed out above.)

So, I’ve denied that Christian churches have the competence or wisdom to rule over all the domains of human life and yet I’ve claimed that those domains are ultimately unified in a very deep sense. Political institutions have even less competence than religious hierarchies have over any significant range of human possibilities—governments can help make possible advances in prosperity, in literacy, in aesthetic quality, but mostly governments can do this—in traditional Anglo-American terms—by fulfilling their limited responsibilities to maintain a well-ordered society with the sorts of freedoms appropriate for good men and good women. I think similar comments can be made on the limited, though real, good which is possible through political clubs and political parties.

Most of the good in human life develops from the efforts of creative individuals, including those nearly invisible efforts which can take place over generations as farmers and metal-workers and physicists and medical doctors and supervisors of local public works departments learn to better and more efficiently take care of the needs of their clients, patients, taxpayers. The list of those who can be creative in the way of individuals or as members of communities can go on and on: philosophers and poets and novelists and musicians and architects and athletic coaches and all sorts of entrepreneurs, farmers and plumbers and parents.

One possible model for discussing all of this is the public square, a square into which Christians and Jews and skeptics or even atheists can step but their institutions cannot—though the individuals bring their communal human being along with their individual human being. Those men and women are also members of various sorts of communities, including political parties, clubs advocating forms of localisms or centralisms, informal groups pushing for social welfare programs, and so on.

The problem with this model is that it stopped working in many ways

when men stopped being deeply Christians and deeply Jews; the only ones who still carry their beliefs and their particular forms of moral character into the public squares of the West are the skeptics and atheists. Even before there was outright hostility toward religious groups which refused to adopt the latest and most progressive beliefs, Christians seem to have quite willingly agreed to enter the public squares in an attitude of skepticism if not quite atheism.

What is to be done?

Gerald J Russello has written an article, *Country Before Faith* at <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/country-before-faith/>, which discusses the viewpoint of Walter Berns, a political scientist and practicing Christian who probably pushed secularism too far, yet, I sympathize with his efforts though thinking he was, like too many unimaginative statesmen and generals, fighting the previous war. He was part of a body of classical liberals who yet feared the *Thirty Years' War* (see [http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Thirty\\_Years'\\_War](http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Thirty_Years'_War)) of 1618-1648 more than they feared the modern educational and entertainment systems which were already doing so much harm to the minds and moral characters of the youth and adults of the West, all to the benefit of the politicians and businessmen and cultural nabobs who wanted genial and pliable cattle. Perhaps it was a genuine fear of the bad behavior of many Christians which led to a willing bargain to adopt skepticism in the public square?

Russello tells us:

Among the most vexing problems Berns addressed over his long career was that of religion in the American polity. An Episcopalian of the old school, Berns thought religion important but something that, in James Madison-like fashion, must be kept under control for fear of causing "faction." In 1963, writing in *National Review* on "School Prayer and Religious Warfare," Berns chided the Supreme Court for delving into religious controversy when it did not have to do so.

A Roman pagan, bureaucrat or philosopher, from the early centuries after Christ would have supported Berns on this, which certainly doesn't automatically mean the position is wrong. There is, in fact, a good deal of practical wisdom and an all-too-rare humility in such a position. It hits the target, though on the edge and a bit away from the bulls-eye.

In 1997, the sometimes feisty magazine, *First Things*, held a symposium on the state of the ‘public square’, where we all meet in our larger-scale political activities and economic activities. Some thought the American government had gone way too far in the program of secularization, even questioning the legitimacy of that government in light of the Christian traditions of the West. Russello tells us that:

[Berns’] reaction to the symposium is informative. The Supreme Court’s extension of its religious “logic” had created too many holes in the fabric of the polity. While other religious conservatives, myself included, rejoiced in the resistance to the “naked public square,” Berns lamented that it also meant the disintegration of a nation founded explicitly on the laws of Nature and Nature’s God, with religious freedom coming second to citizenship,

There is a big problem here. Why is a Christian scholar talking in terms of “Nature’s God”? It’s “God” and “the nature and natures created by God” and “the laws God enacted to regulate Creation”. I hope it was just philosophical shorthand, but it is the sort of talk which leads the children to believe the adults don’t fully believe in what they teach. To the extent that Berns was right, that the United States was “founded explicitly on the laws of Nature and Nature’s God, with religious freedom coming second to citizenship[,]” it was an ill-founding from the viewpoint of anyone who actually believes in the Creed and the Bible. The political systems of the Anglo-American regions, secularized and tolerant as they were, were founded in the context of a Christian civilization, but it’s certainly true that even some of the Founding Fathers, and many since, have thought to tame that Christian civilization to the needs of men more Enlightened, more recently to totally subjugate or even eliminate Christianity and other substantial religions.

A digression is necessary, one drawn from the ideas mentioned earlier and discussed in many of my essays as well as my book: *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53]. Human being is a complex entity with local manifestations in individuals and global manifestations in communities. The Bible itself teaches that salvation comes to us as members of communities (the People of Israel or the Christian Church). With the coming of what might be generally labeled, ‘liberalism’, and the strong tendency

of first Protestants and then Catholics to adopt the radical individualism of that way of thought, men were taught they entered the public squares as individuals to do their public duties. At first, the general decay of the Christian West was mild enough that those individuals carried, perhaps, a strong version of their full faith in its communal form; then, they were like those who appear in the writings of Adam Smith—individuals of vague belief who were yet formed to the moral order of the Christian societies of their grandparents. More recently, men have been allowed to enter the public squares only if they agreed to pretend they had neither creedal beliefs nor an excessively strong attachment to the moral teachings of Christian societies or those which used to be Christian. Of course, there's not a test before you go into the public square so much as there are rules which are understood; break the rules and you are about to be treated as a pariah or even to feel the lash of modern liberalism.

Russello sees this and concludes:

If [Berns] did not predict that a secularized Lockeanism could itself disrupt the constitutional balance that relied on a certain Christian understanding of self-government, he nevertheless defended that balance against the enemies of his time. May he rest in peace.

Berns hit the target, arguably a big one, but was far from the bulls-eye.

Russello seems strongly and honestly inclined toward the right sort of conservatism—one which respects but doesn't blindly worship our traditions, but far too many such thinkers seem to know a lot about the trees and even large groves of trees but they no longer have that greater—global—understanding of Creation which is necessary for a true Christian worldview. Etienne Gilson said the Catholic intellectuals failed to answer the questions which had been raised in the Enlightenment as of 1800 or so—that is, they failed to produce a Christian understanding of Creation which encompassed both revealed truths and also the empirical knowledge which came from Newton and Euler and Columbus. There were no Christian organizations other than Catholic universities and houses of studies which were up to that task, and so Christendom as a whole began to show signs of psychosis, claiming to know the ultimate truths while being increasingly clueless about this world—including even human being. But there are degrees and Russello and other members of the “Russell Kirk” crowd, are at least a little bit

less clueless than was Berns. In a strong sense, we're all clueless, unless we isolate ourselves from the modern West.

Kirk and his followers had a different strategy, one more in line with the stereotypes of conservatives. They set up "permanent things" and turned to some sort of Platonism which gave us a set of truths knowable, in principle, to early men in their fullness. They essentially denied the greater dynamics which is so disturbing in modern science and history and other activities but was also present, though not continuously, in any time of great change. In the full sense, the "permanent things" so beloved by Kirk are still being revealed as God's thoughts, manifested in Creation, are still showing themselves. Human being is becoming richer and more complex as human relationships and human knowledge of Creation deepen, become richer and more complex. When we participate in this process, we are being creative along with God—we're not just observing an emergence of things already existing in some embryonic form and we're certainly not just holding onto "permanent things" known to Augustine and Burke and even Plato and Aristotle to some significant extent.

Let me claim to be a meta-conservative against both the conservative tradition of Berns and that of Kirk. This is to say that self-proclaimed conservatives try to preserve traditional understandings of our last century's understanding of the story God is telling, the story which is this world, and also the greater sort of story which is all of Creation while I try to follow along with God's story-telling, respecting the past chapters and living in the present chapter and trying to anticipate future chapters. I seek to conserve for human understanding and human use not one stage of God's story but rather His storytelling in all its dynamic confusion.

Let me move to another article, from the same website which published Russello's article. This other article, *Secularists vs. Providentialists* at <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/secularists-vs-providentialists/>, also deals with this issue of religion in the public squares. It was written by Richard Reinsch II who is a fellow at *Liberty Fund* (<http://www.libertyfund.org>). Reinsch is reviewing the book, *The Rise and Decline of American Religious Freedom* by Steven D Smith. Following Smith, Reinsch tells us:

Our legal mandarins have constructed a self-congratulatory narrative about their vindication of the First Amendment's religion clauses. Supposedly, until the day in 1947 when the

Supreme Court announced in the *Everson v. Board of Education* case that a “high and impregnable . . . wall of separation” must be maintained between church and state, religious entanglement prevailed throughout the land. *Everson*’s principle that government was to provide no aid to religion was subsequently re-grounded in the early 1960s prayer cases, *Engel v. Vitale* and *Abington School District v. Schempp*, which proclaimed that legislation must be neutral toward matters of religion and secular in its purpose. Other victories for “secular neutrality” followed. We now call this the standard version of American religious freedom. Some, apparently, don’t find it convincing.

I certainly don’t find this version desirable though I don’t claim enough knowledge of the history of this issue to be able to find this version convincing or not convincing in the fullest sense. What I, or other Christians find desirable, might not be what fits in with American beliefs and American practices. That is, I don’t assume the United States to have been so Christian as some do, and I often feel it was usually a Christian country only in a self-serving and self-righteous way.

Reinsch also tells us:

Smith begins with Augustan Rome, noting the confrontation that occurred between Christianity and polytheism. No less a figure than Edward Gibbon noted that Rome’s polytheism led it toward a tolerance and ease with varied religious practices that precluded the type of legally enforced religious conformity that would later mark European Christianity. Smith credits Gibbon’s limited point here, but he does so to illuminate what Gibbon misses about Christian belief and its contribution to religious freedom. Roman polytheism had not produced a principled case for religious tolerance: the devotions paid by Roman citizens to their chosen gods rarely caused sectarian strife, but as Smith shows, polytheistic toleration was merely pragmatic, and it could be and was dispensed with whenever religious practice posed a threat to state power.

While later Christian intolerance, particularly if allied with state power, could be vicious—an attempt to enforce an inte-

rior belief in the authority of divine revelation—Christianity developed superior rationales for religious freedom and political freedom alike. If interior belief is primary, then commitment to revelation must be freely given for it to be valid. That coerced belief was illegitimate was a concept taught by Lactantius, an advisor to Constantine. Smith examines this intellectual lineage to stress its evolution and continuity in Christian thought. Lactantius’s reflections are, in part, similar to John Locke’s case for religious toleration. Likewise, the idea that belief must be freely given is precisely Thomas Jefferson’s explicitly theological rationale for religious freedom in the Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom.

I find this unconvincing if taken out of a limited context. The reason is the ‘mixed’ nature of human being: individual and communal. In fact, the communal nature of human being tells us, if we listen, that the liberal ideas of Locke, at least partly taught to Americans through Thomas Jefferson, are “coerced.” How can it be otherwise? Is American history taught to 14 year-olds who come to their duties as students already disciplined in the way of philosophers, already skeptical in the way of modern scientists or in the different but similar way of Medieval Scholastics brought up on the need to discover truth through debate? The problem is not that the State should be preferring specific religious dogmas but rather that the teaching of any view of history or of the nature of matter and time and space, will carry with it a viewpoint. Even when we deal with knowledge disciplined to formal standards, the book-publishers and educators will get around such elitism—many men and women of high general literacy skills have learned something of quantum mechanics from those bestsellers which teach it as a Zen koan but few there are who take on books teaching quantum mechanics by way of the mathematical formalisms which are the subject itself and not many more who will read a tightly reasoned metaphysics book on the subject. (Yes, I did say the precursor **relationships** which collapse to matter are the mathematical formalisms—we might eventually have better ways to speak but I know of no such better ways. This is an important concept for an understanding of all concrete, thing-like forms of being. See Chapter 156, *A Christian View of Einstein and Bohr’s Debate on the Meaning of Reality* and Chapter 157, *Quantum Mechanics and Moral Formation* for short discussions of the primacy of relationships from the

viewpoint of modern science and philosophy recognizing the discoveries of modern science and also—quite consistently—from the viewpoint of St John the Evangelist.

But there are few interested in a way of making good Christian sense of the world because even Christian leaders have learned from one of a few streams of thought about such issues as freedom or the role of religion in public life. How many high school students go on to explore the subjects, or many other subjects, from other viewpoints? Even if they become journalists or priests or teachers? What was taught to most when they were young will provide the limits of what they are willing to think, and perhaps of what they are capable of thinking.

So it is that the modern State defines freedom in its negative and positive forms in public schools and Catholic schools and Lutheran schools alike. Mostly, even in religious schools, history and related subjects will be taught to the standards of the State, of the Federal government in the United States. Anything taught by the families or communities of worship have to be fit inside the greater viewpoint they learned in public schools and maybe in reading newspapers or magazines or the websites of (mostly) mainstream organizations. Christian dogma becomes those weird ideas which don't really fit into the general understanding you hold of reality. To reform a Marxist teaching to a more perfect truth: anything which is said is always said in the context of greater belief structures. Educators of the better sort have known this since the days of Plato or probably earlier.

The human mind, at least in some of its aspects, will be—so to speak—shaped by its greater understandings, however implicit, of reality. As our general understandings have become so many fairy-tales about how the United States is so exceptional, we end up with holes in our understanding. An hour each Sunday doesn't generally do much to fill in the most important hole, largely because it is the greater part of the understanding of the world—but it isn't there. Our minds are like unto a few upper levels in a building which is otherwise air; the very foundation is but an empty hole in the ground. By eliminating our particular Christian understandings, we Americans have left ourselves and our children vulnerable to whatever promises to fill in those empty spaces and, in some cases, to ease the pain of that emptiness. And so we absorb good stuff and bad stuff but can't make sense of any of it, not the leftist but admirable and humane viewpoint of a Capra nor the fairly straightforward (and far from totally wrong) viewpoint of a mainstream public school history text nor, most certainly, the nihilistic

viewpoint falsely read out of Nietzsche's books by many under-educated teenagers and far too many of those who are legally adults.

Yet, I find Reinsch's claims (or his exposition of Smith's claims) to be convincing, even profoundly wise and also pragmatically wise—at least from the viewpoint of one who thinks we find truth partly by experimenting with our thoughts and feelings and ways of life. I find Smith's claims, as discussed by Reinsch, to be quite convincing in this way when Reinsch tells us:

The significance for law and religion, writes Smith, is that our country has been in a great conversation throughout its history about the interplay between these two subjects. Squaring off from the beginning have been the "providentialists" and the "secularists." Secularists have advocated the near total separation of religion and government, while providentialists have said that public acknowledgment of God by the state is warranted. Both groups have had their "eminent representatives: Jefferson and Madison (and, a bit later, Andrew Jackson) on the secularist side; Washington and Adams (and later Lincoln) representing the providentialist position." Until the mid-20th century, the meaning of our Constitution's religion clauses was "the product of the ongoing competition and collaboration between the providentialist and secularist interpretations of the Republic."

There is a sense in which the pilgrim Body of Christ guides its own evolution and development in this mortal realm, but there is no individual organ or other part of the Body which is in charge. Going along with such processes requires humility and wisdom, patience and openness to reality—qualities not always to be found in those who seek and gain power and wealth. Supposedly, Christians and others in the West have learned not to trust churchmen to have too much power over human communities as those churchmen are themselves human with all that the human condition entails. But I would argue there is nothing reasonable, let alone necessary, about the idea that governments, or other political institutions, should have general powers over human communities as opposed to well-defined powers to, for example, administer an ideally neutral and unbiased judiciary system. If I'm right, it would seem likely that governments will be brought under

control by future generations as was the Roman Church hierarchy and the Scottish Calvinist synod and other abusive religious hierarchies.

Unlike some, I consider the political organs to be evolving and developing toward being part of the perfected and completed Body of Christ. Political activities, and many other human activities, will take place in Heaven; we will not spend time without end in Church choir stalls.

Unlike some, I believe that the political organs should have far lesser powers than they have in this year of 2015.

No one organ should regulate its own behavior or that of other organs.

And, yet, each organ of the Body must regulate its own behavior and that of other organs and even of the entire Body.

The Body of Christ is developing and evolving in a world of self-organizing and self-regulating processes. Our ways of speaking don't suffice to describe such processes; even the formal mathematics is yet under development.

I recommend we accept reality: "Ye gads, what other choice do we have," to slightly paraphrase a comment of Thomas Carlyle. Reality is chaotic and complex, it is yet evolving and developing. In fact, biologists and anthropologists tell us the human race, as a collection of individuals and as a network of individuals and communities, is evolving and developing faster than ever.

As power and wealth grow, there is ever more temptation to take control, especially for those who seek power and wealth, and to control all of human society. Military conquerors and kings and other rulers have been this way as far back as we can trace. Popes and Protestant synods and elected representatives and appointed bureaucrats also tend to aggrandize their offices and sometimes their persons, sometimes to seemingly good purposes and sometimes to criminal purposes.

And so it is that, from an explicitly sacramental Christian viewpoint, I'll endorse the position stated clearly by Reinsch and (I think) stated a little more weakly by Russello.

The position stated clearly is that we need a certain looseness and vagueness in our public squares, a bit of uncertainty as to whether we are a country of secularists or a country of providentialists and also a bit of uncertainty as to whether the political leaders and bureaucrats and judges or the religious leaders call the shots on matters of church and state relationships. This makes sense from the general viewpoint of human beings who should fear the corruption which comes with having power over others

or the privations which come when others have power over us and it also makes sense from the viewpoint of any Christian who believes in the Body of Christ and is willing to view that Body in God's terms as we can read them out of Creation.

## 653 Why Did Peter Go to Rome?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2058>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/05/26.]

A good question: Why did Peter, the shepherd of the flock of Christ, go to Rome, the center of earthly power in its most centralized and most brutal manifestation yet seen. [In fact, we shouldn't forget that China was at a similar level of power and wealth, but no higher so far as I know.]

Roman Civilization was pagan. Its military and political power was at an extremely high level and so were its various forms of culture and human development in general. Peter wasn't pagan but he was a barbarian by Roman standards. He was uncultured in a strong sense. And he was even something of a clownish figure in Roman eyes. But his successors would one day share in the power and wealth and cultural riches of a Rome which remained a significant city in the West for some good part of two millenia. Was that power and wealth, were those cultural riches, truly important to the mortal Body of Christ?

Yes. In a sense, Roman Civilization was taken over as the main part of that Body and Peter moved into Rome itself to set up a new central organ for that Body.

In making this claim, I point to some of my writings which culminated in a claim I made a few years back: The Body of Christ is the completion and perfection of human life, a completed and perfected human civilization. The Christian Church is the central organ, but not the entirety of the Body—which is the same as saying that human life in the world of the resurrected will include all legitimate human activities in some completed and perfected form and not just the activities of life in a community of worship. After all, we are said to be images of God and some of us will share the life of God in the world of the resurrected. God's life is not restricted to just those

acts of human worship, whether as Son worshiping the Father or as Father and Son and Holy Spirit being worshiped. God's life is the fullness of life. See Chapter 624, *Why We Need a Christian Civilization*, and Chapter 477, *What is the Role of the Christian Church in the Public Square?*, for more discussion on this topic.

So, we currently have Orthodox Christian churches which are not part of any viable or dynamic civilizations (though the Russians might be on their way) and a Catholic Church domiciled in Rome of Italy—more of a joke from the viewpoint of civilization than most countries of the modern West. Rome, Italy or even all of Europe, has some wealth and little power and little in the way of living cultures which promise anything at all for the future. Even fifty years ago, it might have made sense to speculate Peter would move to the new center of Western Civilization—the United States, but Americans had plans other than reviving and nurturing a mighty and wonderful civilization from which our country had sprung. Americans had plans other than serving God even by way of being rational and morally well-ordered pagans providing good stuff for the Body of Christ. Americans most certainly weren't about to humble themselves to become willing servants of that Body, however much the promise had been made that the servants of that Body would also be sons of God.

So it is that I note that the Roman Catholic Church seems to be dead man walking and predict that Peter will soon—in historical terms—be packing his knapsack and heading out onto the road, most likely heading into the new complex of civilizations developing on the great Eurasian landmass, though he might still settle for at least some centuries some place on the western coast of the Americas or some other location in the Pacific Rim. (Much of the Americas is looking to be a potentially interesting and very promising mixture of North American, South American, and Asian culture. Perhaps the United States itself can eventually be rescued by that process of mixing with Mexicans and Chinese, but such processes tend to be ugly and bloody for a long time before bearing fruit.)

Before too many decades go by, Peter is more likely to be a bishop on the Pacific Rim or in Asia or the Bishop of Moscow than he is to be the bishop or Rome or the bishop of any other city in the West—other than a city on the western coast of one of the Americas.

The people and peoples of the West have truly destroyed much that was good, much that was from God, much that was given to them for safekeeping and for proper nourishing.

## 654 Science and Naive Anthropocentrism

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2062>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/05/28.]

Razib Khan, is a geneticist who is an atheist but not a naively anthropocentric atheist nor one blind to the reasons why others hold or seek a faith he doesn't hold and doesn't desire. He has published an essay, *Can a Religious Person be a Good Scientist?* at <http://www.unz.com/gnxp/can-a-religious-person-be-a-good-scientist/>, in which he says:

In the culture of science you occasionally run into the sort of person who believes as an apodictic fact that if one is religious one can not by their fact of belief be a good scientist. You encounter this sort of person at all levels of science, and they exhibit a range of variation in terms of the volume of their belief about beliefs of others. I don't want to exaggerate how much it permeates the culture of science, or at least what I know of it. But, it is a tacit and real thread that runs through the world-views of some individuals. It's a definite cultural subtext, and one which I don't encounter often because I'm a rather vanilla atheist. A friend who is now a tenure track faculty in evolutionary biology who happens to be a Christian once told me that his religion came up nearly every day during graduate school! (some of it was hostile, but mostly it was curiosity and incomprehension)[.]

Khan briefly discusses some believers among well-known evolutionary biologists and mentions a historical study of a "a movement in early 20th

century Britain to accommodate and assimilate the findings of evolutionary biology to that of mainstream [Anglican] Christianity,” and then mentions the computer language designer Larry Wall (he might prefer “computer linguist”) and the polymath (mathematics and computer science and typography) Donald Knuth as scientists well known for strong Christian faith. Then he tells us:

To be fair, I don’t think it’s a coincidence that there’s a correlation in the aggregate between secularism and science. But this issue is complex, emerging at the intersection of cognitive science, sociology, and history. These subtleties can’t be waved away airily with a reference to facts that everyone knows which happens to reflect one’s own personal prejudices. That reminds me of things besides science.

The reason so many Christians seem befuddled in the face of evolutionary biology, quantum physics, and modern mathematics adds to the understanding Khan already expresses from the viewpoint of a non-believer. More than that, it can be taken as a warning by scientists, believers and non-believers, and points to something which Khan misses as do most modern Christians and other believers. What they miss is a greater understanding of human being which places the human mind (and heart and hands) into the greater context of this concrete (empirical) world as well as the still greater context of Creation.

There are different realms of being, multiple realms of created being and one realm of divine being in the worldview I’ve built up, but the divine realm mostly plays a role in my worldview as being the source of what I call the “raw stuff of created being”; from there, all of Creation can be seen for most purposes—practical and scientific and philosophical—as being freestanding. There are also multiple ways of human knowing and they don’t correspond in a neat way to realms of being.

I wrote a freely downloadable book about the different kinds of human knowledge: *Four Kinds of Knowledge: Revealed Knowledge, Speculative Knowledge, Scientific Empirical Knowledge, Practical Empirical Knowledge* [43], the full title indicating what is going on. Scientific empirical knowledge and practical empirical knowledge are but two of four kinds of knowledge in this particular way of making sense of human mental activities. Speculative knowledge, using all kinds of knowledge, provides what

I call a worldview and also lesser types of what might be called structures for such purposes as categorizing and otherwise organizing empirical knowledge of things and relationships, of concrete and abstract realms of being. Speculative knowledge also provides a specialized sort of structure: narrative. It's in these forms of speculative knowledge that we find what I think to be needed in Khan's position, not that I'll argue that he should believe in God but only that he should recognize there are non-empirical forms of knowledge involved in understanding empirical knowledge, even the bluntest facts, and non-empirical ways of conceiving a Creation—unified, coherent, and complete. In these three characteristics, Creation and the lesser part of it we know as our concrete world are like persons, even like divine Persons—a similarity seen as an “image” in Christian tradition. By a successful building of a speculative understanding of empirical reality in these Christian terms, we can see this universe as a world ordered to the purposes of its Creator, Creation still more so. A human being, individual or communal, can be seen as a person, an image of a divine Person.

Scientific worldviews differ in type from the one I've presented briefly only in being stripped down, skeletons and not en fleshed living creatures. Because of this, scientists can delude themselves into thinking that they bring an existing mind of great power and insight to the task of understanding this world they explore so well, this world they even understand so well in some of its parts and aspects. This is better, even grander than, but not so much different from, the worldviews of those Christians who see this world as if it were a bleeding and tortured heart; they also can delude themselves into thinking they understand. (I have to admit I would prefer the scientific viewpoint to this bleeding-heart viewpoint if there were not a better choice.)

In my title, I use the term ‘naive anthropocentrism’ to refer to any attempt to set up part or all of human being as an impartial and external judge of empirical reality. Many scientists are more like Galileo's inquisitors and not so much like the master scientist himself. Stanley Jaki—the Benedictine scientist (PhD in physics), theologian, philosopher, and historian—considered Galileo to be a better Catholic theologian than his inquisitors and better than St Robert Bellarmine (not an inquisitor in the brutal sense of the word). Galileo himself didn't separate his faith in Creator and his trust in the truthfulness of Creation; in fact, Galileo's defense of his position (in his letter to the Grand-duchess of Florence) drew upon a line of thought going from St Augustine and St Jerome through St Anselm through

St Albert and his student St Thomas Aquinas. Even with respect to evolutionary biology: Augustine believed that more complex species came from simpler species and, oddly enough, went against his own better instincts in choosing to see the human species as a special creation. St Albert was a great enthusiast for the idea that new species form all around us and, in a similar way to other enthusiasts including some modern scientists, went overboard and saw the grafting of a domestic rose stalk onto a wild rose root system to be the creation of a new species—he had a list of species transformations and got some right but certainly got the whole idea almost as right as he could have in the first half of the 13th century.

It was, and is, bad Christian thought and not Christian thought which targeted parts of science as an enemy. Some Christian thinkers and many ecclesiastical leaders made bad choices and led the Christian Church into a wasteland of superstition in which human schemes were seen as more important than the facts of God's own Creation. Scientists are not themselves immune from the construction of human schemes which are then treated as superior to reality.

Somewhere—I believe in *The Perfectibility of Man* [108], the philosopher, John Passmore, points out the real problem with belief in an all-powerful God: such a God is consistent with any conceivable world. Only sloppy and ill-disciplined thinkers could seriously believe that the existence of a coherent, unified, and complete empirical reality argues against the existence of an all-powerful and all-knowing God.

Yet, my main argument isn't along theological grounds but rather toward an understanding of human being. Recognizing the objectivity of empirical knowledge, we can yet see the true nature of science in the true nature of human being in which the scientist shares. The trick, if that is the right term, is to realize that human being truly is part of the world in which it came to be and in which it lives its mortal life. There is an inside to human being but it's an inside which is shaped in its fundamental, species level by our evolutionary history and shaped in other ways by cultural and individual development. In Christian terms, we Christians are images of God by way of being images of our environments and the environments of our ancestors going right back to self-sustaining and self-reproducing blobs of chemicals.

This is almost a gimme for one who holds a more complete belief involving hands and heart as well as mind as well as a sense of gratitude or at least a sense of justice (see *Justice: The First Step Towards God* [40]; it

can be a problem for one who approaches the ultimate questions from the perspective of traditional philosophical thought in which the thinking organ and its thoughts are as if from a different realm of being than empirical reality or from the perspective of traditional Christian piety of a peasant sort in which the heart is from a different realm. There are also problems for those who think of the world as but a playing field for social work or wealth acquisition or political gamesmanship.

The human being is a dynamic entity formed by various processes involving all three ‘parts’, heart and hands and mind, and each of these parts responds to objective, empirical reality in a different way and is shaped by those responses in a different way. In action, those processes produce a rather chaotic stream—at least that is true of those with a greater sort of life in them. I’ll try not to push this metaphor too far but it can be useful for early thoughts on the wholeness of human being and of the way that a specific human being, individual or communal, is shaped from raw human stuff. Each of us is constrained by the particularities of place and time but we move with some freedom in that streambed set in a particular forest or meadow. In a simple way, we can think of those three degrees of freedom, heart and hands and mind, and realize—at least intuitively—that it is hard to keep a balance of constraints upon those three and it is easy to distort the movement of the stream or to bring it into a state of disorder. I’ll move away from that metaphor by claiming, more or less in line with the traditions of all human civilizations, that the goal of that movement of that stream is a properly rich human being which is true to this world. Take that goal for little more than an ideal in a non-idealistic world but it does capture an essential aspect of the movement of those human streams, as understood in the West by pagans and Christians and modern atheists alike.

The modern world is something of a battlefield among the three groups who define human being, and the human understanding of reality, in limited terms:

- those who judge the world from the viewpoint of a giant and badly bleeding heart,
- those who judge the world from the viewpoint of hands always in motion to make the world an allegedly better place, and

- those who judge the world from the viewpoint of a mind which is seen as capable of direct understanding, unmediated by the shaping forces of evolutionary and developmental events.

Some of the modern atheists, and allied skeptics and agnostics, have used evolutionary theory to pound away at religious faith without accepting themselves what a truly empirical theory of evolution would say about those minds they use in such acts of vandalism. Truth is attainable only if found in this world they reduce to a collection of facts, this world which too many Christians dismiss as a realm of Satan—the father of lies. There are those who have honestly confronted that question: what is the mind which arises from the physical brain? For example, the brain-scientist and philosopher, Walter J Freeman (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter\\_Jackson\\_Freeman\\_III](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Jackson_Freeman_III)), presents a clear and accessible theory of the human mind in *How Brains Make Up Their Minds* [35]; that theory is a modern version of the understanding of mind found in the work of St Thomas Aquinas, one of the most insightful of empirical observers and thinkers—no matter the angelic decorations which sometimes obscure his empirical thought. The human mind arises from the brain shaped by evolutionary history; the human mind is itself shaped by active responses to its environments. (Remember that those environments include not just physical places but also the abstract environments of, for example, mathematics which are conceived in the human mind as it seeks to understand the abstract realms of being underlying this world of things.)

From a book written by Gerd Gigerenzer, *Adaptive Thinking: Rationality in the Real World* [61], I learned a basic principle: in understanding the human mind, we should take care to first understand how it does its job of helping the human being to deal with the world around. For example, Gigerenzer disproved the idea which underpins a truly wrongheaded idea spread by certain sorts of skeptical empiricists from the fields of psychology and economics and business: human beings don't know how to think properly under conditions of uncertainty. It turns out that psychologists and economists and business theorists don't know how to design experiments in the real world in which human beings evolved. In short, human beings—even those with little education in mathematics or statistics—can deal with uncertainty so long as it's presented in the way found in the real-world, that is, in terms of frequencies and not abstract percentages or probabilities.

It's reality that judges us, no matter how some think to judge reality by way of heart or hands or mind. It's far more accurate to claim a human being is shaped properly when shaped in active response to that reality outside of him, including the abstract realms of being which have become increasingly important in human life and have become increasingly real since we discovered that matter itself is some sort of condensation of some strange and abstract being we can describe only in terms of mathematical equations. In fact, I've proposed that these mathematical relationships are a fundamental form of being, a realm of abstract being from which this concrete realm is shaped. I see no intelligible alternative to speaking directly of 'quantum relationships' as a form of being just as much as things are a form of being.

The mind isn't something given to us at conception or any other point in our lives. The mind isn't something which rises above empirical reality so that it can just gather in data and produce lists of true conclusions or even a grand theory. To set up the mind as something which can judge reality from a neutral stance is the original sin of modern thinkers, including scientists, just as pietistic Christians sin in glorifying the heart and others sin in glorifying the hands (acts) of human beings. These errors, as I have noted, are a form of anthropocentrism but are far more erroneous than the anthropocentrism which Medieval and Renaissance Christians inherited by readings and misreadings of the writings of the ancient pagans.

The mind, as Aquinas told us centuries ago and as Freeman and other neuroscientists have been telling us more recently, is formed by way of active responses to the environments of that human being. In addition, we have to realize that the brain as a purely physical organ is predisposed to certain responses to some wide but not infinitely variable range of physical environments. In other words, much of our mind-shaping has taken place on a species level during the processes of biological evolution. To complete this picture, we would also have to consider cultural evolution, but I'll leave that to the reader for now. See Chapter 272, *Human Moral Nature: An Overview*, or download the book, *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53], for a little more development of these ideas.

The major point for residents of an empirical world is that there is no 'I' in here to bring order to or to judge the world or the greater realms of created being from which it is shaped. We learn order by finding it in the seeming disorder of physical reality. So it is that there is an 'I' which achieves its appropriate richness, its completion and perfection, by way of

encapsulating what lies out there, encapsulating by way of active responses and not in the way of computer-like knowing.

Truth is truly out there, in the realm of created being which can be objectively explored, studied, and subjected to speculation by this 'I' which is less a super-scientist—part scientist and part god-like judge, and more a willing participant in created being and perhaps in divine being if we Christians or some other believers are right. To understand isn't to apply to data some transcendental rules of thought which we can magically access; to understand is to work with the ways of thought selected for purposes of survival and reproduction, to refine those ways of thought, and to develop further ways of thought as we explore the various realms of created being which we can reach by heart or hands or mind.

# 655 To Misunderstand Our Human Understandings

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2069>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/06/02.]

We modern human beings have illusions of control; as a consequence, even our ways of approaching human freedom look not so much different from the ways of implementing systems of hierarchical control, even totalitarianism. We think to have some sort of great power over reality, if only in ways of thought and attitude. On the other hand, in many ways, human beings are well-adapted to the real world. We can be said to be an empirically-oriented species in that, for example, our morality is manifested—if quite imperfectly—in our physical selves, in our instincts to live according to such rules as “Thou shall not murder” in our social relationships. (Scientific understandings, as of two or three decades ago, indicated wolves have stronger instincts not to kill members of their own species than do human beings, but our corresponding instincts are clearly good enough for human survival and reproduction and our abstract reasoning ability leads to complex societies and complex moral behaviors and beliefs well beyond those of any other known species.)

In a sense, I continue to beat the dead horse which is traditional human understandings of reality at various levels: our own individual or communal selves, our environments, the entire earth, the universe, or the world which I see as a universe seen in light of a proper, moral ordering. I addressed the same general issue in Chapter 61, *Imposing Ideals Upon Empirical Reality is Insane and Not Noble*, in which I claimed this world to be worthy of the highest respect and as needing study just because it is the work of the Creator, a manifestation of specific thoughts of the Almighty.

Here, I wish to emphasize the need to regard all of our speculative understandings as provisional but also necessary to our further progress even in the seemingly mundane work of gathering further facts about empirical reality and in the mathematical work of building systems of thought which account for aspects of that empirical reality. We also need provisional understandings to guide us in our ways of living and that includes the formation of our institutions, ecclesiastical and political and economic. In the previous two sentences, we can notice a convergence between knowing and doing. To know or to do in this empirical reality, we experiment; we try new ideas, new ways of doing things when we run into new situations or when problems develop even when it seems little has changed in the basic situation. Mathematicians and philosophers and others have explored even mathematics as an empirical field and have produced some interesting results (such as the proof of the four-color theorem—generated partly by computerized examination and elimination of pathological results) though it's far from settled as to whether some mathematics can only be done by way of experiments, including the 'accidental' experiments in which physicists have been known to produce important new mathematical results by solving a physical problem by way of seemingly illicit mathematical techniques. In the case of the *Dirac Delta Function* (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dirac\\_delta\\_function](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dirac_delta_function)) mathematicians accepted the 'non-function' of Paul Dirac (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul\\_Dirac](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Dirac)) by accepting the idea that such an entity could be integrated though not a real function—read the article for a more extensive and less simplistic explanation.

As a Christian, I would say that when we experiment and test against reality, we are learning thoughts of God we might not have been able to otherwise reach.

We aren't inclined toward innovation so much as we pretend, at least not in the short-term and, again as a Christian, I think we would do better if we tried to work directly in response to God in His role as Creator—He has a much richer imagination than any of us have. In any case, there is a fundamental conservatism which is embodied in the very thought that there is such a thing as a 'best' way to understand or to live, a 'best' set of institutions, that is, a best way we can derive as if adding a column of numbers. We want to return to a stable region, an Eden—itself deformed by way of a general-purpose ideological understanding of the Biblical story, and we want to do it by way of fundamental truths we think to already

possess as a basis of all knowledge.

At any given time, we—as individuals and communities—will have some general understanding of important aspects and realms of being which is stated as a worldview and it might be well-enough structured to include an understanding of physical reality, an understanding of moral-order, an understanding of abstract mathematics, and maybe an understanding of how all of this is one greater reality, a Creation to a Christian or Jew or a Cosmos to a pagan. Or it might even be an understanding of what-exists as not really fitting together.

I'll not claim pagans or atheists or others can't provide a good-enough understanding of a universe which is on a trajectory of evolutionary and developmental paths—paths in a general sense of connectors between 'states' or 'phases'. (See the short Wikipedia article [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State\\_space](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_space) and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phase\\_space](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phase_space).) Yet, pagans at least tend strongly (perhaps not necessarily?) to believe that the realm of being which we see as this concrete world is what it is and has to be; it exists alongside of the divine world, even the God himself.

All human beings, not just pagans, have similar thoughts about any mathematical system once it can be expressed in an axiomatic form, so that—for example—Euclidean Geometry had to be the one and only true geometry once so expressed; we had returned to Eden until modern mathematicians ate again of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. In effect, human beings, even Christians and Jews who should know better, tend to see the possible configurations, states or phases, of this world and all else that exists outside of the gods as being contingent but the basic stuff and the currently expressible relationships between entities formed of that stuff are seen as having necessary existence.

By a way of reasoning which might be essentially the same as that underlying the natural (animistic pagan) beliefs of men, modern scientists as well as political theorists through the ages have assumed or somehow concluded that there is a secret which 'explains' all possible being in their particular field of study and a powerful enough abstraction from this world, by way of philosophical contemplation or theory construction, will be that secret. All possible being, or its lesser part in human political institutions, will be found in that secret. Though, as a Christian thinker, I have conjectured that God manifested some truths as the raw stuff of created being, I don't pretend to know if those truths are building blocks or something

totally different and perhaps even inexpressible until we can explore various ways of ‘returning’ to that raw stuff through realms of increasingly abstract being. As matters stand, we can ascend one realm of being above matter—the realm of abstract being which is studied as the equations of quantum physics and which I believe to truly be those mathematical relationships. We have also ascended to other abstract realms by way of mathematics and philosophical contemplation in all disciplined fields of study, but we can’t really put those realms into their proper relationships with each other and with Creation, the totality of created being. The following three chapters are just three of many in which I’ve tried to better understand being from the viewpoint of a concrete, thing-like creature who starts from empirical knowledge:

- Chapter 169, *From Abstract Being to Concrete Being and Narratives*,
- Chapter 177, *What is Created Being? Really, what is it?*, and
- Chapter 181, *The Basic Stuff of Created Being*.

I most certainly don’t think we’ve yet seen the limits of God’s imaginative powers, or those of Nature if you prefer. We have a lot to learn and what we need to learn includes the ‘tools’ of understanding; in fact, there isn’t quite the barrier between tools (of knowing) and being as we are often inclined to believe. We think there is a true ‘inside’ to our individual human selves or perhaps to our more complete individual and communal selves, but there is no such inside as I discussed somewhat in Chapter 654, *Science and Naive Anthropocentrism*.

What some physicists think to accomplish with a “Theory of Everything” is but a grander-scale version of what many biologists think to have already accomplished with Darwinian theories of the expanded sort (including genetics). This is also what some political scientists and philosophers think was already accomplished by Aristotle and his followers with their claims that all possible political relationships, and thus all possible political communities, fit into a small number of categories knowable to a great thinker living circa 300BC. We have a square hole and a circular hole and a triangular hole and we might be ignoring evidence that there are star-shaped pegs. More than that, we might be ignoring evidence that the shapes of holes and pegs might be evolving and developing and even being deformed by forces external to those specific systems. It might even be the case that

there are times when there are no pegs shaped right to fill some important holes, no holes shaped right to hold some important pegs. And it might be the case that the true ‘geometry’ lies far beyond a peg and hole analogy.

I’m not taking a relativistic view of being and of truth but rather taking the position that we have not yet penetrated to truly fundamental levels of being and truth. I’m also not claiming that there is something incoherent or otherwise wrong with reality. That is a far stronger claim and one I most certainly wouldn’t make, believing as I do that God created ordered relationships which then produced stuff. I am claiming that we tend to see our provisional understandings, provisional knowledge of all sorts, as being absolutely true once they work well in helping us to survive or reproduce—as individuals and as communities—in a particular context, such as the world of Greek city-states or of modern nation-states. In other words, I am claiming there is something wrong with our understanding of our own human being and of other forms of created being. That’s all right. There’s bound to be many things wrong with our understandings, in the sense of incompleteness and of imperfection. It’s when we misunderstand our human understandings, when we don’t have the proper meta-understanding of our understanding, when we think that a good and elegant scheme is necessarily true, that we deform our relationships of mind and heart and hands.

A true understanding is a rich and complex body of knowledge which can be described from one angle in terms used in my book and its title: *Four Kinds of Knowledge: Revealed Knowledge, Speculative Knowledge, Scientific Empirical Knowledge, Practical Empirical Knowledge* [43]. From another angle we can consider various elements which are narrative, others which describe the characters and non-living things in quantitative and qualitative terms. The end result is a worldview, an encapsulation of reality, what we can see and touch and smell but also what is derived from concrete reality through efforts of our minds and hearts and hands.

The act of understanding is an act of acceptance and, at least to saints of the mind or heart or hands and who are not all Christians, it is an act of offering gratitude. It is an act which requires the participation of one’s mind and heart and hands. It is an act which is more complete and a little closer to perfection when done as a human community and truly complete and perfect only when done by the completed and perfected human community which is the Body of Christ. (Translate or limit appropriately if you wish to have a non-Christian statement of this critique of our misunderstanding of human understandings.)



# 656 Toward a Better Understanding of Our Human Understandings

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2072>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/06/18.]

Our delusions about the world being subject to understanding by an out-of-the-box human mind and our allied delusions about human control over that world lead us into various specific errors. We ignore what doesn't fit into our favorite schemes, that is, we are blind and deaf to what doesn't fit into our delusionary schemes of understanding. We think we and our children are born with preformed minds and try to understand that world and to teach those children by pushing knowledge into those preformed minds; in the modern West and most certainly in the United States, the duty of teachers is to push knowledge into those minds rather than realizing that the mind needs to be shaped by immersion in a subject, even if the subject were the vaguely defined study of how to be a good citizen. It's of some interest that athletic coaches and military trainers train and educate those under their charge by more penetrating techniques, even deliberately driving those under their charge into states of exhaustion to destroy their reluctance to take on their new roles. In fact, the mind shapes itself in active responses to what lies outside of itself—the true insight expressed in a strange way in the Zennish claims that there is no difference between knowledge and the knower, between subject and object.

So we have distorted our own mental development and that of our children and, most obviously, that of our communities. Rather than responding to a world of evolutionary and developmental processes, we think to be

building first huts of mud and grass, then wooden huts, then stone structures right up to pyramids, then concrete coliseums and temples and aqueducts, then stone cathedrals. . . right up to steel and concrete skyscrapers. And we don't get the point, at least not the bulk of human beings including most of the members of the political and economic elite. That is we don't get the point that the minds of people who build mud and grass huts, those who build pyramids, those who build steel and glass skyscrapers, are minds suited to a world in which those were real possibilities available to and created by human animals responding actively to their environments. They were not just foreseeable stages in the progression of a species fated to build steel and glass skyscrapers from the time the first apish man learned how to use fire to light and to cook and to create grasslands; they were not just learning stages for a species set in this world to exploit it.

We fall into such errors partly because of the 'intuitions' built into our brains by the processes of evolution. Even the most brilliant of mathematical physicists first learned to count as an infant because he has a brain inclined to count due to the survival and the reproductive success of his finger-counting ancestors over the previous hundreds of thousands of years. And that great mathematical physicist named Einstein was a man born near the end of the 19th century and had a brain shaped by his active responses to a world which knew of Archimedes and Newton and Maxwell and also knew of Homer and Shakespeare and Goethe.

We also are fooled because we, as a species have learned to summarize some sorts of knowledge in axioms and rules which work with those axioms, using that axiomatic system to organize our more complex knowledge and to create various short-cuts which prevent us from having to repeat the messy trial-and-error processes which led to the physics and engineering knowledge which can build skyscrapers.

We create our own opportunities and our own problems by way of our very power to think abstractly, to set up—for example—geometric systems. We can somehow rise above our individual and communal selves to judge those selves and the world in which those selves exist—download my book, *Four Kinds of Knowledge: Revealed Knowledge, Speculative Knowledge, Scientific Empirical Knowledge, Practical Empirical Knowledge* [43], for a still preliminary account of what is involved in human 'knowing'. In fact, a 'world' is a speculative construction of accessible and mundane environments, up to the entire 'universe' as defined in modern physical cosmology and beyond. Call this construction a 'worldview' and we can free

the word ‘world’ for referring to the objective reality which we see imperfectly and incompletely—often in a downright distorted way. I go at this and other issues again and again in my writings, trying to draw out the subtleties and nuances because of the underlying complexity often masked by the view that things are really so simple. (I lightly address this issue in Chapter 641, *Enriching Our Moral World: Simple Is Digested Complexity*.)

In a simple analogy: the construction of a “Blocks World” (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blocks\\_world](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blocks_world)) led to a lot of good work in artificial intelligence research in which a very simple concrete world was abstracted so that it could be manipulated as if a well-defined mathematical system. The term ‘well-defined’ points to the problem. For example, once topology was seen as the study of continuities of certain types of systems, by the way of simple set operations, it could be well-defined in remarkably simple ways as the study of sets which behaved in certain ways under basic set operations; a continuous function was then defined as one which has an inverse which maps open sets to open sets. (Very roughly, an open set is a general concept whose simple manifestation is a line which doesn’t include its endpoints.) Modern mathematics is so powerful just because it has ‘fragmented’ into these well-defined fields of study which are interrelated but separated in important ways. It is also so powerful because mathematicians learned to live with a situation confusing to outsiders: some fields, such as number theory, are strictly quantitative while other fields, such as topology, are mostly qualitative and are often greatly concerned with existence proofs. And its also so powerful because a rich field such as topology (originally and even now dealing with continuous deformations which tell us a doughnut and a tea-cup are the same ‘shape’, as are a filled-in square and a filled-in circle—by some rigorous understanding of ‘shape’) can be reduced to some simple sets of axioms about sets. The original power of topology is retained but it can also deal with problems which weren’t even possible to imagine before those simplifications which are actually great abstractions.

Much work in trying to understand our complex world, say the genetic aspects of terrestrial life or the economic or political aspects of human being, seems to involve the implicit construction of blocks worlds and then the direct (naive?) analysis without proper understanding of the need for qualitative analysis of those assumed blocks worlds to determine if the solutions or understandings they seek even exist or—still more basically—to determine by playing out scenarios if those blocks worlds even correspond to reality in the desired ways. Reality might not be cooperative. For exam-

ple, artificial intelligence researchers discovered early on that a robot which relied on pure logical reasoning could freeze for hours while trying to prove it possible to get around one or more obstacles between it and its goal. Obviously, there are better ways to plan moves even in fairly simple physical situations. A hawk won't eat well if he takes hours of analysis to determine if he can get to a squirrel running through a field with the protection of scattered trees.

The trick, for at least those responsible for scouting out the future and forming understandings about futures suddenly become radically different today, is to jump to a higher level of abstraction while always staying within the constraints of concrete reality. This last statement might seem contradictory but it's not—we've found in recent centuries that higher level abstractions in mathematics might be found by exploring concrete reality or they might be found by developing further the abstractions already developed. In either case, there is an admittedly vague sense in which we might say that mathematics as a whole is found in concrete reality—any alternative statements will also be vague or downright false.

Let me consider a few problems seeming far from the reach of abstract mathematical reasoning:

- Is there an qualitative description of human being which is worth much?
- Can such an abstract description, if it exists, help us to provide further descriptions of our possibilities, the ways in which we can shape ourselves?
- Can such an abstract description, if it exists, help us to understand the true relationships of individual and communal human being?
- Is there a coherent understanding of personhood other than as a synonym for nature?
- If personhood is a coherent concept subject to disciplined discourse: are all human beings persons?
- What is a community, really?

Though I have my own still developing answers to some of these questions and a few ideas about all the rest, I don't intend to propose definitive

answers to any of them in the initial batch of the essays and books I can hope to write, only to explore the possibility of developing a more disciplined way to speak about these 'qualitative' issues by borrowing tools from qualitative mathematics. After I succeed, or someone else succeeds, in this initial project of providing a more complex and sophisticated framework of analysis for the complex human relationships of complex communities, then that framework can be used to express, say, Christian or Jewish moral and even theological ideas, perhaps a variety of ideas from other stances.

In any case, there are more such questions which I think can best be dealt with in an intelligent and non-ideological way by proper use of 'qualitative' forms of reasoning which have led to deep and important results in mathematics and mathematical physics and computer science and other fields of human research.

In closing, I'll confess that my efforts in this general vein are powered by a great and optimistic faith that the qualitative forms of reasoning discovered by mathematicians and some other mathematically inclined scientists can be abstracted to provide ways of reasoning appropriate for understanding human being, individual and communal. This is a continuation of the use, for example, of paths crooked and straight in moral thought. The moral realms of this world have grown opaque to much of that thought and we have no tools to rebuild our thought. If being is one and knowledge about being is ideally one then any powerful reasoning processes developed for use in, say, moral issues might well prove useful to mathematicians and physicists and engineers and others.



## 657 God as Judge, God as Creator

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2075>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/06/29.]

We live in a world driven by processes of evolution and development. Our human beings, individual and communal, have been created and shaped by more specific processes of evolution and development. In particular, our minds are shaped as we respond actively to reality in its concrete and abstract realms and aspects.

Some Medieval thinkers made a claim I would support wholeheartedly: most of what we know about God, we know through His effects in Creation. I would say: most of what we know about God, we know through His acts-of-being so far as we can see them; we respond to these acts-of-being and encapsulate them in our minds, making them part of our minds.

And, yet, we pray to God, think of God, teach and preach about God, in terms of ancient Semitic ways of knowing their world. To oversimplify, but not really distort: we pray to God, think of God, teach and preach about God, as if He were a human judge raised to an infinite size and to a level of infinite power. We should be responding to God as a Creator of all, the Source of all being.

“God as judge” makes no sense to the modern human mind, not because the modern mind has become weakened or corrupted in some ways—though I think that to be true, but rather because of the very strengths of the modern mind coming from the accomplishments of human beings in dealing with empirical realms, including the more theoretical or abstract branches of mathematics and physics and other such sciences. The modern mind sees no courtroom in which actions in fields of trial are judged; the modern

mind sees those realms of concrete being shaped from more abstract forms of being by processes of evolution and development. In Christian terms, we see no courtroom but rather a Creation. It must be said we also see no factory designed by human engineers but rather a Creation, but “God as Engineer” seems an ephemeral mistake as opposed to “God as Judge” which is quite long-lasting.

As I’ve pointed out numerous times, Christians—including their leaders—have no problem accepting the world as seen by Darwinians and by modern physicists when they wish to be scanned in a search for cancer or when they wish cancer or other problems to be treated. They accept the world as one where order is evolving and developing in the economic and social realms: the Invisible Hand in Adam Smith’s terms. They have learned to be skeptical of efforts to regulate an economy or society as one might still regulate traffic on the street—robotic vehicles might eliminate the courtroom model from the streets as well. The more complex and complicated a system is, the better it is if allowed to evolve and develop, perhaps within guidelines. See Chapter 656, *Toward a Better Understanding of Our Human Understandings* for a short discussion of the discovery that this is so by the engineers and scientists in the first decades of work in “artificial intelligence”.

Let me close by quoting one form of the *Jesus Prayer* (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus\\_Prayer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus_Prayer)):

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me,  
a sinner.

The above version is the one I usually pray in front of a Tabernacle holding the Body of Christ, in front of a crucifix, when entering a place of special holiness, or when I feel especially troubled.

Let me suggest a first draft of a *Jesus Prayer* more oriented to modern understandings of the explorable realms of our world:

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me,  
a human animal born in the natural world as a member of a  
species evolved from lower species and yet hoping to unite my  
humanity to Your humanity and my humanity to Your divinity  
in the World of the Resurrected.

[Readers interested in a little more detail about how I understand human knowledge can download: *Four Kinds of Knowledge: Revealed Knowledge, Speculative Knowledge, Scientific Empirical Knowledge, Practical Empirical Knowledge* [43]. Many other essays as well as other downloadable books are available on this website: *Acts of Being* at <http://loydfueston.com/>.]



## 658 Can We Understand God by Studying His Creation?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2083>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/07/21.]

In Chapter 654, *Science and Naive Anthropocentrism*, I wrote:

Somewhere—I believe in *The Perfectibility of Man* [108], the philosopher, John Passmore, points out the real problem with belief in an all-powerful God: Such a God is consistent with any conceivable world. Only sloppy and ill-disciplined thinkers could seriously believe that the existence of a coherent, unified, and complete empirical reality argues against the existence of an all-powerful and all-knowing God.

The world is rich and complex, the entirety of Creation still more so. As part of my updated Thomism, I claim that the human mind is a set of relationships with all that lies around us and also inside our own bodies, which relationships form as we actively respond to all that stuff and those relationships. Also, over time, our understanding and recognition of what lies around us and inside us becomes more complete and more perfect. Our minds encapsulate some significant part of our environments whether we be nomads in the jungles of the Amazon basin or Jewish philosophers or atheistic physicists or Christian carpenters. And this is why the truth in Passmore's claim is only part of the truth and only from one viewpoint. We inherit some prejudices in the form of instincts selected over the history of our species and we learn some truths of various levels of contingency as our communities and our individual selves develop in response to the world. Our natures as self-aware, featherless bipeds with some substantial

reasoning abilities don't give us any direct access to transcendental realms of truth; our natures give us only the chance to engage in struggles to attain some truths which can be found in Creation—just where the Creator put them so that we can engage in those struggles.

Yet, the belief survived that there is a body of absolute, transcendental truths which can be grasped directly by a human animal otherwise a creature born into nature. Passmore thinks to be able to reason from “absolutely powerful God” to the conclusion that “any world is possible.” And, yet, Jews believe God to be one Person and Christians believe the Almighty to be three Persons. These beliefs arose in history as the result of different understandings of events perceived (or not) as revelations, but the concrete facts of history—as is true of any fact—can't nail down an abstract truth but they can point to such a truth. And such a truth about God's personal nature arises not directly from raw facts but rather from long-term analyses and contemplations of those facts and from efforts to live accordingly. That we can see the history of the Israelis and/or the biography of Jesus of Nazareth as pointing to truths about Creation and Creator is no less plausible that the idea that we can see the expansion of the universe by way of other raw facts subjected to different sorts of analyses and contemplations and—yes—efforts to live accordingly. Can it be true that “any world is possible” to a Creator who is a specific Person or a particular Community of three specific Persons?

One understanding of a mortal animal developing as a person is: a creature willingly (at least in potential) and knowingly (also at least in potential) living a story in which he can develop as he responds to various sorts of challenges, moral challenges playing a particularly important role. If God is a Person (as Jews believe) or three Persons (as Christians believe), then our world is one sort of a world we would expect Him to create—a world of evolution which can produce moral species, including a moral species of higher potential for understanding, a world in which at least some members of such a species can develop into the state of ‘person’.

It isn't legitimate for Jewish or Christian believers to engage much in theology which considers God as other than a Person or three Persons. Such ways of thought are a false form of openmindedness, equivalent to a claim that the Personal nature of God is a matter of chance—God is some kind of generic god-stuff and the personal stuff could have been different. Why would Jews or Christians wish to engage in theological thought in the way of pagans who think of the divine source of being as being that

generic god-stuff? (This points to a need for Christian thinkers to develop proper ways to speak of the Nature and Persons of the Triune God—I have no proposals at hand but acknowledge the legitimacy, given this lack, of sometimes engaging in some sorts of theology as if God’s nature were generic god-stuff.) Why would philosophers who are the residents of what was once a Christian civilization not realize that many residents of the West would be bound to think of God as one Person or three Person(s) and would be bound to think of Creation as one which would reflect in some way the Personal (including moral) aspects of such a God? And those aspects, not being contingent, can’t be assumed away in any meaningful philosophical or theological discussion. A Creation which is one of evolution at some level and of development at all levels, especially that of individual creatures, seems quite plausible given a Personal Creator and not just one formed to characteristics randomly chosen.

Such a world points back, not by way of rigorous logic but by way of a narrative and moral reasoning, at a God who is Himself Personal in some fundamental and non-contingent way.

True to Thomistic principles, we start with the world and ascend to an understanding of God (see the *Contra Summa Gentiles*, sometimes called the little Summa) or start with God and descend to an understanding of Creation (see the *Summa Theologiae*, also known as the *Summa Theologica* or simply the *Summa*).



# 659 What is Understanding? Again and Once More But Likely Not the Last Time

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2091>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/09/15.]

Let me oversimplify in a useful way:

- Facts are local.
- Understanding is global.
- Knowledge is something of a bridge from facts to understanding.

And, yet, we should not imagine that facts and knowledge exist only to serve understanding. Nor should we imagine that understanding is fully, or even mostly, what can be found in a (pseudo-)Platonic scheme.

We live in a dynamic Creation, one driven forward by evolution and development. The trick for a Christian, for one who believes in an afterlife in the world where the resurrected share God's life, isn't to develop a set of schemes which can be applied to all things and situations to understand—such is a false understanding of understanding. The trick is to understand the story and not to reduce it to just some things that had to happen to compensate for a fall from a state of perfection.

When we have a story which works—and we currently don't, we work to integrate into that story new events and new knowledge of things and their relationships. When the story breaks down, we have to pick up the pieces, Biblical revelation and human traditions to the extent they remain

valid, and then we have to create a new story as did Christians from the time of Augustine (call it the Fall of Rome if you wish) to the High Middle Ages (1150-1300 or thereabouts).

In the succeeding centuries, Christians fell down upon the job. They fought Galileo, a man who was an orthodox Augustinian thinker and even more consistently empirical than was the great African. That was the problem. 'Empirical' means having to pay attention and respond to events and natural revelations which might be very disturbing. Most human beings, including Christian theologians and even saints, prefer to have a set of canned truths by which they can understand and even judge all of Creation. That's not real understanding. Even in mathematics, axiomatic systems aren't created from nothingness but rather distilled from years or even centuries of exploring specific areas of mathematics. Even this seeming ideal of idealistic thought is no such thing—great advances in mathematics have often come when a scheme of thought produced results which indicated the scheme needed to be expanded or enriched or changed in fundamental ways. I don't agree with those who see mathematics as a cultural activity but I do agree with a similar but grander view of mathematics being one area of activity of the human communal mind as it expands, enriches and complexifies itself—first of all, in response to reality, but then in response to the internal developments of that mind and the communities of which the mind is a part.

So, those thinkers such as Reuben Hersh and Raymond Wilder who see mathematics as a cultural activity, and argue intelligently for that view, are more right than wrong but not right enough. They aren't right enough because they have no reason to pursue a grander vision than simply understanding the community of mathematical thinkers—a noble task in itself but only part of the greater task of understanding all human communities as they enrich and complexify themselves in response to what lies around them. . . and then inside of them. Human understanding is the story of human individuals and communities shaping their selves in honest and faithful response to God's Creation.

As I see it, a higher level understanding which is the setting for all lesser understandings, comes from a proper perception of the world as a story, the world as being the universe and all creatures living, evolving and developing, according to the moral purposes of its Creator. This obviously can only happen if we pay attention to the universe, to God's creatures. As Aquinas told us:

[J]ust as a disciple reaches an understanding of the teacher's wisdom by the words he hears from him, so man can reach an understanding of God's wisdom by examining the creatures [God] made. . . St Thomas Aquinas' commentary on 1 Corinthians [3], according to a translation by Fabian Larcher, OP, and now available in hardcopy at the website of *Priory of the Immaculate Conception*, <http://dhspriory.org/thomas/english/>, which is a Dominican House of Studies in Washington, DC. It might still be available as a downloadable pdf if you search the Internet.]

Examine the creatures God made if you wish to understand the thoughts of God in His freely chosen role as Creator of this particular world in a very specific Creation. And then make sense of it in light of your understanding of the Creator God of Jesus Christ or another God or even Reason if you wish. In any case, the idea is to wrap the best available knowledge of your day and age in a narrative, purposeful and even morally purposeful to many of us.



# 660 We Need Moral Order, Not Self-satisfying Compassion

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2105>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/10/28.]

One of the main themes of my writing has been a tripartite understanding of the human being, individual and communal, as mind and heart and hands. We think and we feel and we do.

The triad of mind and heart and hands is like the Real Presence in being somehow a way of speaking of a fundamental truth, a way of speaking which must be retained and kept in mind even as we learn more and speculate upon the deepest mysteries of Creation and the Creator. Speaking of specific ways of understanding “thinking and feeling and doing” (in Aristotelian terms or in modern neuroscientific terms) brings us a greater abstract understanding but does so by taking us a necessary distance from the more raw truth, perhaps the raw experience of created being in its relationship to its Creator. Speaking of some metaphysical understanding of the Real Presence such as the obscurity of Transubstantiation or the much more clear concept of the primacy of relationships over stuff is also to bring us to a necessary distance from the more raw truth. (A Christian may well believe that, when we share God’s life on the other side of the grave, it will be possible to experience being in its most concrete manifestation while simultaneously understanding that being in an abstract, detached way.)

If any part of the human being gains dominance over the others, there is likely to be trouble. To be sure, there are many individuals who are at least somewhat dominated by mind or heart or hands. That often isn’t a problem, though it would always be a serious problem when a major community is dominated by one of these at the expense of balanced human being. There

are signs in this year of 2015 that the major Christian communities and many other human communities, especially in the West, are becoming as gigantic, bleeding hearts—perhaps united to hands but not to minds.

It's the mind which anticipates, much more than thinking on the fly when the action happens. When a human being, individual or communal, is shaped properly by way of direction of a properly formed mind, heart and hands will do what is right or at least what is most clearly seen to be right. This right feeling and right doing shouldn't be simply a knee-jerk reflex to, for example, allow unrestricted migration at the expense of future generations and at the expense of a civilization. In addition, unintelligent charity might well put would-be beneficiaries in a worse position, such as the EU admission of refugees through Turkey—those people are living in tents in northern Europe, without adequate food or clothing, with northern European winter approaching.

And so I diverge to discuss a bicameral mind of sorts. In both the individual and the community, stability will often, and properly, lead to a dominance of a relatively rigid mind, one of rules. This mind will see the future as being essentially the same as today. Perhaps the village is growing and perhaps the kingdom is dealing with other realms which are hostile; yet, things are pretty much moving along a straight path. Until they aren't; until the wise men of the village grow lazy or morally irresponsible or until the village or kingdom moves straight while the path is curving or until the path disappears and a new one must be cleared through a wilderness. Then a more flexible mind is needed, one which looks outside of what is known and responds, well or poorly, to new conditions or even new understandings of old conditions.

During transitional periods of any sort, creative sorts of minds should be encouraged to come to the forefront. We should understand before we act or even before we unleash our bloody hearts upon innocent victims, and certainly before we try to restructure human communities in blind obedience to some sort of rules, even those of charity. Understanding during periods of great change might mean a re-understanding down to the very foundations of human understandings of created being and of its relationship to its Creator.

For example, most traditional moral thinkers, philosophers and theologians and the better sort of political thinkers and so on, think of morality in terms of pre-existing virtues and vices though the positive (at least partly 'mathematical') sciences have shown human beings are born with traits

arising from physical structures or flows of chemicals in the body. The love generally considered purest, maternal love, is largely mediated by physical interaction between the body of mother and embryo and then strengthened further by, for example, the flows of hormones as the baby is first put to the breast of the mother. Both the lust of the sexual predator and the love of devoted husband and wife are driven by sexual passions arising from hormonal flows and the complex and as-yet poorly understood actions of various brain regions.

None of this corresponds well to abstract schemes of virtues or vices, though something like a scale of virtues could be used as a way of training the young in moral behavior; yet, we must realize that even a simple scale will vary according to a lot of factors including the different levels of raw passions and inclinations of different peoples who have evolved in response to different problems and opportunities.

It would be desirable to apply creative mental energies to our situation, to a re-understanding of human being and its relationship to Creation and Creator. It might even be said to be necessary. In such a complex world, one where even moderate collapses can lead to great damage and a huge number of deaths as well as a loss of good standards of living for generations, we shouldn't just go off half-cocked on various military adventures or on the opening of the borders of complex human communities to people with drastically different behavioral and other traits. But we Americans have done such, thinking to protect ourselves by irrational attacks on some community defined as enemies by well-meaning leaders or by the all-too common scoundrel-leaders or by both in alliance. We have done such by opening the borders to those who seek a better life in highly developed countries rather than developing their countries as well as those suffering from unwise growth when their food supplies were dependent upon weather cycles and—this is a tough one—as well as those who are fleeing the chaos caused by utterly stupid and morally despicable behavior by war-profiteering parties in the West.

We in the West should feel ashamed of ourselves, even those who tried to stop some of this criminal behavior, for what we've done to various parts of the world—in a much more intense way since profiteering scoundrels and nutcases started directing American foreign policy following World War II. It's not that we Americans were morally pure before that, but even the crimes against the Amerindians were understandable in the abstract when set in the context of the sometimes peaceful and sometimes violent strug-

gles initiated by the beginning of agricultural and the resulting complex communities and inter-community relationships from the time of the “first farmers” (northern Syria and bordering regions of Turkey about 12,000 years ago). Nearly all Amerindians in North America were nomadic or semi-nomadic, that is, in the same situation as the hunter-foragers of Europe who were gradually pushed into oblivion or forced to adopt the new ways as small numbers of those “first farmers” came out of northern Syria and adjoining regions of Turkey, bringing domesticated crops and animals and ways of life which allowed great reproductive success—the creation of dense populations which came to dominance in acre after acre all the way to the North Sea and to the Atlantic. In putting our own country of the United States in historical and moral context, we could also consider conscious, immoral use of the advantages of more advanced development, such as the banana wars when the Wall Street financiers used the US Marines as a labor negotiation team; see the article on Smedley Butler at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smedley\\_Butler](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smedley_Butler); Butler was the Marine Corps general who wrote *War is a Racket*, available for free download at various Internet locations. On the whole, the United States was acting the part of an immature country which had too much wealth and power for such an early stage of development, a juvenile delinquent of a country and still one nearly a century later.

As many Christian do-gooders follow the spurts of blood from their enlarged hearts, so did many Americans and most of the powerful and wealthy reach out with their hands for the goods of this world—including the goods belonging to other peoples in Nicaragua and Mexico and the Philippines and then Iran and so forth. Even such intelligent men as Teddy Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson and John Kennedy, as well as Pope Francis and other current do-gooders, would have been far better leaders if they had learned the importance of good knowledge, of calm and orderly thought, of the appreciation of tomorrow. Much that is good has been destroyed over the past couple of centuries by a pursuit of what is allegedly perfect or would be more perfectly used by those with superior greed or higher self-esteem.

[Those who have followed my blog or have downloaded and read any of my books will know that I have been working to produce a Christian re-understanding at a fundamental level of human being and of all of created being. My available works along with download links are found in *Catalog of Major Writings by Loyd Fueston* [52].]

# 661 Turning Compassion into a Heresy

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2108>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/11/09.]

Once again, I'll state a standard Jewish and Christian view of man: man can be usefully and truthfully seen as a creature made of mind and heart and hands. This points to state of unity which is not achieved by men in this mortal realm but might be achieved by the resurrected who share the life of God; after all, God, acting in His transcendence, is not separate in this way—His thinking and feeling and doing are as one and all that God does can be described, at least roughly—and in Thomistic terms—as acts-of-being. This theological claim of Christians (and perhaps Jews) is in agreement with the ways in which some neuroscientists speak of our bodies thinking, of our emotions and thinking and memory-formation being intertwined, and so forth. It is almost a cliché in popular or philosophical works by neuroscientists and others who study the human brain and mind that our thinking is distributed throughout our bodies—as certainly seems true of some athletes as well as dancers. Leave this enriched and complex way of viewing human being aside in the interests of making some valid points by thinking as if mind and heart and hands were well-defined and mutually exclusive 'parts' of a human being.

Those who have read any of my writings on human being will probably realize that I consider human beings, individual and communal, to be creatures of action at the point of the now—that is, creatures of acting hands. Heart, emotions and feelings to speak roughly, motivate us towards a state of moral order. Mind can be seen as living in anticipation of the future, guiding the development and shaping of mind and heart and hands. On

a minute to minute basis, we rely on thoughts already formed and encapsulated in habits of various sorts though those who do individual thinking as opposed to those who are smart by proper participation in communal thinking have to always be re-evaluating those habits or preparing to think new thoughts. In any case, a well-formed human being participates in the now by way of what I call, following St Thomas Aquinas by way of Etienne Gilson, acts-of-being which are complex acts partaking of mind and heart and hands.

Many Christians of the modern era, including Pope Francis, distort Christian beliefs, as well as empirical knowledge of individual and communal human being, by claiming we should always act to immediately relieve suffering—even when that suffering is self-inflicted and will continue for centuries if we act to relieve it, even when our acts of relieving the suffering of those far away will do further damage to a badly injured pilgrim Body of Christ. They rely on “God is love.” Yes, God is all-loving but He is also all-knowing (mind) and all-powerful (hands). To take part of our belief out of context and push it as if it were the fullness of revelation is to fall into an old trap: any truth taken out of context and stated too strongly or too consistently becomes a heresy.

Let me move to a practical discussion and use as an example the part of Europe’s immigration crisis caused by Africans from the Sahel, the belt just south of the Sahara. The Sahel is fertile most years but suffers through famines which kill humans and cattle when the monsoon rains fail on a partially predictable basis—predictions can be off by a year or two. Yet, the residents of the Sahel take advantage of the good years by reproducing and allowing their cattle to reproduce without constraint. In recent decades, they have learned that they can head to Europe to take advantage of the more rational individual and communal human beings of that region—when the bad years come. Pope Francis and likeminded folk think it wise and good to extend the welfare systems intended to cover disabled and unlucky human beings of established nations to the unwise or unlucky of all the world.

Unbalanced human being is dangerous—glorifying the absolute or even large-scale dominance of mind or heart or hands create different problems but all such distortions of human being lead to serious problems. The point I made in my title and which I wish to emphasize is:

A distortion of human being so that it doesn’t accord with

any of the major traditions of understanding the Bible and natural revelation is a heresy in the sense of being a rebellion against the Creator, a refusal to accept some aspects of what He created and of what He is teaching us about what He created. It's an act of rebellion.

In ending, I'd also like to point explicitly to something I've always implied and sometimes stated in one way or another: to a Christian or anyone else who believes in an all-powerful and all-knowing and all-loving God, there can be no real separation between what is real and what should be. At most, human being as it is in this mortal world of evolution and development and decay and death can be demoted to an imperfect manifestation of the human being which is truly an image of God, but it is a manifestation. There is no real separation between is and ought. God created a world in which innocent human beings suffer, often because of their own unwise acts or those of others, often because of evil acts by others. In Jeremiah and Lamentations, we read of God inflicting punishment (directly or by way of the 'rules' of His Creation) so that the most tender of mothers is driven to eat her own children. We can do much to improve this world—when we act in unison with the Creator and His Creation. We can do much to damage an evolving and developing world when we act against either mind or heart or hands, often that damage inflicting suffering, famine and disease and poverty, upon our own children.



# 662 Compassionate Christians or Enemies of Christian Moral Order?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2111>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/11/10.]

I'll beat again on a drum, though perhaps a different region of that large and complex drum.

Let's imagine a Catholic confessional booth with a sign over the entrance:

If you feel good about it, it's not a sin. Don't bother to enter.

This is one of the possible sins against the Holy Spirit: To be willfully blind to your own sins and other wrongful acts and improperly developed traits. It would seem that some leaders of Christian churches see this as a proper attitude, or perhaps they're simply willing to define away any sins which cause anguish to human beings.

I'm not much of a rigorist and I think that there are great stretches in most lives when people should go pretty easy on their erring or sinful selves, sometimes stretches when a friend or uncle with a gentle manner can be a good guide or conversation partner. I think Christian thinkers and spiritual leaders have often been almost pathological in their obsession with sexual issues, condemning sexual passion in the undisciplined youth or others in a morally disordered age while wanting marriages to be fertile in all proper forms of love and also fertile in children; this isn't a realistic way to approach matters though I can't give any simple recipe for a better way.

Few can successfully pursue the way of perfection in the way of a cloistered nun headed for sainthood, not when the world is so messy and the true goods of the world can be so easily misused.

Yet, and yet again, we should hunger for perfection even when our accumulated habits and our moral responsibilities get in the way. Yes, I am saying that moral responsibilities, such as those of a parent, can often prevent the pursuit of greater moral growth. Yet, and yet again, we should hunger for perfection. And we should remember that God wants us to so hunger and to follow the way of perfection to the extent possible in our given lives.

Why is it that such a prominent leader of the church as Cardinal Walter Kasper, apparently with some significant support from other prominent leaders such as Pope Francis, can seriously suggest that human beings living in a state of sin (sometimes as a matter of certainty and sometimes as a matter of fallible human judgment) and not receiving a clean absolution should feel free to receive communion on the strength of their own feelings: I feel right about freely engaging in (fill in the blank) behavior though it has been consistently declared a matter of serious sin by the Christian Church and—usually—by the authors of the Hebrew Bible as well.

Let me be clear: despite some wrongfully formed attitudes and beliefs, Catholic leaders and other Christian leaders aren't infallible except on some very specific matters and, it would seem to me, that most of that infallibility is used up in comments upon the Creeds and a few moral issues and isn't exercised properly in updating understandings of those core truths of Christianity—see *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* by John Henry Newman. And, in fact, as a Sacramental Christian currently in communion with the Western Catholic Church, I largely agree with the moderate Orthodox claims that the Pope's infallibility is that of an arbiter who settles disagreements within the full community of Sacramentally consecrated descendants of the Apostles. As a specific and concrete example, the Western Sacramental Christian Church, which calls itself 'Catholic', teaches it's a witness to a marriage which involves only three parties: the man and the woman and God. The Church, through some fourth party approved by a bishop, can't be sure at the time of a wedding or at the time of a request for an annulment that any valid marriage took place or didn't take place. Some men and women who didn't receive an annulment and think they should have might be right. Some who received an annulment maybe shouldn't have received it. This is all greatly complicated by the

different understanding of the formation of a marriage held by the Eastern Sacramental Christian Church, which calls itself ‘Orthodox’. To some extent it doesn’t matter so long as all involved members of the Christian community act in good faith, but it’s the community which is always involved even when it isn’t a party to a specific act, sacramental or otherwise. Some accept this and don’t receive communion if they enter a marriage they think valid but isn’t approved by their branch of Sacramental Christianity.

On the whole, we have a muddle in which many suffer, unavoidably or otherwise. Cardinal Kasper, explicitly, and Pope Francis, implicitly by way of supporting church leaders sometimes even more radical than Kasper, propose that we declare God to be so ‘merciful’ as to discard all claims of justice, all demands of the rules which are part of Biblical or natural revelation. This is said to be a way of easing pain, as if neither man had ever known of the claims of Christians and others that the pains of a well-formed, or even partially formed, conscience in a sinful man or woman can be greater than even the pains of desires denied; and those pains of conscience might well be the salvation of many a sinner. Jesus didn’t say to the woman accused of harlotry: “Go and feel okay about your behavior.” He said: “Go and sin no more.” Jesus offered mercy to sinners who repent, not affirmation of their sinful behavior.

If God had wanted us to be perfect in this world, He would have created a different world in which creatures other than human beings would have lived. Instead, He created a world of evolutionary and developmental processes in which human beings have evolved and developed, and still do so. We typically struggle with the various sorts of imperfections inherent in such processes.

For the most part, we should aim at a moral state which properly integrates us into the human communities which we wish to ultimately be part of. The description of such a state would be described by mathematicians as “global” while individual traits contributing to that global state would be “local”. This entire way of understanding complex entities in local and global terms needs to be properly re-formed to the purposes of more qualitative analyses (which re-formation has been partially done by mathematicians and others). For now, take “global” and “local” in an intuitive way and consider that they might seemingly conflict. Think of a literal globe. Each point on the surface of that globe lies on a tangent plane which is describable in Euclidean terms while the surface of the globe as a whole follows an *Elliptic geometry* (see

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elliptic\\_geometry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elliptic_geometry)). We are left with interesting mathematical problems, quantitative vs qualitative, which might hint of more general problems: one such problem being the joining of each of point, or probably small region, to neighboring regions. Unity of the sort found in Jesus Christ is our goal and not just piece-wise perfection.

This way of reasoning has frightened some mathematicians because of the implication of qualitative reasoning (in my terms: abstract being) which lies behind the quantitatively rigorous reasoning of traditional mathematics. We should not be afraid of what might be the most important revolution in human thought since the development of empirical reasoning, reasoning conditioned—though not imprisoned—by empirical reality.

The above are the issues raised by that ultimate constraint on what human beings, including popes and bishops and other religious leaders, might wish to believe: The Word of God is truth. God has spoken in the Ten Commandments and He has spoken in His actions as Creator. (To God, thoughts and feelings and acts are but one and indivisible.) It is reality which properly constrains us; we shouldn't let ourselves be imprisoned by limited or defective human understandings of that reality, but we should honor tradition as being some sort of plausible understanding of that reality and possibly a fully valid understanding of some parts or aspects of that reality. If we modify tradition or reject parts of it, we should do so very carefully and for better reasons than to accord to the standards of a no-longer Christian civilization in decay or to avoid speaking difficult, pain-causing truths.

# 663 Sacramental Evolutionary Theory

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2116>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/11/17.]

Sacramental Christians need to have an understanding of this world which is compatible with sacramental Christian beliefs. You can't believe the Creator is present, let alone Present on the altar, when you have an understanding of the physical world which is inconsistent with such a Presence.

A particularly important part of the physical world is life, which evolves and develops. Christian understandings, theological and philosophical and empirical, should be not just vaguely (and falsely) "not in conflict" with science—empirical knowledge in general. Empirical knowledge concerns matter and the various relationships of raw forms of matter and complexly organized matter. Matter, that is objective stuff which can engage in relationships of a creaturely sort, is one of the necessary components of Sacraments as we know them, as well as the sheer stuff of a sacramental world, the world created by a God all-powerful and all-knowing and all-loving and the world glowing with His presence.

Christian understandings of a sacramental world and of Sacraments should encapsulate evolutionary and developmental understandings of life including human being as well as relativistic understandings of time and space, quantum physical understandings of matter; Christian understandings should encapsulate all relevant understandings of being, concrete and abstract.

Peter Frost, the Canadian anthropologist, has written an essay, *The Fellowship Instinct* (found at <http://www.unz.com/pfrost/>

the-fellowship-instinct/), in which he discusses the emergence of human religions within a general Darwinian framework. As a believing Christian, I think his analysis is spot-on so far as present knowledge goes and, yet, I also think he comes to the wrong conclusion:

In short, Man has made religion in his own image, but religion has returned the favor. In a very real sense, it has made us who we are.

Frost is apparently an ex-Christian and perhaps was never a sacramental Christian, a believer in the fundamental sacramental presence, that of God in His Creation, including the processes and results of evolution and development. But few Christians are such believers; I guess Frost can at least claim a consistency between his (non-?) beliefs and empirical reality as (naively?) described by well-established facts and plausible theories about physical phenomena. Do phenomenological understandings of facts exhaust the possibilities? I guess they can if one accepts a simple and positivistic version of Occam's Razor. Occam's Butcher-knife? In joking a little, I don't mean to show disrespect since I strongly believe, as a flesh-and-blood man and as a sacramental Christian, that physical reality has to be fully accepted as a part of God's Creation. I part there with Frost and some other empirical thinkers but I part in many ways and at many places from others who claim to be Christians, even within a sacramental tradition.

Where is it that I part with Frost? He accepts empirical reality and so do I, but I consider it part of a greater Creation, a greater Creation which shows even in the possibilities of richer narratives making sense of this empirical reality. My reasons for this viewpoint are as much shaped by my understanding of abstractions, mathematical and philosophical and other, as by my understanding—and acceptance—of Christian revelation.

Anthropology would perhaps incline a thinker to see religion in terms of what it does for men, as a way of understanding the world so to increase one's chances of survival and of successful reproduction. I agree that these are deep and valid truths, but I fail to see how such truths tell us there are no other truths and no greater truths; I fail to see how survival and successful reproduction are in conflict with the God of the Hebrew patriarchs. In particular, the possibility of truth-bearing and truth-revealing narratives arise from an honest effort to deal with reality in its pleasing and cruel

aspects alike. I could even propose the insight that men began to tell stories in his image and those stories shape us.

Things exist and one thing is here and another is over there, but those simple factual truths don't argue against the higher truths of geometry and other forms of abstract reasoning and that raises the question: What is an abstraction? I've argued in various ways against the separation of concreteness and abstraction, considering such a separation to be a more general form of the dualism between brain and mind, body and soul, city and human being of a communal sort. A brain makes its own mind, but in an odd way—by creating mind-like relationships within itself and with its greater body and with all that exists in its environment; thus it is that I would say a mind shapes its own brain. A mind is the evolving and developing relationships which bring the brain into order; a mind is the story of that brain and is as real as the brain-cells themselves. Relationships create stuff (almost straightforward restatement of quantum field theory) and that stuff creates new relationships which. . . Evolution and development are aspects of a greater narrative of reality which we see as through a glass darkly.

So it is that I can accept the fullness of evolutionary biology in my understanding of human being while keeping my sacramental Christian beliefs. I don't see a conflict. If Christ is more fully and more perfectly present in the bread and wine on the altar after they are consecrated by a validly ordained priest, why should He not be present in His brothers and sisters, in their genetic and somatic stuff as shaped by evolution and development? Why would we expect religious belief to somehow be brought about as truths descend from another realm of being and enter a human being of some generic stuff barren of religious inclinations? Or should we expect flesh-and-blood human beings to have brains which function in the way of machines finding truths of a logical sort? It be doubtful that God be an idea discoverable, computable?, by a Boolean machine.

Why should we expect that God can exist and some form of higher religion can be true only if Creation reflects dualities originally proposed by those who, as one example, thought matter was inert? It was those dualities which needed to be eliminated in the interest of a greater unity of created being, one which can—if only very speculatively for now—be produced by a simple acceptance of the principle of modern physics that relationships are primary and generate stuff.

Now the punchline: such an insight is hinted at even in the Old Testa-

ment and stated clearly from one particular perspective in the writings of the school of St John the Evangelist. Creation exists because of the active love which God has for it. God didn't create the world and then choose to love; the world came to be because God first loved it. And once creation existed as a result of divine love, it began to form all sorts of relationships with itself and with its parts and with its Maker. Once the brain exists as a result of the love of self which needs to identify what is not self, it begins to form all sorts of relationships with itself and with the other parts of the greater organism and with all the things around it and with its Maker. Spirit is to be explained (not explained away) by an understanding of the dynamic nature of matter and the relationships which had created stars and the planets which orbit stars. Soul is to be explained by the dynamic nature of the stuff of a human individual. Mind is to be explained by the dynamic nature of the stuff of a human brain.

Relationships are primary to stuff and create and shape stuff. That stuff forms relationships and new things can come to be. The inclination to worship the gods or the God is the result of evolutionary and developmental processes working to produce individual and communal human beings adapted to a world in which the relationships are such as to imply, strongly in my opinion, the existence of divinity of some sort, quite plausibly a Creator who is a different sort of relationship, one which is a supreme act-of-being in Thomistic terms, the ground of other acts-of-being, of all other relationships as well as created stuff.

Why do we Christians try to see what is 'pure' and 'perfect' in our relationships with God and in our thoughts about God or even about mathematical truths? Is this any different than an evolutionary biologist rejecting God because evolutionary processes have shaped the human being who speculates about God or longs for God? What can be better, ultimately more pure and perfect, than what God has created for His purpose of providing companions for His Son? If God were to create a world of evolution and development, why wouldn't we expect the inclination to be religious, the inclination to see the divine, to be the result of evolutionary and developmental processes? In a sense, nothing has really changed from the theological and philosophical arguments in ancient Greece or Medieval Paris, but we do have far better knowledge of empirical reality, knowledge which allows us to make some greater and better sense of it all, whether we choose to make atheistic sense or pantheistic sense or Jewish sense or Christian sense of it. I would argue that sacramental Christians with the courage

to be open to empirical knowledge and the reasoning power to make sense of it have perhaps gained an advantage in a world of evolutionary biology and quantum physics.

Christians should, and easily can, accept what is impure and imperfect in this world in light of evolution and development. It's not a world of devolution from a pair of ancestors living in a state of grace but rather a world of evolution from a confusion of ancestors climbing down from trees and then rising from their knuckles. It would seem to me that a sacramental Christian is bound to see empirical reality in this light; after all, don't we sacramental Christians claim to see Christ as truly present in the consecrated bread we chew and the consecrated wine we swallow? We are rising above our evolved animal nature, not in the sense of becoming something different but rather in becoming what is potential in the animal life of this world—a creature sharing the life of its Creator, a Creator who has created us and sustains us.

We claim to see wheat and grapes as becoming the Body and the Blood of the Son of God. Why can't we more readily see body and blood, including genes, as being part of the fundamental stuff, the "only" stuff of a Christian believer? It's really not the stuff that matters but rather the relationship of God to the stuff, though that relationship probably requires certain types of stuff. Still, the stuff can be seen as a focus of that relationship and not as something existing independently of its most important relationship. God can raise sons of Abraham from the rocks of the field. He can make bread and wine the stuff of the human body and the human blood of His own Son. He can create true believers, friends of God, by evolutionary processes working through our DNA and RNA shaped from the strange matter described by quantum physics and inhabiting the strange spacetime described by general relativity.



# 664 Christianity and the Elites of the 20th Century and Beyond

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2124>. It was finished and uploaded on 2015/11/24.]

In *The Barbarian Conversion: From Paganism to Christianity* [34], Richard Fletcher writes of the very prominent role played by aristocratic families, even royal families, in the conversion of the European barbarians to Christianity. The missionary monks and bishops and priests were often from powerful and wealthy families of Ireland and England and then Francia (modern-day France) and the various kingdoms in other parts of what became Catholic Europe—I don't know what the story was in Orthodox Europe. The royalty and aristocracy of Western and Northern Europe supported the various saints—often their brothers or cousins. Some of those saints of aristocratic (warlord) blood were among the roughest and most dedicated missionaries in Christian history. It is important to realize those aristocratic evangelists were very well-educated, an aristocracy of the mind as well as of the blood. Commoners would not have often had access to education at the level of those of the nobility, but it's important to remember that the likes of Boniface, Apostle to the Germans, made the most of their opportunities; there aren't so many modern Christians, from any backgrounds, who make a serious effort to acquire the best learning of our age.

In at least their public behavior, the peoples of Europe followed their kings and counts and dukes, and their monastic and priestly relatives, into the Christian Church, though often continuing many of their old ways of belief and behavior. While there was a lot of brutal politics and ambition involved in the decision of, say, Saxon warlords to adopt the religious

faith of the powerful and wealthy Franks (such as Charlemagne), much of what happened involved deep and strong conversions on the part of sons of kings and earls whose sons and nephews were often very well-educated and became monks or priests or very devout rulers. These men had a great influence on the men of the surrounding barbarian tribes. The common peoples, simple farmers and wealthy merchants alike, followed their Romanized or barbarian rulers into Christianity, but even in areas where most accepted baptism with indifference or out of purely materialistic desires, those conversions would often result in strong faith in a generation or two.

I hope I haven't distorted a very complex history too much by the above brief telling, but I'm going to use it as background to speak of the situation of Christianity in the modern world, a world where the wealthy and powerful and famous can have great influence over the minds and hearts and hands of the other people and peoples in their communities, a world where that elite is decidedly non-Christian if not actively anti-Christian.

The situation is now very complex. We now have a variety of writers and commentators and athletes and politicians as well as different sorts of teachers who can help shape the beliefs and feelings and behaviors of those they touch in any way. Our modern elites, in the sense of those having some sort of serious influence over others in their communities, include even popular musicians, though it would seem that religious leaders have little such influence and this may be true also of the local sorts of leaders labeled as "town-fathers" (or their maternal counterparts). We look to 'stars' who shine worldwide or at least nationwide.

Not many among these elites of political leaders or entertainers or the few among religious leaders act or speak to endorse Christian ideas, other than the occasional—and usually despicable and sometimes blasphemous—attempt to claim God has endorsed American hegemony and exceptionalism. This is particularly strange when American hegemony and exceptionalism are pursued despite all damage to other countries and peoples, even the peoples of the ancient Christian communities of the Middle East. Rather than the devout, semi-barbarian Charlemagne or even saintly kings such as Alfred of Wessex or Louis IX of France, we have the Bushes and Clintons and Obama; even Cheney and Baker and Albright and Kerry. We also have the pop-music queens and kings; the wig-stands of the so-called news-programs; the stars of movies about comic-book characters I left behind at the age of 12. We have Stephen King with his retro-paganistic and demonic view of evil in an age when mainstream Christians have not made

peace with Darwin and Einstein and are susceptible to corruption by such mental and spiritual trash; authors of thriller novels in which brave young men and women take wild risks with the lives and property of many to save the world from some implausible danger—and earn fame and promotions in the process. We have teachers and school administrators who disdain memorization so as to leave plenty of mental space to be filled with pop-music lyrics and sports statistics. These are the elite who have shaped and misshaped and refused to shape the minds and moral characters of a once Christian people of the West; the members of this elite are also the main representatives of that West to the other regions of the world.

Western Civilization and Western Christianity are tied together, bound as perhaps body and soul but more plausibly the greater body and its central organ. When the Western elite went rotten, Christianity was in trouble—at best it became soft and submissive to the corrupt elite as they sought wealth and power and often seemed to be deliberately working to cut all ties to Jesus Christ and the churches which carry forth his teachings, but Christianity hardly needed enemies when it had leaders and other adherents who seemed to have trouble separating God's commandments from the push for great expansion of Western political and economic power over all peoples in the world. In other words, the religious leaders—Popes and priests and ministers and lay authors—were part of that elite of Western Civilization which did so much damage to the Christian peoples they were claiming to serve. My particular mission has been largely directed to one of the great failures of the leaders of Western Civilization and its primary organ, the Church: the failure to update Christian thought, indeed all Western thought, to properly reflect both inherited truths and and new, fact-based understandings of this world.

American Christianity, in particular, is a simple version of the faith; even sacramental Christianity (Catholic and Orthodox and perhaps a few small communities from ancient churches in the Middle East) in the United States is presented to its members and to the general public as generic Christianity (whatever that might be) with priests in fancy dress and some strange rituals which seem to involve magic. As Rabbi Neusner, a reliable and friendly outside observer of American Christianity, has noted: Protestantism involves an extreme individualism incompatible with Biblical teachings about salvation as a member of the People of Israel (for the Jews) or a member of the Church (for the Christians) and American Catholics are essentially Protestants. The universe has never been re-understood as the

Darwinistic and Einsteinian stuff of a sacramental world; human being has never been re-understood as an individual nature and a communal nature which have evolved and developed in this physical world. This is a task which would require the efforts of a true elite, scientists and philosophers and poets and novelists and film-makers and musicians. And, to use the last as an example, we don't need elevator music but rather music grand enough to lift the soul, lift us not from a fallen state but rather from a state of tree-climbing or crouched knuckle-dragging.

I most certainly am not denying the validity of the sacraments in American Sacramental churches, Catholic or Orthodox or otherwise, but I am denying there be any richness of belief in the Real Presence on the altar or in the hymns which leave the mind and heart uninspired. When I write of "richness of belief," I'm not denying that many believe: I'm a Special (Lay) Eucharistic Minister and I can testify to the belief showing in the facial expressions and bodily postures of at least a substantial minority of those who receive communion in my parish, an ordinary parish with a typical American population (carpenters and machinists and small businessmen, teachers and engineers and doctors). I'm not denying that there are some hymns being sung which truly praise God as He should be praised. I am denying that there is that richness which comes from a basic substance of thought and art and music which speaks truly of God and His Creation, as does the Bible and the writings of the early Church Fathers used by the Medieval evangelists of Europe—though it be likely it was the evangelists who understood (and misunderstood) those sacred writings and their audiences took on faith the testimony of those impressive men. Similar comments can be made about most fields of human endeavor: architecture and sculpture and even home decorations.

Some Christians can develop a deep and rich understanding of Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, which is based upon not only the Bible and traditional teachings of Christian churches but also upon a plausible understanding of God's Creation: time and space and matter, including matter come to life, understood in terms of rich Christian thought and art. Others, probably the vast majority, need to trust in various elites who have such a facility or least a convincing facility with statements of such an understanding.

We have no such understanding and no such elites to develop and advocate and teach newer and richer understandings of Christian teachings. In particular, we obviously have no elites who can plausibly set the Eucharist

in the context of the reality we know and which is well-described by the descendants of Einstein and Darwin, a reality which is seen as part of a greater reality, our world as part of Creation. If we have no way of thinking or speaking of those asteroids and planets being visited by space probes as part of the Creator's story which is this universe as a morally ordered narrative; if we have no way of thinking or speaking of viruses and rattlesnakes as well as pretty little girls and energetic little boys as being creatures of that Creator and characters in His story; if we have no way of speaking or writing of God's relationship to bread and wine and the changed relationship which occurs when a validly ordained priest consecrates them as the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ; then we can do little better than wave our hands spastically as we claim, without any rational justification, there's no conflict between 'science' and 'religion'. We have no worthwhile Christian literature or art to set against the non-Christian or anti-Christian works of recent centuries in the West. (Would such works have been produced if the Christian leaders and intellectuals and artists had been doing their job as was true of the generations of Christians from the Apostolic Age to the Medieval period when German and British-Celtic and Slavic barbarians were evangelized by those fluent in a rich and substantial Christian thought and language?)

We have, in fact, split what is studied by 'science' and even is created by architects and painters from the beliefs and acts of Christianity, which is to say we've split what is united in a sacramental universe. Sacraments, with a capital 'S', aren't acts of magic which unite metaphysically distinct stuff and spirit. Such Sacraments enrich and deepen relationships already existing, the relationships between Creator and what He has created. In traditional terms: Grace doesn't destroy or replace nature, grace completes and perfects nature. Sacraments with a capital 'S' complete and perfect a sacramental nature which is the proper study of evolutionary biologists and the proper matter of chemical engineers and road-builders.

The problem lies with the need for intellectual sophistication, a sophistication dependent upon both knowledge and a well-disciplined mind—not necessarily a creative or brilliant mind. Creativity is needed as well, but not in the large—a few creative thinkers can guide all of Christianity in integrating reality (such as Darwinian ideas of the origin of human beings and Einsteinian ideas on spacetime and quantum ideas on the nature of matter) into a Christian worldview.

Christianity may well have started out partly by way of appeals to the

simple of mind and simple of heart and poor of hands—‘simple’ doesn’t mean ‘stupid’ though it might mean ignorant in the sense of uneducated. This simplicity was more a reflection of the communities of the time and place of Christ’s Incarnation. As the world of men became richer and more complex and the natural world was investigated and found to be also richer and more complex than was thought, as human communities came to include ever more thinkers with well-developed minds, as those communities and thinkers built upon past achievements, Christians needed to adjust according—after all, we claim this complex and rich world to be the work of the God of Jesus Christ. Why shouldn’t we try to understand it and communicate it in words and pictures? Why shouldn’t we feel a need to properly evangelize the citizens of such a complex and rich world.

# 665 We Modern Christians Destroyed the Concept of Truth Along with Our Children's Minds

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2199>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/03/25.]

Rod Dreher posted an interesting essay on March 23, 2016: *Millennial Landslide* at <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/millennial-landslide-religion-secularism/>.

I'll start with a snippet of a quote he provided from another source:

The percentage of Americans who prayed or believed in God reached an all-time low in 2014, according to new research led by San Diego State University psychology professor Jean M. Twenge. [From the short article, *Fewer Americans Now Pray*, found at [http://newscenter.sdsu.edu/sdsu\\_newscenter/news\\_story.aspx?sid=76091](http://newscenter.sdsu.edu/sdsu_newscenter/news_story.aspx?sid=76091).]

A few paragraphs down in that same article from the San Diego State University newsletter, we read:

This decline in religious practice has not been accompanied by a rise in spirituality, which, according to Twenge, suggests that, rather than spirituality replacing religion, Americans are becoming more secular. The one exception to the decline in religious beliefs was a slight increase in belief in the afterlife.

"It was interesting that fewer people participated in religion or prayed but more believed in an afterlife," Twenge said. "It

might be part of a growing entitlement mentality — thinking you can get something for nothing."

Dreher discusses this study and some other studies as well as a book he'd read recently and begins to come to a conclusion by claiming:

The point of the book [*Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* written by Christian Smith, et al. and published by Oxford University Press] is not that Millennials are bad people, but rather that they have not been given any clear way to determine what is right and what is wrong, and how to use their reason. So they fall back on what feels right in a given moment. We have thrown our kids into the deep end of a pool, but failed to teach them how to swim.

Dreher's essay ends with these paragraphs:

This is who we are. This is who we have raised our kids to be, whether we intended to or not. Smith et al. warn against "doom-and-gloomers," though I'm not quite sure why, and they also warn against older adults who say, "Aww, that's how kids are, they'll grow out of it." That's a dangerous complacency, they say. And they also warn against drawing firm conclusions based on anecdotal data. They say there's a lot of bad journalism out there that sees, for example, young people volunteering for political campaigns, and concludes, "See, the kids really are all right. They're engaged!" The sociological data do not remotely justify that conclusion.

It is not going to get any better in the foreseeable future, only worse, and more difficult. This is why we orthodox Christians who want to resist the spirit of the age, and who want to raise kids able to be resilient, need the Benedict Option. Church youth group, parochial or religious school, and church on Sunday is not enough. Not remotely enough.

I'd suggest that all of us who call ourselves 'Christian' should look into the mirror if we wish to see the real malefactors in this problem of confusion of the very concept of truth. There is a clear case of a particular issue where we Christians have fudged the concept of truth to avoid facing up

to a difficult and necessary re-understanding of God's Creation. And all of this distortion of truth by Christians began when the West was truly Christian; any related distortions of truth by post-Christian secularists is only a continuation of errors and crimes began by Christians.

In *The City of God*, Augustine of Hippo discusses the origins of the human race and makes a point which seems obvious. I'll state that point in my terms: Either man arose as a creature by natural processes within this concrete world which is part of God's Creation or else he was a special creation inserted into this concrete world.

Augustine, who had also noted that the earth was immensely old—far beyond the number of years in a literalistic Biblical chronology, chose to go with the idea of a special creation. Stanley Jaki, Benedictine priest who was a physicist as well as theologian and Bible scholar and historian of human thought, said that Augustine's choice was the most important and most damaging act of intellectual cowardice in history. I would add, though I don't know if Jaki would agree, that Augustine made a choice for multiple truths, one truth for the moral and religious dimensions of human life and one truth for the concrete and practical dimensions of human life.

We speak of decisions about sexuality in ideological (not truly 'idealistic') terms while scientists, not villainous in any way, are nibbling away and connecting sexuality and other aspects of human being to their biological foundations. For example, as I discuss in Chapter 316, *The Demonology of Sexual Behaviors and Preferences*, infectious agents can alter our intelligence levels, change some of our personality characteristics, and—likely—change our sexual habits and behaviors.

In general terms: Are we a race trying to recover from a great fall from a state of angelic grace? Are we a race trying to balance ourselves as we rise from our knuckles?

Our ancestors had chosen the first option but masses of empirical facts have pointed to the second option as the truth. But our understandings of our own selves, individual and communal, as well as our hopes rested upon that first option. We have tried to resolve the resulting tensions not by facing up to the factual nature of God's Creation but rather by claiming to have access to a realm of truth which somehow is disconnected from the world in which we live. In this realm of the spirit or something of the sort, we see purposes and futures which are impossible to reconcile to human history and to the factual reality of our bodies.

After generations of self-delusion and hypocrisy, we have reached such

a bad state that the young people of the West are paying the price. They know not truth; they are vacant in their moral selves to a far greater extent than even Pontius Pilate. And all we Christians can do is lament their unwillingness to accept our irrational and hypocritical resolution of the conflict between our claimed beliefs and the facts of this world we claim to be the work of God. Clearly, an awfully botched work because God's choice of evolutionary and developmental processes is in conflict with our claims to the real truths of God's Creation.

The young people of this age are left with no understanding of truth because they've seen through our lies, our hypocrisies, our acts of cowardice, but they have no resources to rely upon to develop a better understanding of truth and, as a result, they have no chance to develop a better understanding of Creation including that small but important work of God which is human being.

# 666 Adaptation as Truth Discovery in Creation, the Christian Viewpoint

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2210>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/04/22.]

What is truth?

Where is truth to be found?

There are a few starting points for a Christian willing to consider the opinions of Thomas Aquinas and all the great thinkers before him as well as opinions derived directly from the works of the modern scientists including sometimes just their empirical or mathematical findings and sometimes their opinions as to the meanings of those findings.

- We must hold to an intelligent understanding of the Bible, including some generally agreed-upon ways of re-understanding the Bible in the event of new historical or scientific knowledge indicating a problem with our initial understanding.
- We must hold to some creed with the substance of the *Apostle's Creed* or, roughly equivalent, the *Nicene Creed* which is a distillation of the meanings drawn from the Bible regarding some very important theological and anthropological issues.
- We must center our attention, that of historians and physicists and sculptors and musicians and many others, upon God as Creator, which means we must center our attention upon God's acts in Creations (His effects in Medieval terms). From Einstein and Darwin, as well as from

Tolstoy and Newman, we can learn how to think the thoughts of God in His role as Creator.

I haven't put a lot of time or effort into the above list, though I've been writing for years about the individual items and the entirety of belief and thought which is implied by the last item, but I'm sure it provides a pretty good foundation to the claim I'll make without being able to fully justify it for now: knowledge, including those bits of knowledge called truths, are not discovered by some sort of pre-existing mind nor do they flow into such a mind from some realm of transcendent truths. Knowledge comes as a result of a process of mind formation, a process by which neurons and networks of neurons adapt themselves to what exists by responding to it—'responding' being an active and sometimes aggressive process.

We shape our minds to what happens in the physical and social and political realms. We learn how to do this, we take the shaping to a new level, by studying what Heisenberg and Dirac taught us about the true nature of matter for various reasons including the construction of a better understanding of the Eucharist and other Sacraments; by studying what Robert Nisbet taught us about the importance of (traditional and not 'imposed') authority in forming healthy and sustainable and non-exploitive societies that we might better form the communities which are the parts and whole of the Body of Christ; by studying what the writings of the Fathers of the American Constitution and their opponents—especially the Anti-Federalists—taught us about the nature of government that we might understand what has gone horribly wrong in the United States; and—of direct relevance to my current efforts—by studying what Riemann had to say about seeing the 'shape' of complex entities in terms of abstractions of geometry and algebra and analysis (calculus).

All the things of this world are thoughts manifested by God so that they might attain a creaturely sort of freedom. But we shouldn't think that God just thinks of individual entities and brings them into existence as freestanding. The objects of this world are the results of active thoughts of God and those active thoughts are part of a coherent, complete, and unified group of thoughts which are this world and, in a still grander way, are part of a coherent, complete, and unified group of thoughts which are all of Creation.

Let me engage in a very preliminary case study, one I'm now working to greatly expand in a book I hope to publish before the end of 2016; the

title, for now, is *The Shape of Reality*.

Webster's 1913 tells us that manifold means, "Various in kind or quality; many in number; numerous; multiplied; complicated." As the Psalmist proclaimed in praise, "O Lord, how manifold are your works." Mathematicians along with scientists and others have to borrow words and they have borrowed 'manifold' for a well-defined technical concept:

In mathematics, a manifold is a topological space that locally resembles Euclidean space near each point. More precisely, each point of an  $n$ -dimensional manifold has a neighbourhood that is homeomorphic to the Euclidean space of dimension  $n$ . [See *Manifold* at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manifold>.]

Don't worry about the mathematical details. The above quotation gives a summary of a disciplined and useful definition similar to the idea contained in the praise of the Psalmist. As an analogy to that mathematical definition, a community is a manifold and the members are the point-like regions which have certain well-defined properties of their own. More simply, the surface of the earth is that of the sphere and, for example, demands use of some elegant and difficult analyses to discover the shortest path between New York City and London. Yet, small regions, such as the town in which I sit, can be accurately represented by maps of a plane and the shortest distance from the clock tower at the Ludlow Mills to the upcountry Congregationalist church can be accurately determined from one of the maps with a simple calculation reducible to drawing a line along a straight-edge. [In fact, you can find the shortest distance of the surface of a globe by stretching a string between the two points, but this isn't of much use in most situations.]

End of case study, sort of. Now I'll explain how it is a case study which supports a Christian understanding of adaptation as truth discovery in Creation.

Christians believe in order though there is no Biblical or Creedal dicta limiting the forms of order in this world nor they ways in which they are established.

Some thinkers believe that order must be present and have always been present. It must have been explicitly created by God. Mind and moral character, maybe the human being in his entirety, must be a special creation. The higher Pagans, as you could label the likes of Plato and Aristotle, had a similar set of beliefs though many pagans followed what is probably the

natural instincts of men from the time that someone first tried to make greater or global sense of it all. The world stands on its own even in traditions where it was, for example, made from the body of the Father of gods murdered by his own children. God has to interact with the world, with all that exists in any other possible realms, in the same way as creatures, though Zeus had more power than the lesser gods, even Athena, and much more power than mortals.

Christians think of God in His relationship to the world as primarily Creator, the active source of being, and only an actor in the mortal sense by His own free will. (Of course, God could have created or not by His own free will but, having created a particular world, He was bound by His own initial acts, an insight slightly deformed by ancients as an after the fact covenant in analogy to a human agreement.)

We now know, by way of quantum physics and other physical sciences, that God created a world not fully contained in the realm of concrete being, a world in which concrete being seems to be somehow shaped from a strange and abstract form of being.

We now know, by way of evolutionary biology and related sciences, that God created a world subject to evolution and development and not fully contained in any neat scheme such as a tree of life.

We now know, by way of modern mathematics, that God created a world which is in a strange state of interaction with and of dependency upon abstractions beyond any currently conceivable human schemes.

By exploring God's Creation in its various realms containing concrete and abstract being, by responding properly to what we find, we are shaping our minds to those thoughts of God. If we think of our minds as our relationships to God and His Creation, then we can say we are shaping our entire selves by way of shaping our minds. This process of shaping is an adaptation which has been, and may continue to be predominately, one of natural selection. He who shapes his mind best to reality has better odds of survival and successful reproduction. The claim in the prior statement is still more true of human communities, especially at the level of civilizations or proto-civilizations which are, in my opinion, largely defined by a worldview, an understanding of this world and all else which might exist.

Most modern Christians would agree with secularists that there are facts about human nature and about other parts and aspects of this world, facts which are gathered by way of active exploration leading to efforts to develop empirically grounded theories as well as more wide-ranging speculations as

well as—most importantly of all—technologies to make our lives safer and easier. What Christians have not realized too clearly, at least not until recently, is that there are no clear boundaries between realms of is and ought, no clear boundaries between a shuffling ape trying to rise from his knuckles and a creature made in the image of God. In fact, the phrase “made in the image of God” should be understood in the sense of “evolved and developed into some rough approximation of an image of God in His freely chosen role of Creator and shaper of this particular world.” Not a good sound-byte, not a phrase which rolls smoothly off the tongue. More importantly, it communicates—however imperfectly—an important truth about human relationships to truths in this world of evolution and development. We find truths, empirical and abstract and—maybe—absolute by way of adaptation, of adapting our individual and communal selves to what God has created. In this way, we learn to think and act and feel along with the Creator as He goes about His work.



# 667 The Failure of Modern Philosophy and Theology and How to Fix the Problem

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2222>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/05/24.]

Let's do a Plato-update. Mathematics is the key, as it was for that heavyweight wrestler (according to some rumors which even hint at championships). Very roughly speaking, philosophy to Plato was a generalization of the thinking done in geometry and arithmetic. It may not be true that Plato's school, the *Academy* (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Platonic\\_Academy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Platonic_Academy)), had a sign above the entrance which said: "Let None But Geometers Enter Here," but that seems to be the spirit of Plato's way of thinking—at least after he'd absorbed some of (much of?) the seemingly qualitative (more informal?) thoughts of Socrates.

Plato, his predecessors and his successors, used mathematics as a form of training and also as a source for thinking tools capable of handling abstract realms of being—as I would put it. Those creative borrowers, call them clever burglars if you wish, were able to produce higher level understandings of various aspects or realms of created being.

This business of speaking of moral and even divine matters by using the relationships, geometrically considered, of material things was natural and even necessary for all those trying to discern the abstract relationships in all of this stuff in flux. It certainly seemed natural to the ancient Judeans to press their argument of Jerusalem's close relationship to God by emphasizing it's location, on a hill, a high hill by the standards of the immediate region. Were they saying it was closer to the Heavens? I don't know but

they were clearly saying that Jerusalem was above the cities of Canaan and even above Babylon and that meant. . . it was holy; the city of David, God's beloved, looked down upon the other (known) cities of man. To Greeks and Hebrews alike, good men followed straight paths and men, like camels, had trouble passing through the eye of a needle (the name for narrow gates through deep portions of the wall of a city, used to deny access to bands of undesirable visitors). Camels are pretty big animals and those gates weren't much bigger; it could be a very tight fit for camels carrying any sort of load. The gates were narrow but sheerly impassable to those who thought to bring in large loads of goods or to those trying to enter in large groups rapidly and perhaps for nefarious reasons. Again, burden yourself with riches and your entry into the City of God becomes more difficult if not impossible for men to accomplish. Try to invade the City of God for man-centered purposes and the entry was also difficult.

We live in a world where the most obvious forms of being are physical things and physical relationships, many of which things and relationships are at least partially described by mathematics of various sorts, ranging from the simple and (maybe) non-theoretical geometries and trigonometries of ancient pyramid- and temple-builders. The very development of (again—maybe) purely empirical technologies combined with the preference of many ancient Greeks for abstract understandings. By the time that Ptolemy, the Greco-Egyptian scientist, built—among other serious intellectual edifices—an extraordinarily complex and very accurate model of the movements of the known large bodies of the solar system. This, like all higher-level scientific accomplishments through the ages, was based upon a great respect, almost idolatrous at times, for order of a sort allied to human reasoning—most especially in its abstract forms, metaphysical and mathematical. (The idolatry shows up mostly when our forms of reasoning prove inadequate but we refuse to pay proper attention and respect to empirical reality and the abstract realms to which they point, thus refusing to pay proper attention and respect to God in His role as Creator.)

I've provided a metaphysical understanding of this world and the greater Creation in which this world is embedded. In the tradition of all major schools of human thought, Christian and Jewish and Islamic and pagan and others, I've made a claim that we can understand each and every thing as well as the greater realms of Creation by keeping that understanding of Creation in mind and constantly using our understanding of the small to better our understanding of the large and vice-versa. My metaphysical un-

derstanding of Creation was based upon a reconstruction of something of a Thomistic system—radically existentialist among other traits, allowing for a more upfront recognition of the necessary respect for empirical knowledge—that of Creation. This respect requires that we consider: modern theories of spacetime, of biological evolution and development, of quantum physical theories of matter, and modern abstract mathematics which have sometimes spoken of facts and truths in empirical reality before we noticed them. My reconstruction, arguably a new Christian metaphysics as much as that of Aquinas was new relative to that of Anselm and earlier fathers, is somewhat superficial right now, but is presented as very much an open work in progress; if I'm heading in the correct direction, there is plenty of work for many generations of thinkers and teachers and popularizers.

I've not even scratched much of the surface of modern empirical knowledge, though a little bit more than I described above because I have made some serious consideration of the knowledge in modern fiction and in modern history and other 'softer' sciences.

But there is something missing in my work, despite my efforts to present my sketches of a metaphysical system in a way that shows all realms of created being, from our concrete realm back through abstract realms of created being and right to the truths and divine thoughts manifested as the raw stuff of Creation. That something which is missing is perhaps a necessary clarity rather than substantial claims to knowledge.

Let's assume, as a matter of necessity of the common sense variety, that Creation is made up of all of its pieces: creatures abstract and concrete as well as specific manifestations of divinity beyond or different from creatures—I write with a necessary vagueness for now. In what sense is my understanding of Creation, call it my worldview, made up of all the understandings I draw upon: Biblical revelation as well as a small body of other revelations along with human knowledge of concrete things and abstract things and all their various relationships?

We don't want things to fit together too tightly. That would conflict with our feelings and well-reasoned thoughts about freedom—not any sort of absolute freedom and not under the control of an agent called 'free-will' but some sort of freedom we can't describe but might be describable with appropriate qualitative abstractions of ideas from modern mathematics. In particular, we must protect the experienced constrained freedom of individual entities within larger entities (for individual human beings, this means communities as well as other corporate entities of a mostly physical nature).

Before coming to a conclusion, I'll point out the obvious—at least it's obvious to those with knowledge of history, including the history of human thought. What I'm saying has consequences for all fields of human thought and endeavor. For example, while there are no implied political policies of a specific sort in my work, there is a strong implication that true politics for human beings as they exist in this world as individuals and communities exclude most modern politics of a left-wing and right-wing sort, as well as any mushy politics in the so-called center. In fact, most 'idealistic' systems of thought about politics and even human nature are disallowed in favor of an ongoing analysis of revelation and empirical knowledge.

The conclusion of this meandering essay is basically the theme of my latest major effort: modern mathematics has tools, qualitative and conceptual as well quantitative, for dealing with parts and wholes—without dissolving the parts into the wholes or considering the wholes as merely nominal conglomerates. (This book is tentatively titled *The Shape of Reality* and is at least six months away from completion.)

This is philosophy and theology done right—to make greater sense of it all while not losing the sense of the smaller realms or particular things. Mathematics has provided, somewhat, the tools for this essential task in an age facing an embarrassing treasure of mostly undigested knowledge of the concrete and abstract realms of Creation. I qualify by 'somewhat' only because highly technical tools of modern, abstract mathematics (topology as a qualitative or abstracted geometry, abstract algebra as qualitative or abstracted studies of structure, etc) need to be understood and then appropriated (stolen?) for more general use by philosophers and theologians, and then by historians and mind-scientists and so on. A lot of work lies ahead of us if my views correspond at all to reality.

# 668 Christianity Without Christian Civilization is a Little Thing Indeed

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2248>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/07/19.]

Even without a Christian civilization, Christianity remains a holy thing, but it would be a little thing.

Partly because of a bad bargain that various Christian traditions made in coming to the United States, dominated after the War Between the States, by a liberal, non-Creedal form of Protestantism, Catholics and Orthodox and Lutherans and other sorts of sacramental, maybe Sacramental, Christians act as if having forgotten about the dependence of a complex religion upon the entire context in which we live. As Jews learned over the centuries in which they had to live in the civilizations of others, mostly Christian or Islamic, a people who held on to such a rich and complex faith had to retreat to a 'ghetto' in which they raised their children and protected their more 'innocent' adults by providing a more complete environment. It takes a great effort, most often combined with a sophisticated intellectual outlook, to be a sacramental Christian in a Western Civilization which is desacralized. The West is most certainly **not** paganized; it is desacralized. From the Christian viewpoint, this is far worse because the people of the West no longer even have a sense of the divine or even a primitive pagan sense of spiritual beings. It's harder to talk with desacralized people than with paganized people about even the nature of truth—even the existence of truth, let alone specific beliefs or speculations about important matters.

The language and concepts used to discuss and explore and teach and

carry out politics, culture, mathematics and science, and everything else are all explicitly desacralized in the modern West. Too many Christians, some of them very devout indeed, think to paint holy colors upon our desacralized civilization, even upon our violently barbarian sports, and think to have baptized what is not compatible with the Body of Christ.

To be Christian is to prepare ourselves to be part of the Body of Christ, to prepare ourselves to share the life of Jesus Christ and His Father and Their Spirit. To do that is to learn how to properly use and enjoy the world and all it contains. Our modern school systems and our religious school systems have de-emphasized memorization of traditional texts, including the Bible, and those empty spaces in the minds of children have been filled with the life-stories of morally disordered figures from the sports and entertainment industry, with morally disordered or even evil lyrics, with knowledge of some disordered collections of facts and urban legends about the genetic foundations of sexual orientation and other matters which are far more complex than Catholic apologists, professional and amateur, imagine.

The world, indeed—the entirety of Creation, is far more complex than Catholic apologists, professional and amateur, imagine.

I wish to respond an intelligent and interesting post by Razib Khan, a geneticist born into a Muslim family who is now an atheist. Khan is interested in theology and history, a good match for a geneticist in this age when there is much exploration of the ancient genes found in long-buried corpses and the ancient genes found in each and every one of us. In particular, he has written a number of good posts on what we might call “Christianity in the real world,” among many good posts on similar issues.

Khan’s post is: *Institutional Religion Needs Institutions* found at <http://www.unz.com/gnxp/institutional-religion-needs-institutions/>. This short essay begins:

It is a common assertion to state Christianity helped maintain the continuity of Classical civilization down to the Medieval era, through the “Dark Age” of Europe after the Fall of Rome.

This wouldn’t be my assertion, though I am a practicing Sacramental Christian currently in communion with the Roman Catholic Church. In fact, as one who advocates the view that the Church Herself is but an organ, an all-important central organ to be sure, in the Body of Christ, I

would assert that Western Christianity became so successful and so powerful just because the Church was willing to build upon the foundation of Roman Classical ('pagan') Civilization and then worked hard to maintain what eventually became a very complex 'hybrid' civilization and to support massive rebuilding efforts following times of trouble. In modern times, the Churchmen seem to have not inclined to do anything of the sort (except for Joseph Ratzinger and a few others) and the Roman Catholic Church seems not to have the resources of creative energy and imagination to maintain or rebuild a civilization; it is different from but similar to the situation of the Germanic tribes which conquered much of the regions north of the Alps inhabited by Romanized Celts and soon discovered they didn't understand and couldn't care for that which they had conquered. Thus it was that this multicultural event led to the true Dark Age, a time of famine and disease and violence of all sorts; the breakdowns in physical and cultural infrastructure when under the control of men who didn't understand any of those sorts of infrastructure and had killed or driven away those who could have done so in servants' roles.

Those ancient Germans were born as barbarians, that is—outsiders to the established order of a civilization. Western Christians have turned themselves into peoples semi-alien to the Western Civilization they inherited; they have no other civilization and are barbarians, however good they are at matching a wine with each course of a banquet.

Unfortunately, most Christians have only a vague belief in the Body of Christ, largely because even members of Sacramental Christian churches are largely corrupted by modern ideologies of radical individualism. Even Sacramental Christians think the Eucharist to be but a symbolic joining of individuals into nominal communities.

Khan makes another good point but, in my opinion, misinterprets it when he writes:

What I would suggest is that complex human phenomena, such as Christianity, are not reducible down to abstract sets of ideas in terms of how they manifest themselves in our world. That is, Christianity is only marginally about the Athanasian Creed, or even the sacrifice made by the Son of God, from a naturalistic perspective. Rather, the religion includes a broader set of institutions and folkways which derive from the culture at large (e.g., the Roman Catholic Church is the "ghost of the Ro-

man Empire"). Additionally, it also expresses common human intuitions about the world and social relations.

While disagreeing with Khan's claim that the creeds are marginal to Christianity, disagreeing more strongly that "the sacrifice made by the Son of God, from a naturalistic perspective" is marginal to Christianity, I would support the general thrust of this claim. In the next paragraph, Khan brings matters to a tight focus: "[A]s a complex cultural phenomenon, Christianity is conditional on complex culture." Without that "complex culture," better still—civilization, Christianity is bound to be a sect of small communities with most being perhaps underground communities. That's not what God wanted Christianity to be, not just because He desires many to be His friends, wishes many to share His life, but also because the Body of Christ is the point of it all. We individual human beings are saved as part of that Body and not as a small or large gathering come together on a voluntary or contractual basis.

From another direction, we should also consider the question: Is a limited, mortal creature suited for life without end, life shared with God? In all honesty, the answer is, "No." If we accept God's promise of salvation, we must remember first that this salvation was promised to some tribes of Semites, Hebrews, as members of the people of Israel and then to all the friends of Jesus Christ as members of the Christian Church, however God Himself defines either the "people of Israel" or the "Christian Church."

We will be able to tolerate life without end just because we, first, will retain our own minds but also share the minds of great scientists and historians. We will retain our own hearts but share the hearts of spiritual giants. We will retain our own hands but share the hands of political reformers and carpenters. By way of becoming more fully members of the Body of Christ in Heaven, 'points' on the 'manifold' which is the Body, we can also share the mind and heart and hands of Jesus Christ and, through Him, share life with His Father and Their Spirit. It is only a complete, unified, and coherent civilization that can become the true Body of Christ, with the Church playing a central role. If the Church were the entirety of the Body of Christ, we would be destined to become "church ladies" of television comedy fame; that would be a fate which would lead most human beings, male and female, to pray for the end of time.

Near the end of the essay, Khan writes:

What is true for Christianity is probably true for many complex human ideas and institutions that we think are here for good. The reality is that complexity of thought and contingency of logic are dependent on the surpluses generated by a highly developed economy and centralized state.

Khan's claim has enough truth in it that I'll leave it unanswered in intellectual terms. In fact, the only possible answer is a strong, confident response by Christians, a response which leads to an understanding of the world in terms of Christian revelation. Elsewhere, and often, I've argued that such an understanding, expanded to cover all of Creation, is the true foundation of a civilization—ideally, a Christian Civilization, a new phase of the mortal life of the Body of Christ.

By responding properly to God's Creation, in light of our Christian belief, we will build a new Christian civilization.



# 669 Religious Liberty is a Nonstarter in the Modern United States

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2259>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/08/23.]

A radically secularized society will make it tough to engage in any sort of religious practices. This happens in a particularly intense way if the majority of parents simply turn their children over to the school systems or to modern American culture as a whole. And so it is that I'll retreat from philosophical or historical discussions of the public square to deal, for a second time, with one of the weirdest psychological mutilations imaginable—the lack of development of the concept of truth, so basic to primitive tribal peoples as well as modern medical professionals and particle physicists.

Though I believe the narrative of Christian American to be mostly hogwash, there was a time when most Americans could be considered as washed-out Christians of a sort. No longer.

By at least 1800 or so, and probably a bit earlier than that, Americans inhabited a world stripped of divinity, a world fully subject to the mastery of men. I'm not concerned here with a specific set of religious opinions but only with the belief that there is a higher meaning than any we can find for ourselves in our mundane activities. In the term 'higher meaning', I include animistic pagans with noble, if sometimes strange, creation myths as well as the higher paganism of Plato and the high theisms of Maimonides and Aquinas. I also include the pantheism of Albert Einstein and his talk of the "Old One" whose thoughts he wished to know—it is much more correct to think of that "Old One" as some impersonal 'force' of reason, perhaps

an Einsteinian version of the Reason worshiped by some of the unstable participants in the Enlightenment.

A secularist doesn't have share a concept of higher truth with pagans and theists and pantheists and others, even some atheists who don't have central, partially divine, principle such as the reason of an Einstein. In March of 2016, I published a discussion of studies which didn't directly address secularism as a set of ideas, instead dealing with the irresponsibility of adults in recent decades who have not taught the children the concepts of right and wrong, nor that of truth—Chapter 665, *We Modern Christians Destroyed the Concept of Truth Along with Our Children's Minds*. The younger adults in the United States (probably most of the West) and those who are yet children have no way to even think in what we might call the categories of morality, even the categories of basic order which underly rational or intuitive or even tribal systems of morality.

Religious liberty might be recognized as a valid principle by those who are disbelievers in truth by way of reason. That isn't the case with most American adults below the age of 40 or so and even with some from those older than me (I was born in 1955). In many of these people, including some in my parents' generation—born in the 1920s or 1930s, even the weakest concept of truth seems to have disappeared. For much of my life, I've been mostly in contact with 'ordinary folk' such as smalltown teachers and bankers, carpenters and machinists, nurses and social-workers and I can testify that most such people have at least an undisciplined faith in, shall we say, a "higher power." I suspect that, from at least the late 1800s, there was at least a substantial minority of non-believers in truth among the big-city or university professionals and teachers. Unfortunately, I think there was a substantial minority of such thinkers among Protestant clergymen, at least of the Northeastern varieties, and Ivy League university professionals since at least 1800 or so. The ideas, more mind-killing than simply dangerous, have been working their way into most American minds from what might be called the liberalized Puritan mind.

Add in the problems raised by the studies discussed in Chapter 665, *We Modern Christians Destroyed the Concept of Truth Along with Our Children's Minds*, that is, the replacement of immediate feelings for those missing value judgments based upon some understanding of truth, and we have a substantial percentage of Americans and probably Westerners in general who can't even make sense of a claim that a Christian nurse or a Jewish doctor has a right to refuse to help a patient commit suicide.

There is anecdotal evidence galore out on the Internet and in books that a teacher or a public speaker has no right to upset someone by suggesting some claims of date-rape might be at least questioned. I even think that some of Obama's advisers are sincere in protesting against any suggestions they shouldn't be destroying entire countries and killing lots of people to prevent the leaders of those countries from killing lots of people. And the evidence for plans of those leaders to carry out such killings is typically, shall we say, below the level of court-room credibility. Apparently, some of these "Responsibility to Protect" advocates—and I'm sure some are actually outright war criminals—are the same sorts of delicate flowers who, bereft of even a concept of higher truths, feel a need to defend their innermost child and to enforce that child's feelings upon reality.

Religious liberty is a non-starter to the younger Americans who have been raised and morally non-formed by my generation and the one before and after my generation. A lot of institutions and individuals, including Christian churches and their leaders, including schools and their administrators and most teachers, have no right to protest at the oh-so tender moral monsters in our midst. They helped to form these people, most people below 40 and many older, who don't have enough of a concept of truth for professionals, test-givers from psychology or sociology, to draw out.



## 670 I Can Dream, Can't I?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2296>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/11/25.]

For nearly 30 years, I've been writing novels and nonfiction, having sacrificed much of a chance of a good life of the normal sort, largely while deluding myself that some modest, or even substantial, financial rewards were coming in six months or, at worst, a year.

Though I had personal problems and inclinations that led me to be something of an independent Christian thinker, I was then led to take up a writing career which was also a Christian vocation and even a Christian mission. I continued to delude myself as my career as a non-profit, non-income writer began to develop and even as that career matured in the past 20 years or so—the first 10 years were practice. Could I say that my own self was maturing as a Christian? In particular, could I claim to be something of a good example? I who was too soft to have responded properly to being in classes which I should have easily handled according to professors who tried to give me some guidance, but I had spent 4 years or more being bored into submission in high school, 4 years of my reading skills degrading and my writing skills and math skills not developing. I shattered in classes in which a group of Malaysians, ethnic Chinese, excelled and in which the Ashkenazi Jews from NYC magnet schools did no better than okay. Broken, I ran into a career as an actuary which I found quite uninteresting and unfulfilling, a career in which I generally failed to even give a proper effort.

Raymond Wilder, an important figure in the development of the American mathematical community of the middle two-thirds of the 20th century, had claimed he could see the decline in the reasoning and manipulative skills of American students by the 1950s and others have said the last generation (as opposed to scattered individuals) of high-accomplishing Americans in

mathematics and hard sciences probably graduated from high school in 1965 or so. Much more can be said, but this is not the place.

Jacques Barzun, in his magisterial *From Dawn to Decadence* [9] made a prediction that the West will collapse upon itself, as in the horrible 14th century which followed a century of both cultural magnificence and increasing inequality of wealth; Barzun projected it will again take us a century to rise from the rubble. He thought that rise would begin when one or more young men of curious minds discover the glories of Western thought and begin to pursue new thoughts through old knowledge.

Can we not simply start that process of rising from the rubble right now? I think I have so started and there are others who can participate as soon as they accept the major insight underlying my work: we need to reunderstand Creation from the most basic level of being, the “raw stuff of Creation” as I have often labeled it. Even the nature of material being as studied by physicists and the nature of certain types of abstract being as studied by mathematicians and poets and moral philosophers, is far too particular a level for starting this project; starting at the level of evolutionary biology is simply absurd. We Christians don't need to complement physicists and biologists so much as we need to reunderstand the foundations, the very forms of being, which underly the strangeness of quantum physics and the wonders and nastiness of evolutionary biology. We need to think along with God in His freely chosen role as Creator.

And so I have dreamed and continue to dream of a community of Christians devoted to a fundamental reunderstanding and to exploring new, yet old, forms of Christian lives. We don't need to undo Kant or Rousseau or to baptize Nietzsche and Sartre. We need to take up the task of St Augustine of Hippo and of St Benedict of Nursia, as well as the task of Dante Alighieri. We need to start at a fundamental level—the level of perceived being was pretty fundamental in the days of Augustine and those of Benedict and a level of perceived being somewhat abstracted was a radical imagining of more complete being in the days of Dante.

I think to have done much of the re-understanding Creation in a way that considers modern empirical and abstract knowledge in the context of Christian revelations. I have little money and little of the entrepreneurial talent needed to organize one or more communities which can engage more fully in the work I've begun, work which might run parallel to or even overlap that of others who, like me, are working in relative obscurity as various sorts of benefactors continue to pour wealth and various sorts of talents and

efforts into the established institutions which are proving they are capable of little more than accommodating gradually to the anti-Christian mainstream of recent centuries. Some of those activities of accommodation seem to be moving ever faster and seem to be aiming at a pretty much complete surrender to some twisted lines of thought and feeling and action.



# 671 Christianity is an Intellectually Demanding Religion, and Deeply, Necessarily So

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2303>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/12/13.]

Unfortunately, we don't have a public Christian intellectual elite which is re-understanding Creation and its Lord-Creator by way of courageous and honest responses to what is known from various fields of human exploration and speculation. We have a Christian intellectual elite more inclined to try to fit new knowledge into old schemes. We have ecclesiastical leaders more inclined to accept whatever understanding of this world is offered up by an increasingly non-Christian or even anti-Christian West.

Let me put that aside and speculate upon what has been true in some crisis periods of Christian history and what will have to be true again if Christianity is to recover and rebuild itself, that is, rebuild the pilgrim Body of Christ in its entirety—a Christian civilization with a healthy sacramental Church at its core.

First, we have to recognize the strangeness in the words of Christian pastoral leaders from the local level right up to some popes and leaders of other major branches of Christianity.

1. Christianity is simple, just live it. [Or some similar formula], but
2. That stuff about the Trinity and the one Person and two natures of Christ is just beyond anything the human mind can deal with. Return

to above item. . .

So which is it. Do we have a simple Christianity with handwaving about the core beliefs of traditional, Apostolic Christianity? Or do we have a Christianity in which some have to seriously grapple with understanding the Trinity and the one Person and two natures of Jesus Christ?

The second is true.

Without the Trinity and a sophisticated understanding of the totality of Jesus Christ, we of the West seem to either return to being Indo-European pagans or we become gentle and befuddled social-workers of a sort.

And yet it be true there are few—even among the population of Christian intellectuals—who can deal directly with those sophisticated issues. Even some excellent, Bible-centered Christian theologians are at their best when they can rely upon still plausible understandings of the more difficult parts of understanding Creation and its Lord. Unfortunately, there seem to be a fair number who overestimate the plausibility of established Christian ways of understanding Creation and its Lord, who think that the ways of thought of Augustine or Aquinas or Bonaventure can be taken as foundations for viable worldviews.

Darwin and Einstein, evolutionary biologists and geneticists, quantum physicists and physical cosmologists, technologists and political philosophers, poets and musicians, have pretty much showed us that Creation is a lot different place than even the best of premodern scientists and philosophers and theologians and poets thought. It's time for a reformation of the Christian understanding of God's work as a Creator. Its time for a refoundation of Christianity and of a Christian civilization.

Rather than trying to refound Christianity by the simple and simple-minded designs of social-justice warriors, we need a Christian intellectual elite to build a new understanding of Creation and the God who is the Creator and still Lord of Creation. If all were to go very well, unlikely considering that we're now starting from a general state of confusion on the part of nearly all Christians, then the poets and musicians and theologians and novelists and politicians could simultaneously start their work of implementing a good reunderstanding of Creation and its Lord even as that reunderstanding were still in early stages of development.

New Christian cultures could start growing, maybe to feed into a new Christian civilization some generation not too far away in what we can pray will be a better future than we seem determined to make possible.

## 672 Salvation: Paying Attention to States of Being

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2306>. It was finished and uploaded on 2016/12/20.]

I'm currently struggling, but joyfully at times, to finish my book, *The Shape of Reality*. Alas, it won't be finished by year-end as I had hoped, which hope I've stated on my blog. The end of January or even during February is more likely. As I struggle to complete this book, I'm obsessed with questions about human being, individual and communal but also mortal and 'divinized'. By the term 'divinized', I mean simply the state in which human being, individual and communal, is sharing God's life in Heaven. I use such a term as a Western Sacramental Christian who is positively impressed by some of the powerful insights of Eastern Sacramental Christians. I also write as one impressed by the potential of modern mathematics and science to provide powerful new abstractions, concepts, for better understanding God's Creation including those creatures who are we.

Think of a landscape in which there are mountains and hills with valleys and gullies, paths up and down some of the slopes. There are dangerous regions where the ground might give way and cliffs appear without warning, where various temptations might take the traveler off the road for a respite or for an attempt to make that small and mortal region into the goal of it all. This is the world in which God has placed us for some sort of journey toward Heaven.

I could go on and fully prepare the ground for an allegory in the mode of C S Lewis. I won't.

Some of these sorts of concrete allegorical elements are anticipations of powerful conceptual tools which can be more clearly seen in the mathemat-

ics and the physical sciences which have highly developed mathematical models. In other words, those allegorical elements are literary attempts at developing concepts which are needed, and I believe them to be a necessary step in our modern, deeper understanding of many aspects of God's Creation. It's likely not just an accident of history that Dante came as a forerunner of the modern age <sup>1</sup>, the age in which science and mathematics and scientifically developed technology has blossomed.

Since I believe that abstract being is true being and part of the same Creation as is concrete and thing-like forms of being, I am saying that an insightful poet or novelist or philosopher who draws upon properties and things of this concrete and thing-like world to make some point is trying, if not always with full awareness, to get at some abstraction lying behind or beneath or above the mountains and gullies of his tales of wonder, some abstraction which is shaped from the very same abstract being as is the abstractions of, say, statistical physics and the spaces of states of being which it studies.

The concrete allegories and other necessarily indirect ways which are used by novelists and poets and philosophers to explore and communicate difficult concepts are good but also limited. They are particularized, sometimes highly particularized shapings of the abstract forms of being which lie behind difficult climbs in both the moral and spiritual journeys through life and the physical journeys of explorers and of weekend wilderness warriors. Those two types of journey are linked and not by mere whim of the poet nor by pure accident.

Many animal species can think well, for their purposes, in terms of the concrete and thing-like being of this highly particular universe. Some species other than human beings, most notably chimpanzees, have some limited ability to think in abstract terms. Only human beings can think abstractly well enough to have a deeper understanding of God's Creation; following Aquinas, I often claim we have minds of the sort which are capable of encapsulating God's Creation in our minds, though any individual human mind is too limited to understand much at all. This power of the individual human mind itself leads to human being with much more complicated states of being and more complicated paths through a very complex

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<sup>1</sup>There are historians and mathematicians who believe that Dante's vision of all of Creation is a remarkably intuitive vision of something few can visualize even knowing the mathematics: a three-dimensional manifold which is a sphere, that is, it is the surface of a four-dimensional solid ball.

space of possible human states of being. It also leads to some hope of understanding, which understanding would probably lead to more complicated and complex forms of human minds and, hence, of human states of being and of paths toward that glorious state in which we can share God's life. It leads to such possibilities largely because it leads to very, very powerful communal human minds and those minds can certainly be understood, or even conceived, only in terms of the sorts of abstractions I've been developing recently, hoping to provide some useful tools for exploration and understanding of these regions of abstract being in my upcoming book, *The Shape of Reality*, and maybe in future works. God willing.

I'm certainly not one to underestimate the importance of heart and hands, but...

More abstraction is needed, which means that we need to pay more attention to developing the minds of those Christians who can do that job of abstracting from various particulars so that we can learn how to think, for example, in terms of traveling across paths in the possible spaces of states of being as if we were traveling across possible landscapes in  $n$ -dimensional spaces where the value of 'n' might be large and the number of possible landscapes might also be large. We modern Christians, as well as many others, act as if we need to turn young people into good students, well-behaved consumers who are obsessed with playing or watching sports.



## 673 Covenants, Then and Now

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2315>. It was finished and uploaded on 2017/01/02.]

Let me go to the ever reliable 1913 edition of Webster's once-fine dictionary, listing just two definitions of 'covenant' which seem most relevant to my discussion:

**covenant** A mutual agreement of two or more persons or parties, or one of the stipulations in such an agreement. [Appropriate example:] Then Jonathan and David made a covenant. -1 Sam. xviii. 3.

**covenant** (Theol.) The promises of God as revealed in the Scriptures, conditioned on certain terms on the part of man, as obedience, repentance, faith, etc.

In general, covenants, in the sense of solemn and sometimes legally binding agreements, are fundamental to human societies, but the concept of covenant has been woven into a wrongful understanding of human being and of all of Creation and also into a wrongful understanding of the relationships between human beings and God. We can do better. The concept of covenant is valid and seemingly necessary to our understanding of human being and of Creation, but that's the rub; it's part of human being, individual and communal, to make covenants and to try to live by them. No less but no more. Yet, covenants—including those in the Bible—have given rise to the idea that human beings were created in some sort of state where they were already capable of forming the Body of Christ.

All of our inadequacies and actual rebellious or criminal acts are bundled up in the concept of sin (and "original sin"). In the newest and least plausible versions of this myth of human being, our apish ancestors—at some

mysterious instant and in the persons of a man and a woman genetically traceable to periods as much as 100,000 years apart from each other—a true human race rose fully capable of being God-like, true brethren of Christ, if only we would obey laws which were revealed in various ways in history, yet were actually declarations of truths imposed by a God from outside of time and space, truths said to be reflective of the moral nature of human beings evolved and developed and living in a highly particular time and space.

Whew!

The sheer breathlessness of the last sentence of the previous paragraph should alert us to the botched nature of our understanding of human being. We have created a chimera which is part Adam as conceived by premodern Christians and Jews and part the vague creature of nature as envisioned by Darwin and his successors. In fact, as Augustine of Hippo considered and rejected, as many modern writers of various and sundry beliefs seem to expect or fear, human beings are both of those and neither of those. They are partly the creatures found in the writings of the truly wise commentators of Jewish and Christian history—images of God in the usual terminology, as well as partly found in the writings of wise pagans; they are partly human animals descended from apes; they are something else in total.

It's the totality with which we have great problems, though tools are available in modern mathematics and modern physical scientists to make sense of totalities which are the sum of lesser entities which retain their individuality and which are also something else. The universe in which we live is the sum of its various components and also itself; it is container of much and also a universe with its own properties. (See *A Universe is More than it Contains* 193 for an early discussion of the issue based upon the fact that a relativistic universe, which ours **seems** to be, violates the so-called Law of the Conservation of Energy, though that law—better: principle—holds at all local places and times.)

We moderns who, in one example, have done so much good work in analyzing parts of communal human being, such as the political and economic and social parts, have shattered Humpty Dumpty and yet we retain memories of what we thought him to have been before we began our studies of his being. So it is that we have great knowledge of the biochemistry of his shell and his albumen and his DNA but we Christians have chosen to think yet of his totality in terms of the ancient view of an egg as containing a tiny chick which just needs to grow without any of the fancy development which is, in fact, necessary for that shell-enclosed puddle of chemicals to become

a Sunday roast. We can do better if we but have the courage and energy, the willingness to work hard and to experiment with new ideas, to engage with traditional and modern understandings, and to rethink matters, that we might produce total understandings which will be as powerful as useful.

We have various misunderstandings of human being and of Creation which can now be corrected because of our greater and more precise and more correct and more reliable knowledge of created being in this world of concrete, thing-like being and also better knowledge of some of the realms of abstract being which mathematicians in particular have explored in recent centuries.

We Christians, and some others, think of covenants in the context of a static Creation and of a static human being when such is not the case. Creation isn't just this world created once and in more or less final form, whether 4,000 years ago or 14 billion years ago.

Think of it all as a house built on-site and still under construction and also being remodeling in its existing sections. This house is set in a particular landscape of a grassy plain and nearby hills and a lake and so on; that house has human occupants. They make covenants with one another, as well as growing into existing covenants. Some of those occupants also make an explicit covenant with the Creator of it all, the maker of the landscape as well as of the house and its occupants.

All of those creatures, living and nonliving, are dynamic, always changing in their genetic family-lines (call this evolution, if you wish) and in their individual selves (call this development, if you wish). Human beings as a species have evolved a lot in just the past 10,000 years when human intelligence has risen dramatically and very much so for some groups of human beings. (See *The 10,000 Year Explosion: How Civilization Accelerated Human Evolution* [23] by Gregory Cochran and Henry Harpending.) This evolution was facilitated largely by changes in the structures of human communities responding to new opportunities; these changes were caused by and led to the need for higher social intelligence, though there was surely some effect as well from the sudden explosion in technology including metalworking as well as horse-breeding; warriors and kings and blacksmiths and horse-breeders gained large advantages in reproduction.

So it is that I claim that covenants in 2000BC (call it the Age of Abraham) and those in 1000BC (call it the Age of Moses) and 1750AD (call it the Age of Blackstone) were not the same. Covenants were once a supernatural relationship even when between two mortal men. Then they were

probably more a matter of honor. Now they are probably more of a dry legal matter.

The definitions from the 1913 edition of Webster at the beginning of this essay give us a pretty good way of understanding certain relationships between men and between God and men. In this short essay, I'm mostly interested in covenants between God and men, whether 'men' is one human being or many or all of those who respond positively to God's invitation of friendship or all human beings—with some necessary flexibility in definition.

In the far olden days, even those tending toward monotheism saw God and world in paganistic terms—God could impose His will upon the world but it existed somewhat in parallel to the Almighty and was maybe as 'old' as He was. To the later Hebrews and the early Jews and early Christians, it seemed clear—in some sense of the word 'clear—that God was a Creator in an absolute sense; before He spoke the world into being, there was nothing but God. Over some centuries, Christian thinkers—beginning with the ancient Christian Fathers and going through St Augustine of Hippo and on through Aquinas—developed a sophisticated metaphysics under which God could be coherently described as the absolute Creator of this world as understood in the centuries of the so-called Middle Ages of Europe (about 500-1400AD). More recently, any understanding of God as a Creator has to take account of such modern knowledge and theories as the Big Bang—not an act of Creation but rather some sort of strange change in the phase of being. This phase change or change in state of being is so strange because it was and is a weird sort of abstract being on the 'other' side and concrete, thing-like being on our side. So to speak.

Abstract being which seems to truly be some sort of mathematical entity, that is—the quantum wavefunction which 'collapses' (bad but useful term) to form matter-energy, can be awfully dynamic indeed, though actually deterministic in its abstract form as well as dynamic. Matter is more particular than the abstract mathematical being from which it is shaped; therefore, matter doesn't move so rapidly as does that mathematical being. And, yet, we know that quantum wavefunctions, the mathematical being from which matter is shaped, seem fully deterministic—raising a variety of questions as to where it comes from, but that is outside the scope of this essay.

More importantly for now, we have to realize that our own dynamic human being has passed through various states of being. As a species, we arose immediately from a line resulting from a split with chimpanzees. As

individuals, we developed from the combination and recombination of egg and DNA with sperm and DNA.

When did the first individual human being arise who could enter a conscious relationship, a covenant, with God?

Given the rapid evolution of human intelligence over the past 10,000 years, we'd have to assume that the undoubtedly real, though shadowy, men who became immortalized as the patriarchs of the Israelites, were of lesser intelligence than modern men—unless they were so unusual as was the handful of modern geniuses such as Newton and Goethe who were so much smarter in some ways than other modern men.

A covenant between God and an early (neolithic) anatomically modern human being would have been pretty rudimentary compared to what is found in the theological and metaphysical and devotional writings of St Basil the Great or John Henry Newman, though most such covenants are made between God and entire communities. A neolithic tribe would have had rich but simple relationships. That tribe itself wouldn't have been capable of forming a sophisticated covenant with God, nor with other tribes. A great leader from that tribe wouldn't have been capable, even with the proper upbringing, to have filled the shoes of Moses and certainly not those of Solon or Charlemagne or William the Conqueror or George Washington.

We can see in the Bible in a distorted, but largely true, way the formation of early civilizations in Southwestern Asia and northern Africa. It seems to have been true to human being, individual and communal, that the political structure of these civilizations were defined in self-serving ways by men talented in organizing human communities and individual projects—including large-scale acts of violence. Even as men during the lifetimes of Isaiah and Jeremiah were collecting and redacting ancient narratives, oral and written, we can speculate that the model for covenants between God and men were those enforced by warlords, princes and kings and sometimes leaders of nomadic tribes, yet, none organizing political or military communities so complex as those of the first Chinese emperor—see the article on *Qin Shi Huang* at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qin\\_dynasty](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qin_dynasty), not nearly so complex as those of later empires in various parts of Eurasia and, eventually, the Americas and Africa.

A covenant with God remains true to the definition found above and taken from Webster's 1913:

**covenant** The promises of God as revealed in the Scriptures, conditioned

on certain terms on the part of man, as obedience, repentance, faith, etc.

But, it's also more than a bit different. After all, God is no longer quite the God of the ancient Hebrews, seen necessarily in terms of concepts available to the Patriarchs and Moses, nor is He the somewhat better encapsulated God of Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezra and Ezekiel on to the Apostles and premodern Christian Fathers. Rather than a monotheistic version of a pagan Sky-God or Divine King, God has revealed Himself—through modern empirical knowledge—as a God who operates primarily through His power to create and to continuously create in the way of shaping, in the way of forming and maintaining relationships.

God is not **only** a mathematician, not **only** a designer—if a designer at all, but He is the Creator who made the abstract being studied by mathematicians, the universe studied by various people including those who overestimate the “design” elements, the living creatures studied by the most atheistic of biologists, the human race studied by historians and anthropologists.

God is not primarily a King and is not at all a King who lives up in Heaven and rules over a Creation which is at His feet. He is a Creator and Shaper of what is not Him. His covenant is given to us at all times of men in a way that we can best and—necessarily—partially understand. As I pointed out above, even the revelation that He is the Creator has been more fully revealed over time as human being has evolved and matured—starting as a pagan Father God who is dominant over other gods and over a creation not quite a creation from nothingness, the Almighty is now best seen and understood by use of not only Scriptural revelation re-understood by modern Biblical scholars but also by use of modern physics and biology and history and mathematics. Even thinkers such as Augustine of Hippo, Moses Maimonides, and Thomas Aquinas had a far simpler understanding of ‘Creator’ and ‘Creation’ than is possible because of, than is demanded by, better understanding of created being.

It's probably best to say that we can now understand our covenant with the God of Jesus Christ in terms not at odds with the ancient covenants of Noah and Abraham, of post-exile Jews and premodern Christians, but rather in those terms but enhanced with our modern knowledge of God in His freely chosen role as Creator. We owe all we are and all we have to

our Maker but He chose to make us out of the stuff explored by modern physicists and by processes explored by modern biologists.



# 674 A Very Simplified View of the Woes of Christianity—Now and at Two Earlier Times

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2319>. It was finished and uploaded on 2017/01/10.]

## 674.1 Introduction

Recently, I attended my monthly men’s prayer group and made a comment about history books telling of the importance of highly educated men from warlord (sometimes royal) families in converting many of the German peoples to Christianity—some of those evangelists, such as Boniface (“Apostle to the Germans”), were themselves Germanic. The organizer of the group and some of the other members asked me to give a presentation on. . . It was a somewhat vague request, wisely so. So it is that I’ve decided to give something of an introductory talk about my responses to the current woes of Christianity. It’s at least true that we Western Christians have great reason to worry about the future of our Christian ways of thinking and feeling and acting.

In any case, I’ve known for a while there is a need for some sort of popularization of my thoughts—not because of a lack of intelligence on the part of those in the greater audience but rather because of different sorts of intelligence, more generally different sorts of talents and inclinations, and because of that all-important constraint on human accomplishments—there are only 24 hours in the day, 365 days in the year, and maybe 80 or 90 years in the typical human life. Most human beings devote the working portion

of those years to greatly important tasks such as making a living in perhaps demanding crafts or professions and raising families.

So it is that this article is structured as an overview presentation on some aspects of my work which are most important to those with non-intellectual interests or inclinations. It does take some intelligence to understand what is presented but it can readily be the sort of intelligence that can be found in any thinking human being who is curious about reality. Someone smart enough to code software or do demanding tasks in metalworking or carpentry, someone who has taught writing skills to young boys or girls or settled complex insurance claims, should be able to understand what follows. If not, then I need to rework the material to make it more straightforward, not to make it simpler in the way of aiming at less intelligent ways of thought.

I'll start off with a very simple model of human being. In this model, which I first learned from the writings of Rabbi Jacob Neusner, human being is discussed, usefully and profoundly, as mind and heart and hands, as thinking and feeling and doing.

## 674.2 A Usefully Simplified Model of Human Being: Mind and Heart and Hands

Both the theological school of St John the Evangelist and modern physics, especially quantum mechanics, tell us relationships dominate stuff. Relationships create stuff, including thing-like stuff. Relationships shape existing stuff, including the things of this concrete world. For example, the world didn't come into existence and then God decided to love it; the world came into existence because God first loved it.

Christian theology tells us that God is so perfectly unified that when He thinks, He also feels and acts. When the Almighty feels, He also thinks and acts. When He acts, . . . Modern brain-science tells us something similar is true of human beings, though defectively so.

In any case, thinking and feeling and doing don't quite substitute for each other in mortal men living in this mortal world. Thinking and feeling and doing are all important and need to work together if we are to complete our human to-do lists. Having said that, I'm biased or unbalanced, if you will, toward mind and it remains true that intellectual insights can help immensely in guiding our hearts and our hands. I'll elaborate a little more

on that when I discuss a couple of historical crises for Christianity which might help us to understand our own crisis.

The main takeaway is that mind and heart and hands are useful ways of using our “human stuff” to discuss different ways of forming relationships, including the relationships which are our understandings of this world and of all Creation. We are (defectively) unified but we can use these “parts” of a human being to deal with our diversity within our (defective) unity.

So it is that I’ll ask without providing here an answer:

Individuals have minds, hearts, and hands. Do communities? That is, can we use our understandings of individual human being to understand communal human being? In asking this question, I assume a positive answer to the related question I’ll address below: are communities real or just gatherings of freestanding individuals as we are taught by our modern political and social systems? (It seems likely to me that Marxism came about as a botched effort to deny the modern denial of the reality of human communities.)

A partial answer will be found in an upcoming book tentatively titled *The Shape of Reality*.

### **674.3 Did Christianity Destroy the Roman Empire?: Ancient Christianity and the Fall of Rome, Circa 400AD**

The 18th century historian, Edward Gibbon, claimed that the adoption of Christianity in the Roman Empire led to the weakening and then the fall of that empire. That was also a claim of some prominent pagan thinkers who were observing and experiencing the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. In the decades around 400AD, Bishop Augustine of Hippo rose to the challenge by proposing that Christ is the Lord of History, a history which is linear from creation of this concrete world through the appearance of human beings (Augustine had considered and then rejected the hypothesis that man arose from lower species) and then hit a high point in the Incarnation and Crucifixion and Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. From that point, history is a linear playing-out of men seeking or rejecting salvation.

So it was that Augustine's expansion of the human mind came in the form of a re-understanding of human history which became dominant in the West as it rose again from the decline and fall of the (Western) Roman Empire. More could be said about the defects of that understanding of history, which was essentially right, but this isn't the place. What is important is to see that such an understanding of human history opened up the Christian mind so that other, parallel or consequent, developments of human being could lead to the Christian West.

Heart? It was strange how the spiritual and even secular forms of human energy were unleashed. A young man living a century or so after Augustine found himself disgusted with the corruption of Rome. So it was that Benedict of Nursia headed out to live an eremitical or semi-eremitical life of prayer and penance. Benedictine monasticism was born and before long, large monasteries were preserving the technologies of Rome and also the intellectual heritage of the Christian Church, but also the heritage of pagan Athens and pagan Rome and much else. Some centuries later, white-robed reformers who were the Cistercians began to develop the water-power of Europe, becoming wealthy and powerful against their own desires even as they prepared Europe for industrialization while other peoples and regions in Eurasia with more sophisticated civilizations continued using asses and camels and oxen. (To be sure, animal power remained important in the West for centuries and is still important for some peoples such as the Amish.)

For all that the Benedictines accomplished, Western Civilization wouldn't have developed if not for better political and social orders. It's important to understand that many regions in the West retained fairly high living and educational standards but disruptions of transportation and communication systems fragmented a great civilization and left many areas impoverished. Powerful popes and other leaders of the Western Christian Church began to step forward to take care of the needs of their peoples and their regions, needs which seemed to fall under the authority of the Church and also needs which were more naturally under the authority of secular powers. It would be centuries before intelligent and farseeing warlords and kings and emperors could take up those needs at a higher level. In the meantime, the seeds had been planted for various conflicts between church and state, to use a modern way of speaking, and also for various sorts of corruption in the Church. Pope St Gregory the Great (540-604 or so) was one of the most prominent Church leaders representing forces of order, one who

played a major role in founding Medieval political and social order. There were others, earlier and later, including Pope St Leo the Great (400-461) who was arguably the last man recognized as the principal leader (though not absolute leader) of both West and East.

## **674.4 Is Christianity compatible with a rational understanding of Creation?: Christian Intellectual Backwardness, 900-1200AD**

During the early centuries of the Middle Ages (as defined for Europe), Islamic scholars and Jewish scholars living in or near Islamic centers of civilization had taken up the thought of the civilizations which had preceded them in the Eastern Mediterranean and contiguous regions. They had recovered much of the scientific and mathematical knowledge of the ancients and had also learned from the Indians. So far as philosophy goes, it is a great but useful simplification that the Islamic thinkers of the early Middle Ages (by European periods) had built their worldview upon the writings of Aristotle, rejecting the Neoplatonic worldview of Augustine and many other prominent ancient Christian fathers. That Aristotelian worldview seemed so much more rational than the mysticism into which Neoplatonism often fell. Since Aristotle's worldview was compatible with his own work as an observational biologist, it could provide a framework for many sorts of scientific efforts. (In fact, Plato and Aristotle were somewhat Siamese Twins of the mind, though Aristotle expressed a certain animosity toward his ex-teacher.)

During the first half of the 13th century, Thomas Aquinas produced a new understanding of Creator and Creation. Some say he disciplined European thought to Aristotelian standards, though it has taken many books over the centuries to discuss the insights and errors in such a viewpoint. I tend to the view of the great Neo-Thomist, Etienne Gilson, who said Aquinas seemed to follow Aristotle but he was actually making Aristotle say what Aquinas needed him to say—Aristotle had influenced but not determined Thomistic thought.

Aquinas thought in terms of a concept which Gilson translated as 'act-

of-being'. God is His own self-sustaining Act-of-being, the Supreme Act-of-being. All else is made up of acts-of-being which I discuss in terms of manifested truths which play the role of raw being (or acts-of-being) which are shaped into more and more particular forms of being up to the most concrete forms of being, such as human being. Even the most complex of things, living or nonliving, remain subject to evolution and development, at least in this highly particular mortal realm.

Aquinas saw that men could understand both God's self-sustaining act-of-being and His created acts-of-being by starting from one and traveling to the other. His so-called great Summa (Summa or *Summa Theologica*) started with revealed knowledge of God and traveled down to Creation. The other summa of Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, started with a discussion of God in His necessary Being and then went to Creation before traveling back to God. A great circle could be composed from these two semicircles. This second summa, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, was probably written in response to a lack of respect for Christian thought on the part of the great Jewish and Islamic scholars, or at least a lack as perceived by Europeans.

Christians failed to properly integrate Thomistic thought (my preferred flavor or any other) into Western thought, though Aquinas did succeed in making Christian thought at least somewhat respectable to the scholars of the other Peoples of the Book. I'll explain below why it was that Thomistic thought wasn't used to build a more complete Western worldview, and this will allow us to see why Christianity is in a crisis mode, why it was that Western thought succeeded so spectacularly in understanding important parts of God's Creation and that thought separated itself from Christianity. In fact, that thought never cohered in any worldview worthy of the name, which is why the West isn't even able to re-form itself successfully into a pagan civilization.

It was St Francis and the friars who followed him who provided great human-energy to the High Middle Ages, powering great accomplishments which seemed yet to indicate that the West was deeply Christian—not entirely wrong, though the failure to refound the Christian understanding of Creation upon the work of Thomas Aquinas would soon show and would spill over to misunderstandings of the Creator as well as those of His Creation.

I'll complete my late Medieval trilogy by pointing to the hands of a man both a great Church leader and also a great leader of the world, the man

who guided Francis of Assisi in forming a disciplined religious order out of a chaotic movement, which continued to cause some trouble just because of that great Franciscan energy and devotion to God. Pope Innocent III should get much credit for the good that came out of the Franciscan order and movement. He should also be credited, positively and negatively, for playing an important role in establishing forms of late Medieval political and social order. Other popes, many Cardinals, and far more Christian laymen played a role in the formation of political entities which proved to be proto-states, that is, forerunners of modern states.

## 674.5 Can the Body of Christ be Real?: Bottom-up Thinking Denies Reality of Communities, 1300AD-?

Thomistic thought never really took root in Western thought and was in pretty distorted form when Giuseppe Pecci—see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giuseppe\\_Pecci](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giuseppe_Pecci), the theologian and older brother of Pope Leo XIII—see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope\\_Leo\\_XIII](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_Leo_XIII), played a role in reviving Thomistic thought as a living—and quite radical—way of understanding God’s Creation. (Read some of the historical and analytic works of the French philosopher and historian, Etienne Gilson—see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Etienne\\_Gilson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Etienne_Gilson), who was educated in modern philosophical ways of thought and discovered the radical and profound nature of Thomistic thought on his own.) So it is that we modern thinkers have access to intelligent discussions of Thomistic ideas about God the Creator, about His acts-of-being and His Act-of-being which is Himself.

Most Catholic histories don’t talk much, or intelligently enough, about another problem—an anti-Thomism of sorts grew up in the heart of the Catholic Church in the generations after Aquinas. Most other histories also slide over a pro or con discussion of what is—in my opinion—one of the most damaging, intellectual developments in history.

Two powerful and powerfully dangerous thinkers—Franciscans both, Duns Scotus—see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duns\\_Scotus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duns_Scotus) and William of Ockham—see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_of\\_Ockham](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_of_Ockham), developed ways of thought that led to various forms of what I’ll simplistically label as ‘reductionism’, such as radical political/social indi-

vidualism and reductionistic forms of materialism. Aquinas' position can be described as rather a sacramental materialism in which man is an embodied 'soul'. Be careful: the soul of Aquinas was not what we now call soul—it was a purely intellectual and nonhuman entity attached by (philosophical) accident to the human body.

Using Ockham's razor, we could claim that planets exist, and stars and galaxies and even men, but the universe doesn't exist in Einstein's terms, that is, as an entity in its own right and not just a collection of what it contains. The universe can't be observed directly though its existence is compatible with existing forms of gravitational theories—mostly, Einstein's General Theory of Relativity.

Modern thinkers often invoke that razor, and it is a good pragmatic rule to eliminate unnecessary entities from theories, but it is often used by thinkers who are willing to eliminate mind/soul and then speak of the universe without realizing they arise from similar types of thinking from directly observable entities to immaterial relationships or even to greater and more 'total' entities. In fact, the razor could be used to good effect if used to eliminate immaterial entities and to then speak of what is there as an immaterial relationship. Even the electromagnetic fields of modern science and engineering aren't really directly observable things but rather relationships observable from the effects of, say, a moving magnet interacting, or relating to, a charged wire.

All ways of thought have had to be modified or enlarged as we discover more about even revealed truths by exploring this universe and all that it is shaped from such as the strange, immaterial, and quite abstract type of being—quantum wavefunctions under one quantum formalism—from which thing-like being is shaped. As a non-scholar working to create better ways to understand Creation rather than studying existing ways to understand Creation, I have a strong opinion that Thomistic thought can be better updated and expanded to our modern needs—largely by adding in an understanding of being as subject to evolutionary and developmental processes. I think it would take drastic surgery on the insides of the systems of Duns Scotus and William of Ockham for them to correspond well to Creation as we now know.

The takeaway is that the universe is real and not **just** a collection of stars and galaxies and so on. I propose and argue in some of my more particular writings that the same is true of human communities. A human family is a real entity, a form of human being and not just a culturally defined

collection of individual human beings. A town or a nation or a civilization isn't just a collection of individuals but rather an entity in its own right. The Body of Christ, most of all, is for real, the ultimate, complete and perfected, human community, an entity much like an extraordinarily rich and complex human civilization with the Christian Church as its central organ.

I would further propose that the Christian mind can begin its recovery by building a worldview (as I've done) which starts from the above viewpoint. This worldview would be a necessary and central part of a civilization; it would be the organizing principle of a human communal mind which is Christian in the best sense: responsive to Creation as well as to God.

Energy is needed, high levels of energy as was released by Benedict in the 6th century and Francis in the 12th century. We might have faith that God will send us a new holy man of that sort, but we can't anticipate where he will be or even whether he is already with us.

The world needs one or more political and social orders adequate to the needs of huge and extraordinarily complex human communities. Our existing forms of order are quite clearly inadequate to the needs of nation-states, to complex religious institutions, to large universities, to scientific research organizations, and so on. It is a mystery where or when this need will be met.



# 675 The Metaphysics of the Christian Creeds: Why Christianity Is Not Simple.

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2374>. It was finished and uploaded on 2017/04/17.]

Far too often, Christians—including some who should know better—claim that:

Christianity is simple; just follow Christ’s teaching of loving your neighbor and doing good for him.

Baloney.

For reference, you can find the most important of the Western Christian creeds, *Profession of Faith* which is used in the Catholic Mass on Sundays and other Holy Days, at <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/index.cfm>.

This is the first stanza:

I believe in one God,  
the Father almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all things visible and invisible.

But then in the later stanzas of the Profession of Faith, we learn that God is Father. And Son. And a mysterious Person labeled as the “Holy Spirit” seems to also be God.

And God is one, even One, except when He is three, or Three.

What to make of this? We could certainly note that: *Alas, the World isn't So Simple* (see <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1476>); we could certainly ask how the actions of a Creator of a world not so simple could be understood in simple ways, indeed ways which are naive to the point of mindlessness. Did the Almighty complicate the environments and the very being of human beings in order to deliberately obscure all the true simplicity? Maybe Christians are quite confused because it all seemed so simple to those who were taught highly summarized and seemingly simple versions of an appropriately rich and complex understanding of a rich and complex Creation. See *Enriching Our Moral World: Simple Is Digested Complexity*, at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1762> for a discussion of what is quite true and quite well summarized in the title of that essay.

The world seemed so simple for centuries as Christians lived in a Western Civilization which was Christian, imperfectly and incompletely Christian, but also substantially so.

While cautious about tricky matters of pure theology—that is, analysis of revealed knowledge of God in His transcendence—I made some suggestions in my recently released and freely downloadable book, *The Shape of Reality* [56]:

God is a divine manifold, in a manner of speaking. The light of revelation as best understood by human wisdom of the age shines upon God, also in a manner of speaking, and can project an image of Father. Let the wise man move a bit to catch the divine light of revelation from a different angle and the image is that of Son. Move a bit more and the image of the Holy Spirit appears.

Those who have read that book, *The Shape of Reality* [56], will have at least a feel for my preliminary development of a way of dealing with the reality of complex entities made of individuals which each retain their real existence. I concentrate on the reality of human communities. Those who haven't read the book but know some modern geometry (especially differential geometry) and topology might understand what I'm saying or, at least, trying to say. The 'manifold' in the above quotation refers to topological concepts under which a complex surface can have 'small' regions which have the topology or full geometry of a simple Euclidean plane; each of those regions exist as such while the global entity also exists, separately

in a distorted way of speaking. In human terms, the individual exists and continues to exist though he is part of a variety of communities which themselves truly exist and aren't just nominal ways of speaking of mere gatherings of individuals. Nor is it true that those individuals are merely parts of a Borg-like collective. (Warning, each of the three Persons of God is the entirety of God in a way beyond the sense of each member of the Body of Christ being the entirety of that Body. This is the primary reason for caution in extending this way of thinking into the theological realm.)

In other words, we now have the capability of thinking rationally and intelligently about the Trinitarian God of Christian belief. This doesn't mean this way of thinking about God in His transcendence is a perfect statement of the truth or the completeness of the truth, but it is a start on talking in rational and intelligent ways of the Trinitarian God, Father and Son and Holy Spirit.

Though I've been concentrating in recent writings on what might be labeled structural aspects of being, by way of geometry and topology, the real issue is relationships. A simple reading of the previous sentence is quite wrong—modern geometry and topology, largely by way of algebraic tools and concepts, is consistent with the trend in modern science and mathematics toward the realization of the primacy of relationships over stuff (or structures). There are major fields of geometry, such as symplectic geometry, where there aren't any well-defined shapes; in symplectic geometry, area is a constant but there is no well-defined measurement of distance or angles, no firm shape.

The best way to make sense of created being is to follow St John the Evangelist and the quantum theorists and evolutionary theorists in positing primacy of relationships over stuff, where stuff covers abstract forms of created being as well as concrete, thing-like forms. Relationships are ontologically prior to stuff and forms and structures and relationships create and shape all of those, sometimes forming complex entities. Something similar can be used to think through the Trinitarian God of Jesus Christ. After all, God is the Creator of all that is not Him and all that is not Him must, to some extent, reflect Him in being manifestations of some of His thoughts. God is unified, not in the sense of some frozen crystal, but in the sense that His mind and heart and hands, His thoughts and feelings and actions, are one.

God who is pure being and thus pure relationships in my metaphysical explorations can be seen to some—probably significant—extent even in

thing-like being.

I've written in this essay about this particular issue, being able to speak rationally of the Trinitarian God of Jesus Christ, as a case study of sorts. This short and informal study was intended merely to present the most fundamental belief of Christians as one which can be handled in a rational way recognizing modern knowledge of God's Creation, modern knowledge of both concrete and abstract created being, but we have to be willing to think in ways which are far from simple. Over time, these beliefs, which reflect modern knowledge of created being, will become the bedrock of Christian understandings of our world and all of created being which is not limited to this world. At that time, these beliefs will be part of a 'simple' understanding of reality—digested complexity as I discussed in the already referenced essay: *Enriching Our Moral World: Simple Is Digested Complexity*, at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1762>.

It takes a lot of hard intellectual labor to see the world in simple terms, and the simple terms we Westerners inherited from Christian thinkers of past centuries are no longer plausible when we consider that modern knowledge of both concrete and abstract being. Either Western Christianity will retreat to a high-walled intellectual ghetto of superstitious beliefs and practices or else it will start passing through a generations-long period of digesting the complexity of the world to produce a seemingly simple understanding.

# 676 Making God's Thoughts Our Thoughts, God's Ways Our Ways: Why Christianity Is Not Simple.

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2380>. It was finished and uploaded on 2017/04/21.]

## 676.1 We Are the Image of God, Except When that Requires Effort on Our Part

At an Easter Vigil Mass (Roman Catholic), I was a lector—5th reading. That reading is from the book of the prophet Isaiah and includes these lines Isaiah 55:8–9:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.  
As high as the heavens are above the earth,  
so high are my ways above your ways  
and my thoughts above your thoughts.

[IS 55:8-9]

It's easy to misinterpret these words, reading into them warnings of a barrier between us and God which can't be surmounted—despite the

ongoing refrain: We are the images of God. In fact, much of the Christian support for human rights, including the rights of the unborn or the mentally disabled or others with little or no power to defend themselves, comes from this belief that we are the images of God. I'm going to recommend a different meaning for those words of Isaiah, a meaning which preserves the idea we are images of God in some substantial way—not just an ambiguous handwaving way.

In this age when Christian faith and Christian courage have weakened greatly, in this age when Christian minds have decayed still faster than Christian hearts and hands, these words are typically taken as a statement that understanding God is beyond our capabilities. The implication is that we should just relax, live with the advances which come from secularized intellectual activities in organizing complex organizations or or developing good and bad technology. The latter leads to the fear of some of us that, bereft of a Christian civilization—increasingly bereft of even Christian structure in our families and local societies, we are traveling with the increasingly secularized (not paganized!!) herd, a herd not heading toward the world where Christ's friends share the life of God.

Modern Christians, like perhaps nearly all modern human beings of the West, have been taught they have a right to hold opinions on all matters subject to human opinions; they have not been taught a duty to learn something about an issue before forming an opinion or even before somehow constructing a viable understanding of that issue. A quick trip to the local library isn't necessary for someone to determine that Iranians/Iraqis/whoever can't think rationally in the way of us Americans and some Europeans; it's knowledge that simply. . . Well, I think it's an assumption drawn out of the way American leaders and entertainment/news figurines act towards and talk about these other peoples.

In fact, while Americans talk as if they can get a factual and intellectual grasp of anything capable of being grasped by any human mind, they bow to self-serving ruling elites and their servants which present themselves as being plausibly true authorities. To be sure, acceptance of someone or some group as true authorities is a human act, often self-serving or self-justifying. It's easy enough for modern Westerners to accept an Einstein or his less famous successors, but quite disturbing to accept Darwin and his successors. More than a little bit of our self-understanding of our individual or ethnic or racial selves would be rendered vulnerable to disturbing changes if we were to honestly and courageously explore human origins and the resulting

human nature.

Our claims for our human natures are quite grand indeed but only in ways that don't require a response from us that demands time and energy and honest contemplation. We modern human beings in general truly don't do well in giving credit to the human mind or even the divine mind because we've been taught by a very bad and ideologically corrupted educational system to despise intellectual effort and to avoid it where possible; thus it is that the most popular of great literature of past generations, such as the novels of Charles Dickens, become mere obstacle courses to struggle through before returning to easier forms of thought.

We learn God's thoughts by studying His manifested thoughts. We learn God's ways by studying His acts-of-being, both creating and shaping created being. (God's ways are different from His thoughts only by way of creaturely perspective.)

I've claimed often and strongly that Aquinas was right, perhaps even modestly so, in his claims that the human mind is capable, in principle, of encapsulating any thing and all things in God's creation, though an actual human mind is not truly capable of understanding fully so much as a gnat. We have to have faith and courage and move resolutely forward in exploring the acts-of-being of God in His freely accepted role as Creator of a particular Creation, which particularity constrains the Almighty, by His own free acceptance, in a modern understanding of the covenanted relationship of Creator towards all that He had created. God honors His own thoughts as manifested in Creation, a modern view which honors but greatly expands upon the ancient Semitic idea of a covenant which is a divine version of what a human king offers to His subjects, with royal legal advisors hovering about. Nowadays, explorers of this world, tinkers and engineers as well as physicists and historians, have joined in, unconsciously in most cases, with old-fashioned lawyers in the struggle to forge new understandings of human communities and human history and technological possibilities and the sun and so on. Those understandings, which will total to an understanding of all of created being in a coherent civilization, are that modern equivalent of the covenants of the Bible.

In the first part of the first chapter of *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53], I deal with an important part of this issue in a way that I might never improve upon. The chapter title is: *Being Empirical with St Thomas Aquinas*. The title of the first section of that chapter is: *A General Approach Toward Proper Shaping of the Human Mind*.

And here is the entirety of the text of that section (with some minor editing to allow for context):

## 676.2 A General Approach Toward Proper Shaping of the Human Mind

Because of the importance to my thought of some insights about metaphysical subjects by St Thomas Aquinas, I'm including a short chapter providing a short summary of those insights which are sometimes explicitly discussed elsewhere in this book but are always at the foundations of this way of thought.

Aquinas had a view of "the wisdom of this world" which greatly clarifies, or perhaps significantly modifies, the view expressed by St Paul in 1 Corinthians. In fact, the view of Aquinas is one I've struggled to communicate in my books and my Internet writings, though I've tried to expand and enrich that understanding to better consider the vast mountains of empirical knowledge which have accumulated since the 13th century. I think we should all contemplate the advice of St Thomas to learn humbly from Creation:

[J]ust as a disciple reaches an understanding of the teacher's wisdom by the words he hears from him, so man can reach an understanding of God's wisdom by examining the creatures [God] made. . . [Page 17 of St. Thomas Aquinas' commentary on 1 Corinthians.] [3]

Even our understanding of God's purposes for Creation should be subject to testing against empirical knowledge. I'll provide another quote from Aquinas:

[T]he wisdom which attains to God through the things of this world is not the wisdom of this world but the wisdom of God. . . [page 51 of St. Thomas Aquinas' commentary on 1 Corinthians.] [3]

In terms used by Aquinas and some other Scholastics: we know God through His effects in Creation. God has told us a few things about His

necessary and transcendent being, but most of what we can know about God relates to His freely adopted role as Creator of this particular Creation. And we have to remember that even God's words spoken to Moses or a few others were spoken in human languages and necessarily relied on concepts within the grasp of those the Almighty was speaking to. In the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Aquinas had told us:

[T]he first philosophy [metaphysics] utilizes the teachings of all the sciences in order to realize its objectives. [page 35 of *Summa Contra Gentiles, Book Two: Creation* [4]]

Even theological systems are built upon metaphysical foundations. As such, they're built from the knowledge of the metaphysician, knowledge that should include that of specific sciences such as physics and mathematics and biology and history and so forth. I'll propose a definition of Wisdom which is put in greater context in a later chapter of *A More Exact Understanding of Human Being* [53] with the title of *The Wisdom of the World and The Wisdom of God*:

**Wisdom** An understanding of Creation and its relationship to its Creator that takes into account the best available empirical knowledge but orients that knowledge as well as the knower's personal experience toward the goals given by one's understanding of the Creator's revelations.

We should learn to respond to God's Creation when forming our ways of thought, hence, when shaping our minds, rather than holding on to ways of thought which are magnificent antiques, once plausible as well as beautiful but no longer consistent with what is known about Creation. Yet, we should honor those antiques for what they are and for the role they played in allowing us to advance further in human knowledge of Creation and its Creator.



# 677 We Don't Know What We Had and We're Making It Gone

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2400>. It was finished and uploaded on 2017/05/26.]

You don't know what you've got till it's gone. [*Big Yellow Taxi*, Joni Mitchell.]

As Western Civilization is decaying, we still don't know what we had and there's a good reason for that. As I've stated repeatedly, a civilization is mostly inside of its members: our understanding of ourselves and others, of Creation and Creator. That is in terms of theists such as Christians and Jews. The Body of Christ believe He has and they have received special revelations about the God Who is Creator. Something similar can be said about Jews, the People of Israel. For the civilizations of other sorts of peoples, you can adjust the language; such civilizations will resemble the Body of Christ even if they have truly evil aspects but, even in terms of this mortal realm, they won't have the fullness or most of the virtues of that Body.

Human communities are for real and Christians are bound to believe that the Body of Christ is the perfect and complete human community. Yet, there are many human communities, some of which feed into the Body of Christ in some ways, some of which are dead-ends of a sort. All of those communities are mortal creatures as much as are the individuals who are members of those communities. The United States has had a longer lifespan than did George Washington, but it won't live for ever and is currently a setting for battles between various gangs of bankers and politicians

and national security thugs and corporate executives and—very bad sign—seemingly a few generals of recent retirement and maybe a few still on active duty.

A well-known economist, Michael Hudson, wrote a book in recent years which bore the title, *Killing the Host: How Financial Parasites and Debt Bondage Destroy the Global Economy*. You can pretty guess his claim from the title. I think his idea can be generalized—and, in fact, without pretending to special prescience I can state that I had a similar idea based upon my readings of standard histories of periods when human communities were in turmoil and the ruling classes had broken up into gangs not fully different from those street gangs found in the bad neighborhoods of our greater cities. Each power-holder or wealth-holder is hard at work satisfying his own greed and ambition or perhaps—a little less despicably—trying to hold onto power and wealth for the sake of his own children or for the sake of his greater family. We wanted individualism and we got a snake-pit.

I'm going to lightly address one pseudo-charitable, pseudo-humanitarian program in the modern ideology of liberalism or reductionistic individualism: mass immigration based upon the idea that communities are nominal entities, mere voluntary gatherings of individuals which are accorded 'true existence'. We can build better communities, inclusive communities made of all sorts of peoples of different characteristics and beliefs and behaviors. By simply "taking down walls," we can advance directly to Heaven. None of this stuff about evolutionary and developmental processes which work over the millenia. None of this Christian stuff about slowly struggling toward Heaven and often falling back, seemingly further back than the position of our barbarian, devil-worshipping ancestors. We can do it because we're exceptional and we just need to describe a world of peace and justice and love and then harshly punish those who don't act up to our standards. I'll write a little later about our fall into a state of greed, but here I'd just like to note that some of our well-meaning citizens fell for the ploys of exploiters by way of an ignorant and stupid belief that we can design human communities, ones which approach perfection by some standard or other—usually a standard appropriate for a promising 12 year-old.

I've been writing more than a bit about communities recently and my latest book, *The Shape of Reality* [56], was an effort to to better describe complex entities, such as communities, by drawing upon concepts abstracted from mathematics, the qualitative drawn out of the quantitative and formal. I worked with differential geometry and topology and am

currently engaged in a slow and frustrating struggle to expand the mathematical horizons of my 62 year-old mind.

Before moving on, I wish to emphasize that, in this Creation, things happen slowly and gradually, by way of processes of evolution and development. The members of the Body of Christ come from a species which has evolved from unknown ancestors which lived about 3-3.5 billion years ago. The universe itself has been developing, and perhaps evolving, for about 14 billion years or so, though that estimate is subject to some revision.

We are an impatient species, a species which finds it hard to realize something I've claimed several times:

In this mortal realm, the mind's main domain is the future.

For example, our moral actions are habitual and almost reflexive—we don't have time to think through all our moral decisions or even many of our moral decisions. Our habits and usual behaviors are developed under the guidance of our elders in a particular cultural tradition. Some will participate actively in these complex processes of education and character-formation. Most will allow themselves to be shaped by those they trust or at least those they are dependent upon. Unconsciously formed in most, moral habits and other habits and attitudes will seem to be a part of our human being as much as our instincts to form families or kin-groups or even our instincts to survive.

This is likely one reason that multi-cultural human gatherings don't easily or quickly turn into real communities—and may turn into killing fields or highly stratified gatherings of peoples who remain separated, some maybe living under enforced condition of hardship. We often find living in settled communities easy just because we share habits with our storekeepers, lawyers, doctors, bankers, and local political leaders. If we don't share such habits with the various retailers and service-providers we depend upon, then we have to engage in exhausting and sometimes dangerous efforts to figure out the motives of mysterious aliens and then to enter potentially dangerous and nerve-wracking relationships. This is one reason that some cosmopolitan human beings are very valuable and are (sometimes) well-rewarded. They make it possible for Irish and Italian and Jewish and Black communities to exist separately but nearby, interacting through those with the skills and attitudes to deal with alien others. Most of us aren't Marco Polo and many will go voyaging among alien peoples and show ourselves to

be closer to the Spanish conquistadors—who were not evil but were tough warriors forged in centuries of fighting against North African Moslems and were also a bit ambitious and hungry for wealth. Their moral characters were better formed for the battlefield or for exploring dangerous wilderness regions than for peacefully occupying the lands of alien peoples.

There are some who can deal properly with alien peoples. Marco Polo comes ever to mind in that context, a man successful in his stay in China and after his return to Italy. Such men are very valuable, but they are valuable as bridges between communities of human beings who take relatively more time to grow comfortable with each other; that process of growing more comfortable involves the building of habits of behavior which are common to both peoples, at least under certain circumstances. A simple example of different habits is: fixed and (presumably) fair prices vs negotiated prices which typically start from a high offering price by the one holding a desired product. It's fun to bargain for hats or elephant statues in the shops in Tijuana, but it would be exhausting—at least for most Americans—to have to do that for their cans of peas and their children's underwear. And such problems lead to distrust, with one disturbing example being the seemingly simple issue of greeting a woman on the streets. Moslem women coming to the United States seem to feel free to move around with relative freedom but ignore the American customs of casual but friendly greetings on the sidewalks and in the public buildings in small towns.

So it is that I come to the research of Robert D Putnam (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert\\_D.\\_Putnam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_D._Putnam)), research which I've referenced a few times over the past ten years or so. In that article, we learn:

In recent years, Putnam has been engaged in a comprehensive study of the relationship between trust within communities and their ethnic diversity. His conclusion based on over 40 cases and 30,000 people within the United States is that, other things being equal, more diversity in a community is associated with less trust both between and within ethnic groups.

We learn in that same article that lowered trust in areas with high diversity is also associated with:

- Lower confidence in local government, local leaders and the local news media.

- Lower political efficacy—that is, confidence in one’s own influence.
- Lower frequency of registering to vote, but more interest and knowledge about politics and more participation in protest marches and social reform groups.
- Higher political advocacy, but lower expectations that it will bring about a desirable result.
- Less expectation that others will cooperate to solve dilemmas of collective action (e.g., voluntary conservation to ease a water or energy shortage).
- Less likelihood of working on a community project.
- Less likelihood of giving to charity or volunteering.
- Fewer close friends and confidants.
- Less happiness and lower perceived quality of life.
- More time spent watching television and more agreement that “television is my most important form of entertainment”.

Now we come to the punchline. The deliberate opening of the immigration gates and the other programs which have led to great damage, not yet complete destruction, of the countries of the West are the result of programs of the mainstream institutions of the West:

- the governments,
- the non-denominational charitable agencies,
- the Christian churches and the various branches of Judaism, including their charitable agencies,
- the schools at all levels,
- the publishing and journalistic industry,
- the banks and various corporations including the real estate developers local and national, etc.

The ongoing damage, and perhaps ultimate destruction, of Western Civilization has many of the appearances of a well-organized and huge conspiracy. As do most large-scale movements in human history. We need to realize that even the multi-culturing of the United States, and all of the West, is but a part of destructive parasitical behavior by our ruling elites and their allies—clueless snowflakes, morally corrupt intellectuals, politicians desperate to control all that exists, and so on.

Conspiracy? Well, we should reserve that word for specific, criminal projects, such as the Brink's robbery or the takeover of Russia by Lenin and his followers or some of history's most spectacular murders of public figures. Usually, we should think in terms of convergence, as individuals or small groups act in their own parochial interests and those interests turn out to significantly overlap with each other. Such a process might even be that which led to some of the spectacular crimes of recent decades in various parts of the world—the United States itself or those with an American embassy or those lacking in the capability of excluding American activists and intelligence agents.

The invisible hand. The invisible claw. The invisible fang dripping blood. Adam Smith saw truly but he saw truly in an age when there was very imperfect but still substantial Christian moral order in England and Scotland, when there was so much opportunity as to leave little room for the types of parasitical human beings described by Professor Hudson, when true innovators and wealth-creators were dominant and still rising. The invisible hand phenomena he saw can take some nasty forms in other circumstances than those of Glasgow and London in the 1760s. (Though they were nasty enough even in those circumstances; young men were setting off to make their fortunes and to have some adventures and would come back with chests of silver and gold after trading slaves or opium.)

Given some freedom for the various agents in the economy or politics or science or cultural projects, momentum builds and the herd starts moving together as if coordinated by an invisible hand. If not for this growing coordination between members of the involved populations, nations would not have formed and religions would have been all local and science wouldn't have become (at least for now) a self-sustaining operation. Nor would the West African slave-trade have taken on such a well-organized form—as if directed by an invisible hand. Or an invisible claw. Or an invisible fang dripping blood.

Clearly, it's only a minority of the people of the West who have con-

sciously turned a set of attitudes and incoherent ideologies into a project to destroy their own civilization—and that of their children, though they have recruited hordes of college students, snowflakes in a common way of speaking. More generally, those snowflakes are badly damaged human beings—including their communal parts and aspects of their human being. Perhaps mostly those communal parts and aspects. In any case, it might be that some of the children of the American middle-class and perhaps a lesser number of the children of the American working-class have been taught to hate their own families and ethnic groups, a lesson they've learned as least as well as the children of the Soviet Union in the days of Stalin and Beria. It would also seem that Christian leaders who have proven themselves incompetent at passing on the faith to the children in their communities have decided to betray the members of their communities in order to help peoples from other countries.

In Chapter 547, *Self-government Isn't Government Structure*, I had this to say about this situation:

We have let our exploitive classes destroy our own insides, our minds and hearts and hands—including all that is meant by “moral character.” We have, in old-fashioned language, sold our souls in return for television shows and the Superbowl and affordable tennis clubs and fancier housing than we need.

There is a major qualification to all of this. Many of the college students and religious leaders, probably some of the teachers and charity workers, some others, meant well and some might still mean well. Probably even some of the most greedy and ambitious of the exploitive class (elites, if you wish) had not meant ill when all of this decay was set in motion. At the same time, all of those people, and their equivalents in the past two or more centuries, should have been aware of a certain, shall we say, “loss of focus” in the Western mind, a problem which was spreading into Western feelings and behaviors by at least 1800: the mind leads the way into the future, the heart motivates and the hands get it done. The motivations of today's hearts and the actions of today's hands are shaped by yesterday's minds. This lack of focus on what's important led to various problems, including the one noted by Ortega y Gasset in *The Revolt of the Masses* [60]: the modern era freed many from what might be labeled peasant lives of limited opportunity and limited perspective but the leaders of all those parochial peoples who now

had some access to more cosmopolitan lives failed to lead; they chose not to raise their flocks to a higher outlook and a greater understanding of Western, Christian Civilization; they chose rather to descend to the more vulgar lives of peasants having some money and being set loose in the wonderful and dangerous city.

So it is that the herd is still larger than the total of exploiters and activist-suckers. The herd is most of us and our priests and ministers and teachers and town-fathers and smalltown journalists and so on. It was most of our parents, all of those parents who tolerated:

- the low-quality of the American schools, deteriorating still more beginning in the false prosperity of the 1950s—the distinguished mathematician Raymond Wilder saw a significant drop in mathematical knowledge and skills starting in that decade,
- the ideological corruption of their children in schools which did their best to delay maturing of those students and to socialize them into being American consumerist widgets (for lack of a better term),
- television with its noisy children's shows so destructive of any developing skills of concentration and its family entertainment composed of exceptionally nice people living in plastic communities bereft of the interesting characters found in the works of Mark Twain and other worthwhile, morally good entertainments,
- pro sports becoming a major part of American life even as it evolved from something largely admirable (“where have you gone, Joe DiMaggio”) to freak-shows run by moral degenerates,
- the destruction of smalltowns and city neighborhoods in the interests of mall developers and large stores,
- the centralization of the American economy and consequent mobilization of the American worker—didn't settled peoples once look down upon nomadic peoples?,
- the destruction of local political corruption in order to centralize it in Washington,

- the destruction of local banking systems in order to centralize financial power in New York City and other such places (wonderful in their own way),
- ...

In a word, we've destroyed what we inherited, what we were beholden to protect and hand on to future generations, and we did so in the interest of short-term gains of the sort that men and women of better moral characters might have disdained but certainly wouldn't have accepted under the terms offered: "become dependent upon us, the rulers of centralized power and wealth and give us your children, we'll provide you with your hearts' desires." We made a terrible bargain with Satan and now he can't even keep his promises of prosperity. But that matters not. Whatever the particulars of your beliefs—I consider myself a Catholic bound to a living tradition and don't believe in the existence of angels and demons, the evil we've done is to turn away from God and from our communities. If we can't get all we were promised in this mortal realm, we still gave up our desire to be saved, a desire which has to show in at least an awareness of our need to keep our priorities straight, for our sake and the sake of the future generations and the sake of the Body of Christ—the community of the friends of God. As it is, most Americans and most Westerners in general seem only to be upset that Satan isn't keeping his side of his bargain with us.

As I've claimed for years, the true foundation of a civilization is found inside the members of that civilization, in an understanding of all that exists. I'll be as intelligent as a musician or poet rather than as form-bound as 'good' writers; I'll repeat an earlier part of this essay.

[refrain]

In Chapter 547, *Self-government Isn't Government Structure*, I had this to say about this situation:

We have let our exploitive classes destroy our own insides, our minds and hearts and hands—including all that is meant by "moral character." We have, in old-fashioned language, sold our souls in return for television shows and the Superbowl and affordable tennis clubs and fancier housing than we need.

[end of refrain]



# 678 Is God's Creation Compatible with Centralization of Authority and Power?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2428>. It was finished and uploaded on 2017/08/01.]

Let's consider one historically important central power: the Papacy. The history of the Papacy was actually quite complicated but we can pass over those complications for my current purposes.

I choose the Papacy for several reasons. Firstly, I entered the Catholic Church as an adult and am currently an (excessively?) active Catholic parishioner. I hold an orthodox version of the Western Catholic Christian faith, including a largely Orthodox view about the history and true nature of the Christian Church and its hierarchy, sacraments, relationship to God, and so on. Secondly, the Western Church—mostly biased too strongly to Roman ways—was one of the central communities in the very formation of 'the West' in all of the strands of human being: political and cultural and economic and moral and so on. Thirdly, though not really separate from the prior claim, the inability of Western Christianity to deal with modern understandings of very important realms of God's Creation is perhaps the major reason for the current decline of the West—that decline seeming to be irreversible at this point. Fourthly, the Church Herself (a 'female' organ of the Body of Christ) seems to have a 'revolutionary' or 'progressive' leader who is trying hard to bring the Church and its leadership into synch with the Progressive communities of the modern West—which communities I have labeled as parasitical, living off the resources nurtured by the traditional (**not** stagnant) communities of the West. To be sure, many of

the traditional thinkers of the West in this time of decay do advocate a stagnant way of thinking and of structuring our human communities; this is true in political as well as in ecclesiastical communities.

The Papacy, the institution itself strongly centered on the Pope and sometimes even being his prison, is also useful as an intellectual organizing point for another reason: it is the only institution which has existed for the entirety of West's existence, where the West can be understood as a vaguely defined human community drawing upon Rome (after the collapse of Roman political authority in the West) and Jerusalem and developing over the years C300AD to C1800AD when the Enlightenment had clearly gone wrong after the incompetence of Christians in dealing with the great opportunities of modern science and other endeavors to explore this wonderful world God gave us. These endeavors include such fields as textual analysis and physical anthropology as well as physics and mathematics as well as the explorations of the physical world and the development of modern technology and industry.

And, of course, it's always useful in the search for larger-scale or abstract understandings to have something concrete to focus on. So, I'll turn to a quick schematic of papal authority. We have:

- the Pope in the context of:
- the Western Church in the context of:
- the entirety of Christianity in the context of:
- the entirety of the Body of Christ (<b>not</b> just the Church) in the context of:
- the universe in which we are pilgrims in the context of:
- the entirety of Creation in the context of:
- God's purposes for Creation and all it contains.

If the Catholic Church, especially the Roman Catholic church, has played a passive but essential role in the death-throes of Western Civilization, that passive attitude—defend but don't adapt in an intelligent

and tradition-respecting way, has led to this danger of the Church being corrupted inside by the same forces the Churchmen and other churchmen (Protestants and others) refused to engage in a healthy and productive and creative way. One good example of mindless defense was Pope Pius X's *Pascendi dominici gregis* ("Feeding the Lord's Flock", see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pascendi\\_dominici\\_gregis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pascendi_dominici_gregis)) which was a relentless condemnation of a certain (not all that common at the time) form of Modernism without a hint of Christian responses to the problems and opportunities which the so-called Modernists were responding to. There were no ideas of such responses, only ghetto-walls for the minds of most Catholics—likely it was that some who tried to stay outside those walls for all the right reasons ended up leaving the Catholic Church. And many who stayed began to nurture the suspicion that Christianity had no positive ideas, only brutal criticisms of the ideas and attitudes and behaviors growing up in a world increasingly beyond the comprehension of the Catholic Churchmen.

It seems to me that the all-too common understanding of the spiritual descendant of Peter as being the ruler of the Apostles is wrong because it conflicts with God's effects in His Work of Creation. The Pope is the head of the college of the Apostolic successors (all legitimate bishops, Catholic and others). He is not any sort of despotic ruler, though even good Popes have had to take on that role for the good—if it had been possible to shed such wrongful authority when no longer needed for God's purposes. Nor do the members of the college of Apostolic successors have the full authority they gained during the years when most educated men were priests and monks and those men, often against their own desires, were sucked up into a vacuum in the courts of kings and counts and in all departments of research and teaching institutions.

We live in a world in which evolution and development dominate. We rarely even suspect what the ideal is until it begins to show itself in the world; Hume and the other empiricists were wrong in thinking empirical reality to be the whole show but they were right in denying that empirical reality is just a curtain in front of some 'real-world', 'real' in the sense of Plato, 'ideal' in the sense of what this world is moving toward—so to speak. Looking at matters on the longer-term, we never know what the 'ideal' is since the human brain evolved in response to this physical world and the human mind has developed, upon that brain, in response to those realms and other realms of God's Creation which men could reach at any given

time—such as the abstract realms of mathematics and metaphysics. There is, in fact, strong truth in claims that the human mind and the world are evolving and developing in synch.

We live in a world where the insides to physical creatures, living and nonliving, are as dynamic as the outside. Neither Aristotle nor Thomas Aquinas could quite figure out how much of human thought could proceed—they knew the brain to be the center of thought and thought the brain to be a static entity and so they considered and somewhat endorsed the idea of a mind or soul as made of different ‘stuff’ than physical matter. They shouldn’t be blamed for living before modern chemistry and biochemistry and all the instrumentation, microscopes and MRIs and cellular dyes and so on. But they made that mistake and it’s embedded in Western thought in various ways, some of which I largely grasp and others I grasp but not well enough for clear expression, and others which are obscure to me. It’s all a confusing mess largely because of the entanglement of the human mind (think relationships largely mediated on our end by our brains) and all else we can perceive or validly conceive.

I’m in the same position I was in ten years ago or so regarding ways of thinking of communities as being real in this world seen in reductionistic terms. In my previous series of three posts, I moved forward in stating my confusion about the dynamic nature of God’s Creation using our own human being as a focus:

1. Chapter 336, *What is the Totality of a Human Life?: Individuals and Communities.*,
2. Chapter 337, *What is the Totality of a Human Life?: Individual and Communal Intent.*, and
3. Chapter 338, *What is the Totality of a Human Life?: Unity, Coherence, and Completeness.*

Though I can’t claim to have cleared up even the ‘structural’ issues of human being, I have made some progress in at least defining what needs to be done by those younger than me—see *The Shape of Reality* [56].

Sticking to just human being: how do we discuss and understand these dynamic relationships of human being which exist at so many levels? There are individual human beings and various communities, starting from the more or less biologically mandated communities of families and ‘tribes’ and

then ranging from card clubs through ethnic clubs to local political communities and through many others up to the entirety of the human race. To me, the ultimate community is one which is essentially a unified and coherent and complete civilization with the Christian Church as its primary and central organ.

But there is no centrally imposed order on all of this, this sheer mess in strong opposition to the human desire for simplicity and for static forms of order. Order does come to an entity partly from the greater realm in which it is embedded but also from inside of the entity—even inside the brute matter of that entity—and from other surrounding entities of various degrees of influence in either direction. And it's all rapidly changing, evolving and developing as well as decaying and dying.

Our desire for that simplicity and static forms of order conflicts with the way this world works, with the way that all of Creation works. The world is such that power and authority can't be truly centralized: the Creator Himself has not chosen to work in such a way, to exercise His power as a despot.

Order isn't to be enforced upon this world from a central region, or from above—if you prefer.

Yet, order is being established—though there seems to be a large de-  
volution or setback occurring in the West because of greedy and overly-ambitious leaders who aren't even very competent. Order is growing, despite the current setbacks. Human communities are generally growing and becoming better-ordered, though growth in recent centuries has sometimes overwhelmed any processes establishing order; many huge human communities have passed through or are passing through periods of partial chaos. Libertarians can be credited with seeing that stable and long-lasting order can't be imposed by central authorities. They fail to see that large and well-ordered human communities are, over the long-run, ordering themselves as if there was some sort of central authority, or Invisible Hand, directing the process; this is more or less known to be true in economic realms, but it's also true in other realms: political and cultural and so on.

Order grows from inside of entities and communities of entities; it is also impressed upon entities and communities of entities from the outside. Order comes bubbling up and comes raining down. Any of these growth and development processes can be gentle or harsh.

For now, lacking much of a program for making sense of this, for providing some way of properly enrichening and complexifying my worldview, I'm

going to describe my intentions in a way entangled with more traditional spiritual terms—which remain valid but aren't likely to produce the basic tools and concepts we need to move forward in better understanding Creation including human nature. Again, as we learn more and as our human communities grow and become more complex, Creation itself grows richer and more complex—we are creating new forms of being, most especially human being.

A pagan God rules from above or outside, rules as if being a more powerful version of a human king or aristocracy. That pagan God rules by command and by force imposed from above. And so it is that we have the ultimate sort of centralized power.

The Christian God (or the Jewish God) is the source of being, supreme but not needing to exercise powers in the way of a human king—though we should remember the Almighty can do so if He wishes. Since the God of Jesus Christ is the source of being, He is everywhere and is not a pagan God or god sitting on a throne on a mountaintop though that image seems to be the best that many believers can manage when thinking about the Almighty. And it becomes the false ideal for the Church regarded as the (entire) Body of Christ. We need ways to think about God and our relationships with Him which transcend the traps of our natural pagan ways of thought as well as the modern philosophical and scientific tendencies to push God off to the distance until He no longer even exists. You can see such a process of distancing in the family of John Adams who came from Calvinist stock, was himself a Deist who yet respected versions of Christianity with strong beliefs and whose descendants were increasingly Deistic until God was of no importance at all in their lives. When God is so far away and so little involved with His own Creation, He ceases to exist.

My current way of looking at matters, an expansion of my views as expressed in *The Shape of Reality* [56], isn't something that came to me from some sort of contemplations of immaterial realms of being. Rather did it come to me from interactions of Christian teachings with modern knowledge of concrete realms of being and also modern knowledge of certain abstract realms of being—mostly mathematics but also creative writings and other human fields of endeavor. It is those abstract realms of being which have led my thoughts and feelings and acts in directions at least somewhat parallel to the thoughts of those known as spiritual masters.

Elijah couldn't find God in all the great forces of nature but did find Him, and heard His commandment and encouragement, in a whisper (or

“gentle blowing” or similar words in various translations). (See 1 Kings 19:.)

To me, this means that Elijah found God inside, not just inside of his own mortal self but also inside of the atmosphere so that the Almighty could be heard more easily in a gentle breeze which didn't distract and frighten the senses of a human animal as did the winds of a great storm. God could have been found just as easily in the ground itself: to the modern mind in the wonders of the soils and rocks and waters and all the remarkable relationships that underly their properties, starting at the level of subatomic particles and all their relationships described by quantum physics.

Somewhere in his great pile of writings, Augustine of Hippo stated that God is deeper inside of us than we can reach. He is also higher than astronomers can see with their telescopes and more deeply inside matter than the physicists can see with their accelerators. He is more abstract than the category theory of mathematics, larger than the greatest of transfinite numbers. He is more concrete than a granite slab.

Again: the Almighty doesn't seem to run things in the way of a king, nor is He merely a kindly grandfather doting on His young ones. Let God be God, meaning that we have to be openminded about God in His transcendence and also in His freely chosen role as Creator of a particular Creation. We have a few abstract descriptions of God which are binding: all-powerful and all-knowing and all-loving. He has also revealed to us a few aspects of His 'concrete' transcendence, mostly His triune nature. We know much about God's acts as Creator and Shaper of His Creation. That latter knowledge doesn't yet show much in Christian thought. We think yet of God in the Neo-Platonic terms of many of the early Fathers of the Church.

Much of modern knowledge points to relationships, participation in being and in shaping being at all levels—from subatomic particles through blue whales and on to galactic clusters, and self-organization which feeds into the self-organization at smaller and greater scales of being. God is the driving force in all of this, absolutely powerful and all-knowing but still seemingly managing to give us some freedom—at all scales of being. When it comes to human being, at all scales from individuals through small communities and on to the Body of Christ or ultimate human civilization, we have a mind-boggling complexity of relationships with each other, with other animals, with all the physical universe, with all Creation, and with God. Our relationships with God and with creatures or all of Creation are internal as well as external, though human animals—of all known creatures—have brains capable of generating minds (certain sorts of rela-

tionships) which can respond to Creation in such a way as to encapsulate it. And we can encapsulate whatever God tells us, whether He gives us hints about the true nature of Creation or hints about His own nature. This is inside of us though Judaism and then Christianity mulled over bodies of private revelation and turned them into authoritative public revelation. Even the truly public revelations of Christianity came from those whispers inside of prophet or king or priest, of carpenter or tentmaker or fisherman. Jesus of Nazareth spoke softly when announcing that He was the Son of God and those who heard were often uncertain that those whispers were truly in God's voice.

God Himself leads and teaches as well as creating and shaping. In human terms, a leader such John Paul II and a teacher such as Benedict XVI take on some of the true nature of the God they served. Moreover, the nature of this world of evolution and development tells us—at least those of us who have studied some history and some evolutionary biology—that brute matter and animals of limited intelligence (including human beings emerging from darkness to a greater knowledge of God and Creation) sometimes need to be forced. William the Conqueror, Henry II, Henry VIII, and other brutal English kings played a role in establishing the order which became—almost miraculously—a political system which moved by some sort of internally generated forces toward an expanded franchise, approaching a state of inclusive self-government before the Enlightenment (British as well as Continental) went out of control and, more recently, turned developments back toward some sort of elitist rule—elitist in the sense of those who are most unscrupulous and not in the sense of any sort of earned or displayed merit.

After the tradition-respecting reforms of various modern Bishops of Rome, we're seeing the Papacy and the Curia of the Roman Catholic Church being returned to that same sort of elitist rule. In both cases, the rhetoric of the so-called progressives who are returning the institutions of the West to more primitive forms of organization forces them to pretend to be moving forward, and this is true of Pope Francis and his various packs of attack-dogs who pretend to be Christian intellectuals. Any forward movement is intended to destroy the structures of human communities and even those of healthy human individuals, to destroy in the interest of reshaping the political and ecclesiastical and other human communities of the West, reshaping them to be under the control of a small number of power-hungry leaders of Western Christianity and Western political systems, of bankers

and generals and corporate executives and morally degenerate intellectuals in the mold of Zbigniew Brzezinski as well as priests who seem to have moved beyond their Christianity. They themselves can't control in a centralized or hierarchical way—God didn't create a world in which such is possible. Yet, the power of convergent interests (think: Invisible Hand) moves them in this direction in which they'll destroy much that is good in a hubristic and impossible campaign to control a world in a way more like that of Satan than that of God. Our modern elites have little positive power but much destructive power.

I can't describe how it is that human being, individuals and communities, will operate when they are reborn in Heaven. We can see some hints by paying attention to the way that God works in this (mostly or most obviously) concrete world and in the entirety of Creation. We can get more hints by studying modern science in the light of the Johannine (St John the Evangelist's school) claim that relationships are primary and stuff is secondary. We can study such fields of thought as self-organization in the mathematical and biological domains or evolutionary and developmental fields of thought in general. We can study history and see the real trends—they aren't in the direction favored by American progressivist politicians and intellectuals and favored also by certain types of Christian leaders including Pope Francis. Modern progressivism is so 19th century, relying on outmoded theories of determinism, including forms of political and economic and moral determinism which lead to the the false possibilities of centralized control of at least the human realms of God's Creation.

So, I'll conclude that God's Creation isn't compatible with anything approaching complete centralization of power and authority, though centers of power and authority do exist and have their own role, often more thrilling and chilling than the roles of more modest human communities but not really more important and certainly far more dangerous when the leaders in those centers of power and authority wish to impose themselves and their thoughts and feelings and behaviors upon all the human communities they touch.

In my next post, I'll display my deep confusion a little more explicitly by arguing that God's Creation also isn't compatible with any sort of radical decentralization.

Something else is happening, the development of order by way of processes working from the inside and from the outside, from the lowest levels and from the highest levels. Somehow, things seem to work out, order is

being slowly established, though it can be beaten back by those blind to what is going on around them—including the leaders of the West in the 20th and 21st centuries.

# 679 Is God's Creation Compatible with Decentralization?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2435>. It was finished and uploaded on 2017/08/22.]

Mostly. That is, decentralization creates lots of opportunities for dynamic efforts of various sorts, some of which might well be very successful. By “successful in human history”, I write of both history proper (written narratives based upon facts) and also prehistory (the reconstructed narratives of pre-literate men and even of apish ancestors of men). By success, I write of the proper enrichment and complexification of human being, individual and communal, where that enrichment and complexification is such as to encapsulate those realms of Creation reachable by human mind and heart and hands at a particular time. In three earlier essays, I noted that this sort of human development (intertwined with significant evolutionary changes over surprisingly short times) has to take place at multiple levels of human being: individual and small communities and large communities up to that ultimate of all human communities, the Body of Christ which is essentially a completed and perfected human civilization with the Christian Church as its central organ. The three essays which very roughly sketch this viewpoint are:

1. Chapter 336, *What is the Totality of a Human Life?: Individuals and Communities.*,
2. Chapter 337, *What is the Totality of a Human Life?: Individual and Communal Intent.*, and

3. Chapter 338, *What is the Totality of a Human Life?: Unity, Coherence, and Completeness..*

For the past few years, my philosophical thoughts have been largely concerned with human communities and their reality. Now, I'm turning to an effort to describe some more dynamic aspects of human being. These dynamic aspects come into play in this situation because I'll take a position related to that of Adam Smith, of classical liberals and libertarians in general. The classical liberals and libertarians say that individual human beings form contractual and breakable relationships that provide for their needs and desires; I say that individual human beings along with the fundamental communities baked into our genes form relationships that lead to the formation of new human communities and even new types of human communities. Many of these newly formed communities will last for at least some generations and perhaps so long as humanity exists in this mortal realm. And some of these communities will reflect back and cause deep changes even in individual human being—changes which, if they last and lead to reproductive advantages for some, might be baked into the genes of future generations of individual human beings.

And so it is that I can claim that structures akin to hierarchical structures arise naturally, through the processes of community formation and especially in response to demographic factors and to increases in cultural or technological sophistication. Ideally, most structures will be—or least will evolve and develop to be—confederal or distributivist in the sense that authority and power is located at the lowest level possible.

I'm not trying to write any sort of complete account—if such is possible since I claim that new forms of human being come into existence with these new communities and even inside of individuals and of pre-existing communities as the new grows out of relationships involving individuals and those pre-existing communities. The production of better understandings of human being as it is and as it was will itself lead to enrichments and complexifications, new forms of human being.

I might be writing a book covering human being in a bit more detail—it seems nearly impossible that I can write such a book in less than a few years or so. For now, and as I explore new ways of thinking about this interesting stuff and non-stuff which is us, I'm motivating myself to move on and do more disciplined thinking about human being in the context of all of Creation. Perhaps some of my readers might also move on to such

thinking and exposition of the results. For now, I'll write a few paragraphs about the sorts of issues to be considered.

A man can't do what that man can't do. More of some things, such as irrigation or building defensive walls or temples, can be done by greater numbers of human beings. Some things, such as the forging of new types of weapons or tools or jewelry, can only be done by those who have the creativity and technical skills for innovations of that sort; on an ongoing basis, such work can be done by those at not so high a level of creativity but having at least steady hands and good eyes and good procedural memories. In effect, more people can lead to new forms of communal human being and so can a population with an increased number of certain types of individual human beings or new types of small-scale human communities—such as guilds which develop and pass on skills. Archaeology and ancient literature (including the book of Genesis) tells of the importance of new technology which was dependent upon the development of new skills.

Culture, in the form of literary or philosophical or artistic works, give human beings of a certain time and place an understanding of at least a major region of this world and maybe even of the Cosmos by some definition. The West, which seems to be enduring a prolonged, self-inflicted death, had a Christian Civilization of extraordinary depth and richness which drew upon the teachings of early Church Fathers. Western Civilization also drew upon the various Indo-European cultures, including those of Rome and Greece, and, over time, drew somewhat upon various Asian and North African cultures. The tightly related understandings found in the West had become the sea in which the European fish swam by at least the early Modern Era—say, around 1300. The sea is draining and becoming more and more toxic by the day, but this is a sea which can be replenished by the efforts of men. The replenishment would take much hard work and some amount of time (perhaps a generation or two if we get to work yesterday with a major effort), but it's quite possible. It's more likely that sophisticated schools of full-blooded, sacramental Christian fish will soon enough be swimming in a sea with Chinese or Russian minerals and salts, but I'm trying to start this replenishment with waters and minerals and salts flavored in my Gaelic and Saxon and Roman and American ways.

What can I say about the technological aspects of human life in this regard? Don't we all know that knowledge, true and false, can be distributed more rapidly by way of printed books than by handwritten texts on expensive parchments or animal hides? And the speed grew so much with radio

and then television and then cheap recordings of music and movies and documentary materials. We're nearly at the point where current human information could be put on small devices which would be affordable for many; at the same time, vast amounts of falsely or truly presented events could play their way across the widest of screens even as they occur. For now, this has played a role in a tremendous drop in literacy, which is the foundation of the styles of thinking which have produced the cultural and technological products of the West. (See *From Dawn to Decadence: 1500 to the Present* [9] by Jacques Barzun for a historian's brilliantly detached telling of this decline in literacy and in the styles of thinking which led to quantum physics as well as to the poetry of W. H. Auden as well as to the truths and the partly manufactured image of American greatness—see *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* [14] by Daniel J Boorstin.)

In summary, God's Creation is quite compatible with decentralization. In fact, most of the evolutionary and developmental processes in at least this concrete world occur by processes of self-organization, decentralized processes being explored under sometimes misleading terms such as "chaos theory" or "complexity theory" as opposed to centralized design or control processes. The odd thing is that these decentralized processes do build the hierarchical structures so beloved and misunderstood by the advocates of top-down design and control processes. And so easily corrupted into centralized, top-down control structures by those meaning well or ill for their fellowmen.

The longer discussions are delayed while I work out some ideas and some possible paths forward. I won't have the final answers anytime soon, probably not in my lifetime on earth, but I hope to be providing some interesting possibilities before the end of 2017. Until then, I'll be writing about various topics, some related directly to this line of thought and some not so related.

## 680 A Few Comments on Order in Human Being and All of Creation.

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2439>. It was finished and uploaded on 2017/09/01.]

In Chapter 678, *Is God's Creation Compatible with Centralization of Authority and Power?*, I concluded:

...that God's Creation isn't compatible with anything approaching complete centralization of power and authority, though centers of power and authority do exist and have their own role, often more thrilling and chilling than the roles of more modest human communities but not really more important and certainly far more dangerous when the leaders in those centers of power and authority wish to impose themselves and their thoughts and feelings and behaviors upon all the human communities they touch.

In Chapter 679, *Is God's Creation Compatible with Decentralization?*, I concluded that:

God's Creation is quite compatible with decentralization. In fact, most of the evolutionary and developmental processes in at least this concrete world occur by processes of self-organization, decentralized processes being explored under sometimes misleading terms such as "chaos theory" or "complexity theory" as opposed to centralized design or control processes. The odd

thing is that these decentralized processes do build the hierarchical structures so beloved and misunderstood by the advocates of top-down design and control processes. And so easily corrupted into centralized, top-down control structures by those meaning well or ill for their fellowmen.

All recent political and social and economic and historical thinkers I know of are at the wrong level of abstraction for understanding the basic existing characteristics and potential characteristics of human being. There are at least three categories of such thinkers:

1. Those who recognize the concreteness of human being and remain at the level of concrete, thing-like being in nearly all their thoughts.
2. Those who use applied mathematics directly upon the concrete relationships and actions of human beings and their immediate environments.
3. Those who use forms of abstract reasoning which don't reflect what has been learned about the being of this world in its concrete and abstract attributes.

Of course, these categories are nearly empty though a lot of thinkers can be found standing in sometimes strange postures on the boundaries. Let's pretend there are such limited thinkers. In my opinion, the first group has the best of the arguments if our goal is to use these fields of thought to understand human being. Unfortunately, most of the (imaginary) members of that first group and nearly all the (imaginary) members of the other two groups forget that the non-human parts of this concrete world are so well understood because of the use of abstract reasoning as shown in quantum mechanics, physical theories of spacetime which are based on very abstract geometries. It seems questionable, and maybe outright silly, to try to use, for example, the uncertainty relationships of quantum mechanics to explain free-will, but there is a general principle I'd advocate:

Some of the complexity of the fundamental levels of concrete being in this universe might be smoothed out and simplified at the level of larger-scale entities such as human beings, but there is no reason to think that is always the case and perhaps some

reason to speculate that those entities have their own corresponding types of complexity.

Many hardheaded men and women might claim this doesn't matter because human individuals and human communities act at the level of concrete biological forms of being. True enough, so long as we're sure we're not missing some very important traits of living organisms and of human beings in particular. After all, it was not only literalistic interpreters of the Bible but also some competent or even outstanding physicists who attacked the early attempts by geologists and paleontologists to understand the chronology of rocks and living creatures. Not knowing about subatomic particles, those physicists thought the Sun had to be burning by chemical processes and, thus, the Solar System—including the Earth—couldn't possibly be as old as some geologists and paleontologists were claiming. Even more relevantly, overly concrete thinkers never even dreamed of one of the Einsteinian insights which the great man himself probably didn't grasp when first proposing the Theory of General Relativity: the Universe is an entity with its own properties and isn't just the sum of what it contains. Our thing-like world is defined by two-way interactions between the global whole and the local parts. Human being is very similar to the "global whole" understood in terms of descending levels of community and the "local parts" understood in terms of individuals and their ascending levels of community.

True it is that human being arose in this concrete world. Human being remains flesh and blood. We know that flesh and blood, even that of worms, is more dynamic and more complex than even the greatest of early biologists, say Aristotle and Galen, could have guessed.

But the complexity of human being rises above that of flesh and blood and even above most of the processes studied by physicists for various reasons including the simple and non-mystical reason that human being has come to include mind which developed geometry and calculus and algebra, physics and chemistry and biology, history and fiction writing and musical composition, theology and poetry and pictorial representation. Human being has taken on abstract attributes, and these exist at particularly intense levels in human communities engaged in the conversation over the ages between the great and creative thinkers of our race. (Similar but more vague statements can be made regarding the hearts and hands of those communities which tie together the generations, but—as I've claimed repeatedly, the human mind leads the way into the human future.)

All entities and more elementary forms of being in this universe, certainly the universe itself, were formed by abstract streams of being—relationships. Human beings are more so, because of our various forms of awareness which rise far above even the self-awareness of our fellow living creatures on earth. Mostly, we are aware of abstract relationships. We can somewhat perceive and more clearly conceive of the abstract being which forms part of the thing-like being of this universe.

Our awareness of ‘political’ relationships, for example, rises far above that of the lionesses in a pride or the various bull elephants in a band of rogues. Over the millenia, our awareness of political relationships has grown, leading to more abstract being of that sort. Thousands of years ago, the Indo-Europeans seem to have developed patronage (think of it as an initially gentle or persuasive form of feudalism) and the ancient Chinese must have developed something similar which led to the First Emperor. This sort of political relationship led to better-organized bands of warriors, which bands evolved and developed over some small number of centuries into communities which could truly be labeled as “armies of conquest”. It also led to the protection of and control over miners and blacksmiths and leather-workers and horse-breeders and others necessary to those early warlords.

Since then, various forms of government and of bureaucracy have evolved and developed—not often under the complete control of even the most ruthless of political leaders and sometimes not much under any sort of control of political leaders. Various communities, political and economic and military and artistic and academic and scientific and so on, have developed and grown large and complex. They overlap and intertwine and intrude on each other’s domains; bureaucracies and entities we might call ‘agencies’ have grown up as part of this process. Under conditions which have held in the Modern Age—from perhaps 1500, centralized political communities have become excessively powerful. The legitimate responsibilities of these centralized political communities have not always been a high priority because such communities allow individuals of great ambition and greed to grab more power and wealth for their selves or their families or their classes than they otherwise could have even dreamed of.

This sort of situation has occurred before with the leaders of various sorts and mixtures of political and military communities we find in history. Having achieved those positions of leadership, by means fair or foul, various sorts of leaders use their dominance over violent means to grab more power

and different sorts of power than is justified by the needs of the greater and encompassing communities of clan or tribe or confederation of tribes or nation or empire or whatever. There have been leaders who have refused to abuse their powers and perhaps many who were never so tempted. The ones who refused to abuse their powers include Jesus of Nazareth first and foremost but also, on a mundane level, the Roman patriot Cincinnatus and also George Washington who is often referred to as a modern Cincinnatus.

Over the generations, some larger-scale human communities have been able to grow along with their political and military communities. In a sense, the modern history of balanced powers reached a peak in the American Founding. Let me take one example: the Congress of the US (House of Representatives and Senate) was given authority to declare war and the House was given the further responsibility of funding a war or refusing to do so, at least refusing to give the President as much money as he and his military advisors wished to have.

The American system of government has broken down in various ways and the current efforts to control the world are but part of the problem. In fact, we can't fully see the problem in terms of the US Constitution since there are some very active centers of illegitimate power—the “national security agencies” and the related, quite bloated, bureaucracies in the military services and the State Department and Justice Department and other places; the political and military authorities seem to be allied with and dependent upon these bureaucracies and agencies and willingly so. Those agencies and bureaucracies have grown like fungus on and inside a living creature with a weak immune system. And, in fact, that is an accurate analogy. The more legitimate political and military communities can perhaps be more accurately compared to cancers, legitimate parts of the greater body which went bad and began to wage war upon that greater body.

The US Constitution doesn't consider the existence of national security agencies, though they have existed along with other parts of complex human political systems—in ancient China and in at least the later Roman Republic. Ruthless scavengers of information and those willing to commit brutal acts are often valuable to power-seekers and power-holders. Yet, they don't seem to have come into their own until their hyper-development in the various totalitarian societies, most especially those which inherited imperial intelligence and police agencies—think of the Bolsheviks absorbing the services which spied upon the Tsars as much as upon the Tsar's enemies.

The NKVD/KGB was certainly a power-center which even worried Stalin at times—hence, the purges. There is precedence for the growth of intelligence and police agencies into self-serving power-centers. And the United States, its government and its other communities and realms, had no experience in dealing with such. The Founding Fathers had no reason to foresee the development of a CIA which kills under orders of the constitutionally elected bosses or for its own communal purposes.

The historian Carroll Quigley, circa 1950s, had identified three dominant power-holding groups in the United States: bankers (think J P Morgan), monopolistic capitalists (think John D Rockefeller), and politicians (think Teddy Roosevelt). There are complications here as Rockefeller moved to New York City and started using banks to control his various corporations and trusts into which he had thrust productive enterprises which he had built up. Ignore these sorts of complications for now. The important issue here is that Quigley seems to have been right for the period before the Great Depression and somewhat right for 2 or 3 decades after that, but the creation of the CIA from the OSS (which had been subject to military discipline and reported to George Marshall) created something new. That the CIA is nominally under the control of the civilian leaders of the American government doesn't seem to matter any more than did the Tsar's nominal control of his secret services—George Kennan and other commentators have noted those secret police targeted the final Tsars as much as they targeted the revolutionaries or foreign agents.

We are seeing more explicitly what has been clear to many for years. In our huge and complex modern communities, new forms of institutions have grown up: the Red Cross as well as the modern intelligence and police agencies. Some are good institutions, some have developed into true communities. There are also some bad institutions and many of mixed natures and results.

So, the United States has at least four groups which hold great power at the regional or national level.

1. Politicians.
2. Bankers.
3. Capitalists of some sort.
4. National security agencies and private service-providers.

There is some sense in which the educationalists and entertainers have also become a strange power-holding group, molding the minds and moral characters of young Americans in ways compatible with the ideologies of the teachers and the administrators of schools and which are so compatible with the ideologies and greed of those in the entertainment industry. Those ideologies tend to strongly conflict with the needs and—maybe—desires of the United States as a whole and of most of its individual, adult residents.

We can see a major part of our problem in the split between power-holding groups which take a short-range outlook and act accordingly and those which take a long-range outlook and act accordingly. Our politicians and businessmen and church-leaders take care of this afternoon while the educationalists and entertainers and other child-exploiters like to experiment with the minds and moral characters of young human beings—those experiments have resulted in very bad, long-term results. So far as I can tell, no totalitarian society destroyed or deformed human being as successfully as have the educational and cultural communities of the West, with the Americans being dominant.

The leaders of the West, some lacking much knowledge and understanding and perhaps meaning well, some meaning to cynically or mindlessly exploit others, have responded to the opportunities of the Modern Age by badly damaging the human being which could have been greatly enriched and properly complexified. Individual human being in the West has been badly damaged and so has the communal human being.

The leaders of the West are the enemies of the West, the enemies of its individual and communal human beings, and the enemies of the God of Jesus Christ. They contribute little or nothing and live not to serve but to suck the blood out of the West. This includes not only the more active parasites but also the leaders of Christianity who have chosen to go along with the program, for example, by bringing in more human beings not suited to live in the West; by such means, the value of citizenship is stolen and many members of the middle-class are pushed down into the lower-class ranks along with immigrants from undeveloped countries.

We have to realize that the American citizenry failed to keep watch upon the government and its agencies and other parts. We and our parents and the truer public servants of recent generations failed to notice the dangers, failed to investigate signs that those dangers were there and growing—the national security thugs and likeminded creatures in the political and military communities had only to say, “There are monsters out there and

they have only one desire: to destroy us and all the good we represent.” Even Stalin, a true moral monster, had at least one rational desire: to survive, but we allowed our citizen-selves to believe, or at least act as if we believed, that Stalin and his henchmen were ready to commit some sort of suicide if only it allowed them to harm us. This built upon the earlier delusion that the Tsarist Russians were bad guys because they stood in the way of the West as it tried to steal and control much of Asia and parts of Eastern Europe. The Russians were evil for desiring to take the loot, the Ottoman Empire and huge parts of southern and eastern Asia, when the British—with Americans lurking in nearby shadows—were busy doing the same things which were evil on the part of the Russians. Ironically, the Russians actually had some legitimate reasons to exercise power over some of those regions close to Russia and thousands of miles from the British Isles.

Empires were and are a fact of life in this imperfect world, but don't pretend your country has a moral right to intervene throughout the world and control other countries while your country's competitors are evil for doing the same. That is a path to irrationality, to foreign policy by way of hatred and fanaticism. It would be better if we were to seriously explore other ways than conquest and violent interventions to bring greater and larger-scale order to the various communities of the world, but we court various sorts of moral corruptions and other dangers when we play the intervention game in a morally dishonest way. The game may be dishonest to begin with but it has brought much good to the world—think of the order established by the Romans and the Muscovites and Emperor Qin of China. See the somewhat depressing book by Lawrence H. Keeley, *War Before Civilization* [81], which provides facts and controversial but seemingly solid arguments supporting the contention that death-rates are higher in the small-scale but constant warfare of tribal societies than they were in 20th century Europe or other times of large-scale military activities. The concentrated violence of large nation-states might well be spectacular, and often unnecessary and harmful by rational standards, but we may soon see far worse, city by city and suburban block by suburban block in the formerly peaceful and orderly regions of the West. War after civilization might well be as bad as war before civilization.

If we are to regain some order and peace in the West, we must all do a better job of trying to understand—with mind and heart and hands—our modern complex problems and opportunities. By “all,” I mean artists

and authors and politicians and businessmen and generals and diplomats and scholars and pastors and everyone else. If we refuse to properly use our minds and hearts and hands for this task, we will have to endure the end of much that is good in civilization, perhaps the establishment of a brutal order by the sometime nasty processes of “mindless” or “purpose-free” Darwinian processes, and that new order might be at a much lower standard of living. We will have refused to use the human being which developed fully by the same processes to which brute animals and other living creatures are subject and we will remain subject to those processes rather than choosing to intelligently work with those processes.



# 681 Dualism: A Wrongful Response to Valid Intuitions?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2447>. It was finished and uploaded on 2017/09/26.]

Simplicity is quite useful and even necessary in understanding God's Creation, just as it was useful to such thinkers as Riemann and Einstein in developing the mathematics and the specific theories of spacetime. Yet, full understandings in many such matters comes only by way of analyses using concepts and words and ways of thinking which are quite complex. Simplicity can then follow, partly the simplicity which comes from simple acceptance of new ideas and the integration of those ideas, in words and related concepts, in our day-to-day language about our world. (See Chapter 641, *Enriching Our Moral World: Simple Is Digested Complexity* for a short and, yes, simple discussion.)

Complex ideas (such as dualistic speculations of ancient pagan and Christian thinkers) are digested and then take on simple forms in our words and concepts, in our ways of thinking and feeling and doing. This is true of the dualisms such as mind-body which seem to explain so much. Unfortunately, the explanations are now in conflict with what we know about the minds and bodies of those creatures which are us, but they are deeply embedded in our ways of thinking and feeling and doing. And so it is that the processes of moving toward better understandings of the Creator and His works is stalled by the very processes which make it possible for the great majority of human beings to understand and use the thoughts of the small minority of creative thinkers.

In terms which point to the same confusions, modern Christians have been reluctant to deal with the seeming, in fact—real, complexity of what

the Medieval scholastics labeled as the "effects of God." I would bring that to tighter focus by changing it to the "effects of the Creator," or even the "effects of God in His freely chosen role as the Creator of this particular world." As it is, the ordinary Christian believer as well as Christian leaders and scholars, have retreated to a stance that:

It's all simple.

It's so simple that, over the past two centuries or more, they have stood by helplessly while the greatest civilization mankind has known—the Christian West, fell into ruins, some parts of those ruins being occupied by strange or outright unattractive bands of gangsters and so-called "cultural Marxists" as well as the more ordinary and expected hedonists who come out from the shadows whenever a civilization falls toward decay. It's so simple that Christian leaders and scholars can't pass on their faith to their own children or the others within their range of influence. It's so simple they can't express the faith in ways that make sense, even to their own baptized and catechized children, in light of what is now known about God's Creation, about the Almighty's "effects in Creation."

Christian theology, Christian thought in general, deals with the relationships between and among God and all of Creation, Creation as a whole and all the individual created entities or realms of created being. Christian theology should teach its adherents or friends or even the merely curious how it is that we can think about, for example, the meeting of God and created being which occurs in the Sacraments of Christianity: baptism where God forms a special relationship with a human being, marriage where God and man and woman form a special relationship, the Eucharist where God forms a special relationship with the communicant through bread and wine after the Almighty has entered His own effects in a special way. There are other Sacraments and all of Creation is so many sacramental acts, that is, relationships involving God and creatures.

There is most certainly a dualism of a certain fundamental type: Creation and Creator, created being and He who creates all that is not Him. Thinking men have always had to account for living creatures or even creatures such as stars and planets, not obviously alive but constantly in motion. How could the stars be fully like rocks or even much like rocks if they seemed to move as if living creatures? Maybe they are living creatures or at least inhabited by living creatures? The Sun is a god driving a flaming chariot

across the sky? The obvious way to account for living matter or even non-living matter which seems to move on its own is to posit the existence of spirits of some sort. Arguably, it was the only way to make sense of the entirety of what lies around us.

But we created deep problems by literalizing this dualism, by making it simple in a way that it falsely seemed an obvious truth. Of course, men have souls (or minds or whatever). Of course, angels and demons exist.

One take-away is that there is a true dualism between what-is-created and He-Who-Is-Self-Sustaining, a true difference in being between He who is a self-sustaining Act-of-being, and all His creatures who are not. The further dualisms dividing created being into realms of body and soul, living and nonliving, are a different matter. They are contingent insights of past generations which are seen as truths by those not capable of or not willing to analyze newer knowledge of God's Creation. It's easy to understand how and why we fall into such errors since they greatly ease the necessary and inherently difficult task of determining the difference in moral status of a human child and a grizzly bear cub. Many slide over this difference, "It's all so simple, so easy to see," ignoring even the confusion of their own children who learn about the shared biological history and shared DNA and bodily organs and chemicals of human beings and grizzly bears, or even human beings and sharks.

Yet, we can deal with both revealed truths and empirical, contingent truths. We can recognize man is born a very unique animal—but an animal, and then, within the Biblical and Sacramental contexts, see that man rises above that status because of his relationship with Creation seen as such and his relationship with the Creator. From there, man can rise to a deeper relationship with God in His transcendent Being.

We start out by realizing that, from a metaphysical (or ontological) viewpoint, created being is created being is... The Almighty can make interstellar gas-clouds or lively little children of created being. Ultimately, all created entities are objects of God's attention, all of created being is an object of God's attention. What we are, what we perceive or conceive are relationships formed by God in such a way as to give the foci of those relationships objective existence, a certain sort of independence from even God Himself, but an independence which itself exists only as an object of God's attention.

The Satanic rebellion, which is the essence of the Enlightenment gone bad, is a grab for independence of a sort which is impossible for creatures;

it is unhealthy for creatures to even aspire to have control over their own being. It is unhealthy for rational creatures to be bereft of gratitude directed toward some creating and sustaining force which could be labeled ‘divine.’ We have allowed our educational communities and cultural communities to teach young human beings to aspire to that unwise, evil, state of controlling their own created being and the created being around them.

The nature of this universe is that of evolving and developing being. Entities might be born or might develop after birth into confused states—see Chapter 335, *The Life of a Human Animal Begins at Conception. And Ends at Death. Maybe..* This doesn’t justify the mutilation of the bodies of confused human beings nor does it justify the exploitation of, say, young boys and girls with lesser sorts of confusion. Nor does it justify changing institutions such as marriage which are centered on the begetting and raising of children, even though some man-woman marriages end up childless, perhaps child-centered by way of adoption or involvement with the children of other couples. The willful and ideological use of ephemeral or deep and permanent confusion in the sexuality of human beings is clearly an attempt to gain control over created being, to impose ideals of perverse imaginations upon the sometimes confused, and always evolving and developing, created being of this concrete, thing-like universe.

I’ve claimed in a number of writings that we can discuss and analyze communities as being real entities and not just ways of speaking about gatherings of individuals; we simply use concepts drawn from modern mathematics, especially some of the tools used by Einstein and others who dealt with gravity or—equivalently—spacetime. Those tools allowed physicists to treat the universe as itself an entity and not just a container for individuals entities such as stars or intergalactic magnetic fields. But stars themselves have properties which were speculations based upon empirical information about those stars; it doesn’t seem possible to have come to understand stars by starting with hydrogen and helium—though the bottom-up analyses and top-down analyses did meet by way of both that empirical information and theories fine-tuned to that information at each step of observation and then at each step of analysis. Lather, rinse, repeat. The result is the realization that entities such as communities or the universe can have real existence and aren’t just the gatherings of individual entities. (See *The Shape of Reality* [56].)

What accounts for life, even for mind? What accounts for the generally dynamic nature of the seemingly most inert forms of thing-like being?

Matter in this universe is actually a cooled-down form of energy, stable so long as ‘trapped’ in certain sorts of complex relationships and less stable otherwise. This way of thinking assumes the normative, or at least starting, state of the thing-like being of this universe is that which occurred in the early fractions of a second after the phase transition falsely seen by many as a creation-event: the so-called Big Bang. As I’ve noted before: both modern quantum physics and also the theology of St John the Evangelist claim relationships to be primary over stuff. Another way to think of these matters, and one which might be of central importance in my project is to think in terms similar to quantum mechanics where abstract stuff (described by wavefunctions in quantum mechanics) can localize or particularize to, say, an electron.

We need to correct our tendencies to split created being into completely separate realms: mind vs brain, soul vs body, (creaturely) spirit vs all thing-like being, self-moving entities vs inert matter, etc. Created being is created being is. . . Yet, to repeat redundantly, there is some truth captured in the traditional dualisms, such as mind vs brain. We don’t wish to lose that truth but we don’t wish to preserve that truth in a false way by imposing some idealistic scheme upon reality.

I’ll try to post further explorations on this line of thought, perhaps every two weeks or maybe every month, with occasional postings of on subjects easier to deal with.



## 682 Dualism: The Fragmentation and Crippling of Human Being

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2450>. It was finished and uploaded on 2017/10/10.]

In this chapter, I'll be mostly recapping ideas I've developed and written about over the previous 10 years or so. These ideas are necessary to understand my deepest and most hardened objections to forms of dualism other than those which are necessary and bracketed ways of speaking. Chapters will follow which will deal with some specific aspects of various forms of dualism and the ways in which such ways of thought are problematic to a Christian who believes in an all-powerful Creator of all that is not Him.

In my parrot-mode, I say: "Created being is created being is . . ."

I'll add: "Human being is human being is . . ."

An additional claim, often useful and productive of true insights is: These are attributes, aspects of human beings who are unified and coherent and complete in senses I've been discussing for more than a decade. When I write, "Human being is mind and heart and hands," I am claiming that human being is certain sorts of acts of thinking and feeling and doing. In other words, mind and heart and hands are ways in which a human being responds to different aspects of the environments of that human being. But those responses, these acts, are not a well-defined set. Human beings can respond to what lies around them in very flexible and creative ways. When they do respond in such ways—and assuming they respond in a proper way, they encapsulate part of what lies around them in their own bodies and, hence, in their own minds. Even the simplest of animals do that, even the simplest of brainless organisms do that, even nonliving complex systems do that—with proper modification of wording. This universe, probably all of

Creation as a Christian would define it, is an entity of evolutionary and developmental processes.

[In this metaphysical mode, acts has more to do with “bringing into being” or “shaping being into entities by way of creation-type forces” than with physical events measurable by scientists and engineers—though those events are among those acts.]

There is something special about the human (proper) responses, conscious and unconscious, something special about the encapsulation produced by those proper responses: the human mind which can see not only the relationships of concrete, thing-like being but also those of the abstract being which flows into and is shaped into that concrete, thing-like being. The human mind can conceive of an encapsulated flow of past into present into the future and even extend that past back to the badly-named *Big Bang*, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Big\\_Bang\\_Theory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Big_Bang_Theory), and perhaps metaphysically back before that event which was a phase change.

The human mind can obscurely perceive and sometimes clearly conceive of abstract, complex entities (sort of: totalities) which show in altered relationships within groups of individual entities—such as human communities or the universe.

In many and sundry ways, this human mind has been greatly enriched and complexified in recent centuries as men began to explore the concrete and abstract regions of Creation, but a price has been paid. The sometimes extreme specialization of the human mind which began around 1600 or so reinforced the (Pseudo-Platonic or Neo-Platonic or dumber-down-Platonic) error which had assumed that the Reals were but the models for an entirely different realm of being. Or something like that. It’s likely that Plato, and certainly those ancient cultures which said a man knows a woman when his penis enters her vagina, wasn’t treating knowledge as something which isn’t really connected to concrete reality. That knowledge about more ethereal being could be used to judge concrete being but also magically provided ‘models’ for concrete things. A perceptive thinker might realize at this point that there was a deep problem in this form of Platonism, one which would lead future thinkers in a wrong direction: the ‘reals’ were themselves complex entities, if ghostly ones, rather than some sort of being from which concrete, thing-like being could be shaped.

What did Plato mean exactly by the Reals and by knowing? What did the authors of the Old Testament mean when they wrote about a man knowing his wife?

What does it mean for a man to know his heart (feelings) or his hands (behavior)? Can we know our own hearts only in the wrongful way in which casual history buffs might know about the American Revolution? What does it mean for a man's brain to come to know the mind it generates? Can we know our own brains only in the way of badly educated high school mathematics teachers who know manipulation of numbers and a little bit of manipulation of symbols but share not in what might be called "the mind of mathematicians"?

If our minds must know even the brains to which those minds are intimately connected in the modern sense of 'know', then we are truly lost, truly alienated first from our own selves and then from the world into which we are born, the world which will be the starting point (not something left behind) for the world of the resurrected. We will be inherently alienated from the world into which we are born, the world which is the foundation of the next world for those blessed to be friends of God.

In order for us to be part of our environment, even to the extent of all of the universe or all of Creation, that environment must be encapsulated in our minds. Christians should have a clear idea of what is going on when a human being responds properly to his environment: that human being is learning how to share the thoughts God manifested in His Creation, what the Medieval thinkers called "the effects of God."

Part of what we can learn to share with God is what I call a worldview, an understanding of the one-ness of Creation and of some of its levels, an understanding of one-ness not in terms of a homogeneous pudding of created being but rather a one-ness which is that of unified levels of complex entities arising from various sorts of created being, abstract and concrete, all arising in turn from truths God manifested as the primordial stuff of Creation, truths we Christians see as coming from and through the Son of God, the Word of God.

Without a Creation which is unified, such characteristics cannot hold in a human brain/mind complex which evolves and develops in response to what lies outside and inside of that human being. Similar statements can be made of coherence and completeness and also of the human heart and hands with respect to all three of those characteristics of unity and coherence and completeness.

There is a back-and-forth movement which tells us that a human mind fragmented into regions of human study, such as religion and science and history, won't be able to deal with the unity and coherence and completeness

of Creation or even of simply this universe of concrete, thing-like being. In fact, such a mind won't be able to deal with even the unity of a complex human community. Thus it is that the West has fragmented and begun a serious stage of an ongoing process of decay.

The above re-understanding of the decay of the West provides an answer to the oft-asked question: How is it that the Modern West has advanced so rapidly in science and mathematics while decaying so rapidly in moral order and social order and political order? The simple answer is: The Western Mind was fragmented and the individual minds in the scientific and mathematical fields remained energetic and adventurous while the minds in many fields such as philosophy and theology and (somewhat) in history and creative fiction settled down to travel ruts. The fields allied to human order in individuals and communities stagnated. This is the sort of thing which is likely to happen and we have no reason to believe that the minds devoted to mathematics and science will always be the minds which retain energy and good attitudes. In any case, with the radical separation between fields of human intellectual endeavor, the fields such as political philosophy or creative poetry or historical analysis which had stagnated weren't able to draw upon the ideas and energy of the fields of intellectual endeavor which were doing better. This also led to further separation, to a quite understandable loss of respect for "soft" fields of human knowledge on the part of those thinkers in "hard" fields of human knowledge, especially quantitative fields.

This general process of decay, seen from the viewpoint of a decay in literacy and literate styles of reasoning and knowing, is described brilliantly in Jacques Barzun's magnum opus: *From Dawn to Decadence: 1500 to the Present* [9]. Without claiming Professor Barzun would agree with all I've done, I've added a theory of being to the critical apparatus he developed to understand this decay of the West—fundamentally, a decay of the Western mind which led to a decay of Western human being.

# 683 Dualism: The Split Between the Practical and the Ideal

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2454>. It was finished and uploaded on 2017/11/07.]

This split between the practical and the ideal is generally acknowledged by modern thinkers and ‘common folk’ alike. But what is the ‘practical’ and the ‘ideal’? I think they are very much different from both the traditional and modern prejudices. I don’t think that prejudices are wrong as such; often, they carry good and useful information, though often undisciplined and only partially reliable even when true. But...Prejudices sometimes have to be corrected to make them better prejudices, more accurate and better suited for understanding reality (sort of: ‘ideal’) and dealing with reality (sort of: ‘practical’).

I’ll start by quoting definitions for ‘practical’ and ‘ideal’, using that ever reliable and literate dictionary, Webster’s of 1913. In that source, we find that ‘practical’ is an adjective meaning, “Of or pertaining to practice or action.” Somewhat useless for most purposes, but we can then learn that ‘practical’ means: “Capable of being turned to use or account; useful, in distinction from ideal or theoretical; as, practical chemistry.”

We can also learn that ‘ideal’ can be a noun meaning: “A mental conception regarded as a standard of perfection; a model of excellence, beauty, etc.” We can also read an illustrative quotation:

The ideal is to be attained by selecting and assembling in one whole the beauties and perfections which are usually seen in different individuals, excluding everything defective or unseemly, so as to form a type or model of the species. Thus, the

Apollo Belvedere is the ideal of the beauty and proportion of the human frame. —Fleming.

Webster's 1913 defines 'ideal', used as a noun, by: "Existing in idea or thought; conceptional; intellectual; mental; as, ideal knowledge." A second definition reads: "Reaching an imaginary standard of excellence; fit for a model; faultless; as, ideal beauty. —Byron." Another quote is of some serious interest in my current task:

There will always be a wide interval between practical and ideal excellence. —Rambler. [1913 Webster]

The above definitions and quotes deal with the 'practical' and the 'ideal' assuming pre-modern ways of understanding the world in categorical terms. See Chapter 335, *emph*The Life of a Human Animal Begins at Conception. And Ends at Death. Maybe. for a discussion of the rare but real blurring of even personal identity or sex of human beings. Along these lines but more importantly: what is the ideal for males—over-muscled men talented at violent activities or the bearers of talents equally dominated by males such as mathematics and theoretical science? Some of the above definitions and quotations imply the ideal would be Mike Tyson with the brain of Einstein; in the modern American viewpoint, he should also be sensitive and tenderhearted with maybe Rambo's ability to handle weapons and commit mass murder with a military flavor.

We live in a world of evolution and development, a world in which things move under partial control of global structures but those moving things shape those global structures as they move and as they begin to form more complicated entities. And so it is that we need to change to new concepts and language such as global/local and abstract/concrete. For the most part, and certainly in the context of this discussion, we can think of concrete as 'particular' or 'specific' or even 'peculiar'. I'll be writing several essays and won't deal here too much with the particulars, but—as a hint of future suggestions, I'll deny that 'just war' is only an ideal concept of no application in the real world of diplomacy and boots on the ground. I'll deny this because I consider the relationship ideal/practical to be at least analogous to (quantum wavefunction)/photon.

In any case, I perhaps implied the error that all evolution and development of, for example, human being both individual and communal, is

bottom-up. It isn't. It's bottom-up and it's top-down and sometimes a struggle between the shaping processes at the bottom and the force-generating structures at the top. From the top, relationships between and inside entities evolve and develop as fast as the stuff at the bottom evolves and develops into those entities. Above is the abstract, below the concrete. The language of 'practical' and 'ideal' can be pretty misleading as can even be that of 'concrete' and 'abstract'. But, mostly it's useful and truthful—if only in part, so long as we remember that the ideal itself is evolving and developing. The stars aren't frozen in place for eternity nor are they eternal, life in this world not eternal—not even in the way of eternal return of the ancient ones of our race. And so it is that we, at least from our perspective inside Creation, cannot think of the human 'ideal' as having come into existence in some mystical way at the (ontological) instant of Creation. I claim we can regard that instant as one when God manifested certain absolute truths, but those truths were used by evolutionary and developmental forces which produced men, concrete animals with specific and contingent sexual natures as an example of an important, but not 'absolutely true' aspect of the human animal or communities of human animals and, hence, of the human moral person which can develop from that animal or its communities.

In somewhat simple language which points to the truth, the ideal and practical, while different and—in some sense—coming from different directions, are intertwined in a way far more intimate and far weirder than any two balls of string after a pair of kittens finished their work.

What is the true and greater ideal: individual freedom or cooperation with the community?

And neither really determines the other, though one might be dominant at any one time. Let's talk economics.

First, I'll note this isn't so much different from asking: what is the ideal human physique: short and broad or tall and slender? We live in a world of evolutionary and developmental processes. We live in a world of differing environments which have selected different characteristics from human populations, monkey populations, rodent populations, fish populations, etc. In the case of human beings, there are human populations with different characteristic reflecting responses to their environments, over generations. For example:

The *Maasai people* “are a Nilotic ethnic group inhabiting

southern Kenya and northern Tanzania.” This is a hot and dry region and Maasai seem to have adapted to their environment by becoming tall and slender, increasing the ratio of heat-emitting skin to total body mass. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maasai\\_people](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maasai_people).

The *Eskimo* “have traditionally inhabited the northern circumpolar region from eastern Siberia (Russia), across Alaska (United States), Canada, and Greenland.” These people are typically stocky and have a low ratio of heat-emitting skin to total body mass, even though they wear heavy clothing over most of their bodies. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eskimo>.

There is no ideal human physique and I’m claiming this fact isn’t so much different from the more complex question of personality attributes. We have attributes inclining us toward individualistic endeavors and other attributes inclining us toward communalistic endeavors. Some groups of human beings might have stronger, even much stronger, inclinations toward individualistic endeavors and some might have stronger, even much stronger, inclinations toward communalistic endeavors. Some groups might be more of a mixture. A member of this latter group might enjoy behavior of a more individualistic sort, for example, when working as a writer and thinker and might also enjoy behavior of a more communalistic sort when doing volunteer work for his church.

Is it individualism or communalism which is more truly human? Which is the ideal of human life: to be a freestanding individual or be a loyal and humble member of a community? Of course, those of practical sense—especially those who understand what is meant by “evolutionary and developmental processes”—will likely conclude that this matter, perhaps many matters, which are often treated as being subject to *a priori* analyses are actually a matter of the evolved and developed attributes of a physical creature. Even the ‘ideal’ is something of a many-headed beast and not fully different from the ‘practical’.

I’m going to be a bit unfair to a good young thinker and claim the problem can be seen in even this title for a blog posting by *The Audacious Epigone: Breadwinning father, homemaking mother remains ideal in The Current Year* at <http://anepigone.blogspot.com/2017/10/breadwinning-father-homemaking-mother.html>.

It's not an ideal. It's a desirable situation based upon empirical (practical) facts on the ground. By using such language, better thinkers (including more than a few philosophers) have encouraged the lesser thinkers who trace their psychotic thinking back further than Marcuse and Gramsci—think about Ralph Waldo Emerson—to propose their own ideals. If the sexual dimorphism of the human race is an 'ideal', why not try to change to new ideals? If such efforts are seen instead as ideological goals based upon dreams and in conflict with facts, then the sheer insanity (psychosis or separation from reality) of much modern thinking becomes more obvious. To put it in theistic terms, the God of Moses or the God of Jesus Christ or the God and Father of all other gods and all else (working through the Demiurge in Plato's theology) could have created a different world or a different set of living creatures to live in whatever world He created. It is God's acts-of-being as manifested reality which give us the ideals for human animals, and we learn more facts about that manifested reality and come to better understand it even as we change the human parts of that reality by evolving and developing into somewhat different forms of human being.

The various sorts of roles for males and females, such as "breadwinners and homemakers", are natural ways of behavior, responses to—for example—the modern economic conditions. The obvious—Yes!—ways in which human communities will organize themselves correspond to practical goals, efficient ways of going about the formation of families and the raising of children and so on, determined by the human sexual dimorphism which arose by evolutionary processes and are refined by developmental processes. There are no ideals governing empirical reality but for those found in that reality or those which arise as that reality evolves and develops.

To pay attention to reality is to pay attention to what the Creator has done; to pay attention to reality is to pay attention to the wisdom the Creator would impart to us if we respond as His trusting children.



# 684 Dualism: The Delusions and Dangers of Believing in an Unembodied Free-will and Mind

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2460>. It was finished and uploaded on 2017/11/27.]

The doctrine of “free-will” and the similar doctrine positing an immaterial “mind” or “soul” seem to be attempts to avoid the limitations and constraints of biology, of an organism in this world which is a highly particularized realm within Creation. We wish to rise above such mere physical processes as hormonal flows and—at a ‘higher’ level—our desires to eat and to engage in sex acts. We try to see our better inclinations and behaviors as representative of absolute truths which are implanted in and thus we are primed to accept stories of primordial falls from higher states, including an implausible understanding of the story of Adam and Eve. We don’t wish to be too much a part of those evolutionary processes which most of us accept in this modern age of man, though that acceptance is nominalistic, verbal acceptance that doesn’t reflect our acts or deeper thoughts. To be sure, we can be pleasantly mystified by thinking that we are somehow descended from rat-like creatures which had to move fast so big dinosaurs wouldn’t step on them or smaller dinosaurs eat them. Far away and cartoonish. The closer reality of morality and intelligence being embodied and developing along with brain and heart and liver is not part of the sermons or homilies of our clergymen, part of only some recent histories, part of few Biblical commentaries though parts of the *Old Testament* seem compatible with a full-blown sociobiology.

In a sentence: we pretend that particular manifestations of human being,

individual or communal, are so plastic that we can make of that human being a better entity than did God the Creator. This is a form of a Satanic rebellion and will not turn out well.

I'll back up a little to consider the possibility that something exists in human beings which could be called free-will and leave it to the reader to investigate some of my earlier writings in which I discussed free-will as a disembodied mental activity (which it isn't). The discussions about mind or soul would follow a similar pattern to what will develop in this essay.

The interested reader might wish to review an earlier chapter addressing the biological, experimental, evidence which I originally wrote way back in 2008: Chapter 385, *Is this evidence against free-will?*. I dealt with the issue a number of times in chapters written in later years.

If "free-will" exists and is truly free of the constraints of human biology, it isn't us; that is, it is different from and somehow transcendent to the "us" which loves some other human beings and struggles to love God and perhaps all other human beings. In that case, that entity of "free-will" is free but we are enslaved to it and our good acts aren't to our credit nor our bad acts to our debit.

If "free-will" is more truly us, then it is part of our human being, an organism similar in many ways to a chimpanzee and in fewer ways to a spider organism. A human being is subject to various pressures related to survival—hunger which can drive us to eat at the expense of our own children, sexual desire which drives men to rape or acts of infidelity and drives some men to kill other men to take their women, a general desire for rest and comfort which can drive us into states of greed and ambition that we can live better at the expense of other human beings, and so on.

So, this "free-will" is either part of a human animal subject to various constraints which don't allow for anything which could be considered complete freedom or "free-will" is independent of this human animal, an alien entity (or agent) and our master.

We so-called modern men, heirs to a very promising Enlightenment gone bad—in part, bearers of badly-formed rumors of deep understandings of our physical world, are entrapped in ways of thought and feeling and behavior which are a result of that bad turn in the Enlightenment. Some might criticize me for being too abstract or too deep in my thoughts but this is necessary to clear out bad forms of abstract or deep thought that we might achieve better understandings of our own human selves, of life in general, of the physical universe, of all of Creation. The other way to clear out these

bad thoughts is for the West to go through a more total collapse followed by a fresh start. In any case, it takes some very abstract analyses to understand that there are many wrongful abstractions in our current understandings of concrete reality; those abstractions, such as those of various dualisms, feel concrete because they're part of the cultural air we take in from our earliest years.

I've fallen into a pessimistic outlook that foresees a period for the West of barbarism and huge population decreases in most regions as a result of the loss of social structures and a coming-soon drop in technological capabilities which already shows in a decay in the quality of American infrastructure. I'd like to be proven wrong but don't think that there is too much Western human being left; our human being is a far more primitive sort than that of even the Victorians let alone the Elizabethans. We no longer have the sophisticated conception of God's Creation, the resulting worldviews which turned the rocks and animals around us and the stars above us into manifestations of God's creative will. A worldview so rich and deep as to support anything so magnificent as Western Civilization will take generations to build and may never be built in such a way as to be "Western": European at heart. Though stated in my words, this is a situation which Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) discussed and feared. The Christian unwillingness to gradually reform the Western worldviews, to retain what was still right in the Medieval worldviews but integrate those still good parts of traditional Western Christianity with modern knowledge, has doomed the West. All the political and moral and social decay is but an outcome of the increasing separation over recent centuries of Western science from Western philosophy and theology, the increasing separation of Western political beliefs and behaviors from Western moral teachings, the truly fundamental problem of the loss of literacy and literate styles of thought. (See Jacques Barzun's magnificent *From Dawn to Decadence: 1500 to the Present* [9].)

So, let's deal with one of our major problems by facing up to the obvious truth that we are human animals formed by way of evolutionary and developmental processes. The species *Homo sapiens sapiens* evolved from a creature also an ancestor of the chimpanzee. Human beings are creatures with a certain sexual nature and certain ways of forming communities. We form certain sorts of relationships with each other and with animals of other species and with trees and bodies of water and so on. We are blessed and cursed with the sort of abstract reasoning abilities which allow us to rise to higher understandings of all of these. But the rise when a human civilization

is forming or prospering is often slower than the fall from that state in which human communal being has become so rich and complex, with many—far from all—individuals taking on a significant amount of that richness and complexity. A civilization can collapse in a matter of years but can only be built by the efforts of a number of generations.

It's all so contingent, so much a matter of chance—of pure unrepeatable factuality. From the sort of stuff which makes up the Earth, human being as we know it is but one possibility, though some inclined to political or economic dogmatism have claimed to develop a scheme with the one and only true way to form political or economic communities. Not so. And we can see this with a little imaginative effort in dealing with individual human being and communal human being. There is no chance a purely individualistic scheme for interpersonal relationships would work nor would a purely communalistic work. How much individualism and how much communalism would we need for a rich and complex civilization true to its human being? The possibilities would be determined by the environment of a particular people and how its ancestors responded to opportunities and problems in that or similar environments—where I write of responses in terms of the entire human animal and the entirety of human communities rather than writing only of the responses which are external acts in which we consciously participate though those acts may not be consciously determined; this is to say that a human being living near the Arctic responds by becoming shorter and stockier as well as by learning how to fish from ice-floes or to hunt sea-mammals.

One thing is clear: we need some substantial set of virtues, inborn but properly developed by way of nurture. Our ancestors were selected not to be like the self-serving individualists of libertarian myth and not to be like the self-sacrificing communalists of . . . communism. What's needed is some combination of individualism and communalism allowing for some flexibility in the face of an uncertain and sometimes nasty, sometimes wonderful world.

So it is that nearly all human animals are born with some imperfect versions of those moral sentiments so beloved by many philosophers and poets and also by those who wish to live in peace in a human community (or communities) where some sort of decency reigns, some sort of recognition that we would have others respect our lives and property and beliefs and we should do the same for others. Obviously, such sentiments do exist in nearly all human animals, but not in one form—it's likely the virtues of an Iron Age barbarian were a bit harsh by our standards. Our inborn virtues

are also often weak and subject to great corruption. There is even reason to believe a (very?) weak form of the Fifth Commandment is written on the hearts of nearly all men—see *On Killing* [66] by Dave Grossman, a retired Lt Col and Airborne Ranger in the US Army, for a discussion and references to some underlying research which is admittedly dated and is the sort of research which often fails replication or even later plausibility analyses.

Many modern men—including many ideologically corrupted men of science—carried over parts of the mistaken understanding of human being developed by the early Christian Fathers: the belief that the human species came into existence as a result of a special act-of-being, set in nature but not part of it in the way of the creation of other animals. Increasingly, scientists have wandered away from scientific thought to gobble on about a future in which there will be a lot of Africans of various nationalities who are in the top ranks of scientists or other thinkers. The same sort of cruel irrationality is being spewed out on pages of (previously?) respected science societies about the need to get large numbers of women in male-dominated fields such as mathematical physics. Essentially, these mean-spirited bastards are trying to teach Africans and women that their moral worth and self-esteem, their true humanity, should be dependent upon Africans and of women of all colors making up an increasing percentage of Nobel Laureates in physics in coming years. It isn't going to happen, it can't happen, and this is why I claim this stupid campaign is also cruel. I hope Africans and women prove to be smarter in important ways than the scientists who run the societies and try to push schemes which are based upon clearly wrongful understandings of human being. Or maybe those scientists do know better, as surely some Senators and Catholic bishops do, and they are merely going along with this exploitation because they have not the courage to speak truth to power?

The main branch of Western Christian thought is Augustinian and Augustine of Hippo accepted the idea that non-human species could transmute into other species but rejected the idea for human beings, thinking that human being was a special creation. This is to say that many Christians of this time who—mostly—accept some version of biological evolution retain the assumption that men around the world form a species outside of the transmutation of species; men worldwide have the same attributes, the same personality traits making each and every one of them at least potential members of a complex civilization. Many of the West have passed outside of Christianity but took that convenient view that all men are alike with

them though claiming to be oh-so scientific when looking for arguments against Christian belief and practices.

By way of some sort of magical thought intermingled with reasoning about the empirical world, men were seen by the dominant thinkers of recent centuries to all be London gentlemen or Florence polymaths—at least potentially so if only those Central Africans and highlanders of New Guinea could be educated by the proper schoolmarm or semi-paganized Jesuit missionaries. The mind of powerfully abstract reasoning, the mind of an Archimedes or a Bismarck, was seen as having been gifted by God or the Deity or simply Nature upon all men though there be no sign of such a mind in the villages of Central Africans or highlanders of New Guinea and no reason to posit in the past of those peoples the sorts of environmental or opportunistic pressures leading to the selection of (expensive) brain developments supporting such a mind. In other words, these oh-so modern thinkers had rejected most of what is good in traditional Christian thought but had retained the false teaching that human being isn't fully subject to the same evolutionary forces as other forms of living being are. A man is the same whether a Swede or Maasai or a Cree.

Why would anyone, Christian who believes in the Bible or modern liberal, think that all peoples are the same when it comes to either reasoning or forming families and polities and other communities? Over the past 50,000 years, sub-Saharan African peoples have evolved separately from the peoples descended from the (probably multiple but not too multiple) out-of-Africa peoples. At various times, other peoples found in various regions of Asia and the Pacific also separated out and faced entirely different selective pressures from those faced by the peoples of Eurasia who are accurately labeled as “high-achievers” in matters of abstract thought as well as advanced technology. Over the past 10,000 years or so, some of the peoples of northern Eurasia have gone through a series of responses to opportunities and hardships which have led to significant increases in IQ and in personal traits—see *The 10,000 Year Explosion: How Civilization Accelerated Human Evolution* [23] by Gregory Cochran and Henry Harpending. Those peoples of Northern Eurasia evolved to survive in promising but tough environments and to carry out complex migrations and conquests. They moved on to form increasingly complex communities, culminating in a few major civilizations, including those of Western Europe and Eastern Europe and Iran and some parts of Southern Asia. Those Northern and Eastern Eurasians developed the personality traits to deal with, for example, ab-

stract justice systems rather than person-based justice systems. Human beings evolved to live in civilizations have the IQs (boosted by greater abstract reasoning powers) to deal with technology and economic relationships more complex than those found in tribal societies.

Most from the peoples, such as most sub-Saharan Africans and the Hmong of Southeastern Asia, who live in tribal societies and haven't formed more complex communities or engaged in more complex forms of thought than myth-based tales most likely are not capable of prospering or feeling comfortable in civilization without ongoing assistance from Western governments and charitable agencies or else falling into a barbarian life in the shadows of skyscrapers. People of the West shouldn't feel triumphalistic as the prior sentence is probably far too complex for most modern-day college professors to parse, let alone to truly understand—again, see Jacques Barzun's magnificent *From Dawn to Decadence: 1500 to the Present* [9]. For the foreseeable future, we will have no triumphs but those in our history books. And we can't understand those in our current state.

As for the descendants of those poor Africans or other tribal peoples brought to the West as slaves in the bad, old days so they might be used to the profit of the cotton and tobacco industries, as for those more recently brought to the West as clueless barbarians in the good days of now so they might be used to the profit of Democratic party vote-seekers and professional do-gooders, they might wonder, "Why is no one teaching us the magic that they use to design rocket-ships and to become politically powerful? Why do my children suffer so much when they try to learn algebra while those Jewish and Chinese and Polish children handle those symbols the way the witch-doctors back in Ghana could handle the ghosts of dead tribesmen?" There is, in fact, substantial overlap among the various populations. There are many in various Eurasian groups who have trouble passing beyond superstitious thought or elementary school literacy skills, but the Northern Eurasian and Eastern Asian peoples—and some others—produce enough human beings who are capable of higher forms of abstract reasoning, more often the forms of reasoning appropriate for entrepreneurship or organizing military units than those appropriate for solving difficult mathematical problems.

The continued importation of human beings not made for life in Western Civilization will not turn out well. I'll leave it to others to predict the details but I will repeat that we have to learn how to think about human being in its great variety. We need to think in terms of evolution and inherited

characteristics, to learn how to think about such facts as those provided by IQ tests rather than simply rejecting them or interpreting them to suit our personal isms.

Human beings are, first of all, human animals and we have characteristics such as intelligence and tendencies to impulsiveness or tendencies to work toward future results which are constrained by our genes, though any population of human beings has a spectrum of such characteristics and we can always work to make the best of our particular characteristics. We don't have something corresponding to a mind or soul or free-will which is pasted onto our animal bodies and is free of our biological-genetic constraints. Any improvements in the characteristics of a tribal and barbarian people which are conducive to civilized life have to come by way of reproductive advantages to the smarter and more diligent among that people. That isn't happening in our oh-so non-racist West which seems to place more value on West Africans who can jump very high than it does on Africans who can learn topology. A little research will show, for example, that the smarter and better-educated African-Americans tend to have few children and this has been true for more than a century. There are new reports, rumors, that some athletically talented African-Americans of little intellectual talent have dozens of children. Even if the rumors in the prior sentence are exaggerated, there seems to be reason to fear that African-American IQs won't be rising anytime soon.

Let's admit to our bad situation and to the damage done by misunderstandings of human nature currently being used by those in government or in charitable agencies or in schools to bring in more human beings who will eventually find themselves to be strangers in a strange civilization, unless they help to destroy that civilization and leave us all in a barbarian wasteland. I think that wasteland might come about though I would expect more of a fragmented West in which, for example, some politically independent parts of what is now the United States will be reasonably prosperous and even civilized and some won't. In any case, it's unlikely these immigrant populations will prosper over the long-run and some of them might be exterminated by bloody conflicts, largely with each other.

It was bad actions which brought about this mess, but those bad actions were motivated and justified by bad ideas, ideas based on desires to understand human being and other forms of created being by positing the existence of immaterial entities rather than settling down to the hard work of understanding God's Creation as it truly is.

# 685 Dualism: JFK and the Quite Speakable and Quite Historical

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2466>. It was finished and uploaded on 2017/12/07.]

This essay will seem more of a stretch as a case study in the problems of dualism, but there is a method to my stretchy madness. The general point will be: what we see as evil acts by human beings, individual or communal, are the results of behaviors often quite consistent with the bad part of the spectrum of behaviors on the part of evolved “apes” and also sometimes consistent with hubris on the part of well-meaning human beings who think they know how human communities should be organized and how human individuals should behave.

I recently read *JFK and the Unspeakable: Why He Died and Why It Matters* [30] by James W. Douglass. This book was recommended as the best on the topic by Ray McGovern (see <http://raymcgovern.com/>, a long-time CIA officer. One paragraph from his bio on that website tells us:

Ray came to Washington from his native Bronx in the early Sixties as an Army infantry/intelligence officer and then served as a CIA analyst for 27 years, from the administration of John F. Kennedy to that of George H. W. Bush. Ray’s duties included chairing National Intelligence Estimates and preparing the President’s Daily Brief, which he briefed one-on-one to President Ronald Reagan’s five most senior national security advisers from 1981 to 1985.

McGovern has been involved with various groups, some Christian, which have tried to re-orient our world towards peace. He also founded and has

remained involved with a group of other retired intelligence professionals—Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Veteran\\_Intelligence\\_Professionals\\_for\\_Sanity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Veteran_Intelligence_Professionals_for_Sanity), an impressive group of men and women who've worked in the higher levels of the “honest” ranks of professionals in the CIA and FBI and State Department and in military agencies. (The group includes the admirable likes of Coleen Rowley, an FBI special agent who forced a meeting in the early summer of 2001 to ask the politically corrupt intelligence professionals why they told the agents in the Minneapolis FBI office not to investigate some illegal immigrants who were talking about flying jet-planes into buildings—these turned out to be men with loose but real connections to some of the alleged 9/11 attackers. We still don't know the answer to Ms Rowley's question. By “honest,” I refer to those below the “political” level in government agencies and not scheming to join that “political” level.)

McGovern discusses Douglass' book in this article: *The Deep State's JFK Triumph Over Trump* at <http://original.antiwar.com/mcgovern/2017/10/30/deep-states-jfk-triumph-trump/>. I'll quote him on just one interesting incident from his period of training for a promotion from agent to officer at CIA:

It was summer 1963 when a senior official of CIA's operations directorate treated our Junior Officer Trainee (JOT) class to an unbridled rant against President John F. Kennedy. He accused JFK, among other things, of rank cowardice in refusing to send U.S. armed forces to bail out Cuban rebels pinned down during the CIA-launched invasion at the Bay of Pigs, blowing the chance to drive Cuba's Communist leader Fidel Castro from power.

It seemed beyond odd that a CIA official would voice such scathing criticism of a sitting President at a training course for those selected to be CIA's future leaders. I remember thinking to myself, “This guy is unhinged; he would kill Kennedy, given the chance.”

Our special guest lecturer looked a lot like E. Howard Hunt, but more than a half-century later, I cannot be sure it was he. Our notes from such training/indoctrination were classified and kept under lock and key.

In his deathbed confession, E Howard Hunt (a police-state criminal and congenital liar for sure—see [//en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E.\\_Howard\\_Hunt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E._Howard_Hunt)), claimed to have been in Dealey Square on 1963/11/22 as part of the CIA project to murder JFK; he claimed the project name was *The Big Event*. Jesse Ventura found mugshots of men appearing to be homeless bums and they looked like Hunt and Frank Sturgis (another CIA covert agent involved in multiple crimes inside and outside the US including the so-called “Watergate burglaries”). (The wise reader will be skeptical about the Wikipedia article and most Wikipedia articles dealing with matters of interest to what some call the “deep-state” but it gives a start on learning about a man who was involved in a number of crimes including smuggling, regime-changes of legitimate governments, and (probably) assassination; at times, Hunt, a much published author, was the propaganda expert. In one of his collections of essays, Gore Vidal claims that Hunt certainly wrote the diary of Arthur Bremer (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur\\_Bremer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Bremer)); Hunt appears in almost all the books summarizing investigations into the political murders of the 1960s, CIA smuggling activities and regime-change crimes in Latin America, and Watergate. Hunt was somewhat bluish of blood and apparently took up life as a loyal follower of Alan Dulles and a CIA warrior, maybe to avoid the boring life of the likes of his father, a successful lawyer and Republican Party official.

There is also much background information in Russ Baker’s book, *Family of Secrets: The Bush Dynasty, the Powerful Forces That Put it in the White House, and What Their Influence Means for America* [6] that ties Wall Street and the National Security agencies and military into the murder of JFK, though it seems likely to me that most of those with some inside knowledge played relatively minor roles, perhaps knowing the goal was the destruction of JFK and RFK but not knowing the details of the plot. Some maybe didn’t even realize that JFK would be killed rather than being politically neutralized in some other way as later happened to Nixon; I wouldn’t defend Nixon to the death but he was less of a villain than those who destroyed him. Read the books and pay attention to the roles played by J Edgar Hoover and Lyndon Johnson, each of whom likely knew that powerful forces were trying to kill Kennedy, neither of whom did anything to protect Kennedy, each of whom moved to benefit from his death—it’s unlikely Hoover was an insider but possible Johnson was in on the details before that fateful day in Dallas. Pay attention also to the testimony of

Hoover recorded in Douglass' book that the CIA had even infiltrated the FBI and had used the FBI for CIA purposes.

I think this points to the great background truth that there is no centrally-organized conspiracy of the ruling elite of the United States against its own people and against other countries and their citizens; rather is it the case that a certain "space" is open to those from the right families or, at least, the right schools, with further entry into the right social clubs and, maybe, marriage 'upwards' into a family bluer of blood. That "space" is also not a region where all residents are at peace: rather is it something of a battleground between forces, each of which control only a part of the wealth and power of the United States. This is why they are now such bumbling fools in international relations—our lack of (peaceful) response to the growth of wealth and power in various Eurasian countries, especially China, is largely due to the battles of our ruling elites against each other; China builds up wealth and trade relationships and so forth while much of our ruling elite is devoted to the destruction of Donald Trump and the related war against Russia, our natural ally in protecting Western interests.

The murder of John Kennedy might prove to have been practice for a period of warfare of bankers against industrialists, military against state police (in which category I would put the CIA in its current condition), leaders of populist religious movements against the major religious institutions, and so on. On this level, JFK's murder seems to have led to the elimination of some regional powerholders, ethnic political machines and truly progressive or truly conservative political parties. Generalize and also look back to the 1950s when Eisenhower acted to the benefit of the forces he would warn us about in his farewell speech; for example, the highway system was built to make nuclear war conceivable and, more generally, to give greater mobility **inside the United States** to the US military. It also gave advantages to corporations running centralized manufacturing facilities or centralized retail stores. The death of Main Street wasn't a necessary result of modern technology or prosperity but it was a likely result once Wall Street and other money-centers, some major corporations, the national political parties, and the new entertainment industries (television and movies and all that) gained the upper-hand.

Anyone wishing to understand what is happening can search on the Internet or your local library website for Peter Turchin and his writings, especially those dealing with "overproduction of elites," or they can read Barbara Tuchman's *A Distant Mirror* [135] for the story of some important

aspects of the collapse of the remarkably prosperous High Middle Ages into a period when Northwestern Europe's population dropped by perhaps 50% in a century overlapping with another century in which the common man regained some of his lost prosperity while Europe's ruling elite reduced its own population by way of murder, war, starvation in prison, and other activities apparently being glorified in some of the current television shows and video-games—I hear only rumors of those realms.

Anyone wishing to practice the art of tying together knowledge from different viewpoints or even different fields of study can also look up the writings of the economist, Michael Hudson—especially his explanations of damage done to the most prosperous of economies when wealth-producers are displaced by “rentiers” or wealth-holders who devote their energies to protecting their power and wealth and position relative to others and don't make much effort to increase the wealth of the human race. (Some, perhaps even most, are incapable of gaining wealth in these moral ways.)

To return to the actual murder of John Kennedy and to leave behind for now the greater background issues and motives, it all seems to be unnecessarily complicated, a problem that always bothered me; Douglass claims at least some of the complications had to do with CIA incompetence—for example, their bumbling use of Oswald doubles led to Oswald being in two or three places at the same time at some of the most important points in the plot. According to Douglass: By the time of the Warren Commission, Johnson and Hoover were on board to help run the cover-up for whatever reasons and the FBI suppressed evidence that would have led to the recognition of a complex conspiracy by some powerful forces, whether the CIA, the Mafia, the KGB, or some other group.

I'll move on to deal with the “Unspeakable” and why such notions are caused by dualisms which may be implicit in our thoughts even if we don't think or speak in terms of the more explicit dualisms of immaterial created beings (angels or demons).

Many things that we value in the modern West, such as our relatively high freedom—as individuals—in our social and political and economic and religious lives, have come about because of a history dominated at times, always strongly influenced, by men who were ruthless in their exploitation of other human beings. Those men put together the nations of Europe, their descendants were slowly brought into webs of disciplined power and of honor; the term ‘nobleman’ was often not a *non sequitur* when describing those who exercised power in post-Roman Europe, nor was it when describ-

ing the ancient Romans. At the same time, both Jeremiah the prophet and Lord Acton the historian made a point about wealthy and powerful men including a disproportionate share of evil men; I'll quote Acton:

And remember, where you have a concentration of power in a few hands, all too frequently men with the mentality of gangsters get control. History has proven that. All power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely. [*Quotes by Lord Acton* at <http://www.quoteopia.com/famous.php?quotesby=lordacton>]

Such men have played important roles, good and bad, in American history. For example, you can read a little about the fortunes made in opium smuggling in China in James Bradley's *The China Mirage: The Hidden History of American Disaster in Asia* [15]; those making fortunes included such blue-bloods as Warren Delano, grandfather of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. In addition, as you can read in David Herbert Donald's *Lincoln* [29]: that president thought of his 'mercy' towards the South as simple justice since he knew that it was Northerners who sold African slaves to the Southerners and then left others to deal with the aftermath—the Africans and also Southerners in general, not just slaveowners or defenders of the *Peculiar institution*—see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peculiar\\_institution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peculiar_institution).

Some of the best families in the United States became "best" by way of drug-smuggling and slave-trading. They used the fortunes gained at the expense of Chinese and African victims to build railroads, to manufacture the large farm machinery which allowed the conquest of the middle of the North American continent, to build and expand the various textile and metal-product industries in a multitude of cities and towns in the US, along with much more in the way of high rate-of-return activities. They obeyed the Zeroth Commandment: Thou shalt seek the highest rate-of-return.

This is not so much different from other countries, however unexceptional they might be. It's the way the world works and, under some conditions, those criminals can do some good, though it might involve doing bad to one group and good to another which includes themselves and their children. Americans, perhaps even more than others, had a talent for washing their memories. Some, such as Warren Delano, came back from dealing in opium and talked in front of the ladies about the "China trade" as if they'd made their fortunes selling some unknown stuff to the Chinese (who

actually wanted no legal or moral goods that the United States or Europe could offer) and then coming back with valuable porcelains and jade statues and silk robes.

The United States seems to have been responsible for a new unleashing of men with the mentality of gangsters. Under the pretense of overthrowing the dead hand of European history, or something like that, the ruling elite of the United States actually overthrew the hard-won moral traditions of the West. The American citizenry didn't seem to mind so long as they could look forward to a new television season and, of course, a great Superbowl.

In any case, so long as men with the "mentality of gangsters" flow toward the centers of power in the United States, so long as there are receptive groups (institutions or agencies or... simply gangs) to receive those sorts of men and develop their ruthlessness and reinforce their sense of having the right to run at least part of the world at the expense of productive citizens and other victims, then the United States will continue to suffer from strange events such as murders or attempted murders of public figures, sometimes by implausible characters or by way of implausible events. Those in the centers of power will continue to tell us that it's plausible for these assassinations or other events to be carried out by badly schizophrenic young men or by demented loners or by illiterate nitwits from Saudi Arabia who didn't even know enough to adopt false identities when infiltrating a country and who had never learned to navigate—other than one alleged pilot of one hijacked plane going out from Chicago. They will also tell us it's crazy, "conspiratorial" thinking, to suggest that such events could be executed by highly-educated American men with many resources and high levels of technical understanding of airplanes and building structures, as well as governmental cover-up powers.

The citizens of the United States, from the end of the era of the Founding Fathers, have proven themselves incapable of self-rule.

There is no "unspeakable" aspects of the murder of John Kennedy and other public figures nor even of such events as the bombings of prominent American buildings. There are men with the mentality of gangsters among us and, currently, they seem to have grabbed a great deal of that power they crave. But they crave more and they need to fight others with the mentality of gangsters; after all, I have no power or wealth they can take. Be afraid, be very afraid, until they fail. But, they might be honestly investigated and prosecuted, perhaps to be hung. But don't hold your breath.



# 686 Thoughts in Response to "Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism" by Alvin Plantinga

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2473>. It was finished and uploaded on 2017/12/20.]

I recently read Alvin Plantinga's powerful book, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* [115]. I have little to say against what he deals with and bow to his well-organized, scholarly mind. He does a better job than any of a half-dozen or so books I've read which critique the metaphysical imperialism of some branches of Darwinist thought. I would give more credit than he explicitly has to the importance of evolutionary and developmental processes in God's acts as Creator and Shaper of this universe and perhaps of other realms of Creation, but John Henry Newman—who also dismissed the wrongful claim that evolutionary thought is a true problem for Christianity—also missed the point that Darwinist thought points out the importance of evolutionary and developmental processes in God's ways of acting as Creator and Shaper of this universe. Still more importantly—in my opinion, modern empirical science has opened the path to understandings of all of Creation which couldn't have even been seen by the best of philosophical and theological thinkers before the maturing of scientific understandings of matter-energy, of space-time, of developmental and evolutionary processes. Should I have also written development-evolution? Perhaps and perhaps not. Cutting across those dual entities, matter and space and development seem strangely linked, as do energy and

time and evolution.

I'll move forward from a slightly different angle.

Most, perhaps a vast majority of scientists, pursue the truth as they can see possible paths which might lead to a new truth or a better or more complete version of a known truth. But, they also are human beings. Henri Poincare (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri\\_Poincare](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri_Poincare) was, and is, regarded as one of the greatest—perhaps the greatest—living mathematician and physicist alive as of 1900 or so. He had even developed parts of special relativity before Einstein; some others had done the same. (See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Relativity\\_priority\\_dispute](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Relativity_priority_dispute).) But Poincare and, presumably those others, took their results as being formalisms within the general setting of Newtonian physics. So it is that Einstein most certainly wasn't alone in seeing the problems with that highly successful physics nor was he alone in seeing pieces of a solution; he was alone in taking the problems and those pieces as being 'reality', in a manner of speaking. He presented a theory which was a coherent and complete understanding of some central components of that physics.

A contemporary of Poincare, Max Planck—see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Max\\_Planck](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Max_Planck), who was co-discoverer of quantum physics along with Einstein, put it this way:

A new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it. [See the article on Max Planck at [https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/m/max\\_planck.html](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/m/max_planck.html).]

John Polkinghorne, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Polkinghorne](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Polkinghorne), is "an English theoretical physicist, theologian, writer and Anglican priest." He's written about this problem in the specific form of the difficulties that physicists and others have in understanding the wavefunction of quantum physics—see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wave\\_function](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wave_function). In *The Quantum World* [117], Polkinghorne tells us:

The wavefunction is the vehicle of our understanding of the quantum world. Judged by the robust standards of classical physics it may seem a rather wraith-like entity. But it is certainly the object of quantum mechanical discourse and, for all

the peculiarity of its collapse, its subtle essence may be the form that reality has to take on the atomic scale and below. Anyone who has had to teach a mathematically based subject will know the difficulties which students encounter in negotiating a new level of abstraction. They have met the idea of a vector as a crude arrow. You now explain to them that it is better thought of as an object with certain transformation properties under rotation. ‘But what is it *really*?’ they say. You implore them to believe that it is an object with certain transformation properties under rotation. They do not believe you; they think that you are holding back some secret clue that would make it all plain. Time and experience are great educators. A year later the student cannot conceive why he had such difficulty and suspicion about the nature of vectors. Perhaps we are in the midst of a similar, if much longer drawn out, process of education about the nature of quantum mechanical reality. If we are indeed in such a digestive, living-with-it, period, it would explain something which is otherwise puzzling. A great many theoretical physicists would be prepared to express some unease about the conceptual foundations of quantum mechanics – in particular, about Copenhagen orthodoxy – but only a tiny fraction of them ever direct serious attention to such questions. Perhaps the majority are right to submit themselves to a period of subliminal absorption. [page 82]

Freeman Dyson, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freeman\\_Dyson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freeman_Dyson), is an important figure in various fields of physics and mathematics, including quantum physics as can be seen in the history section of the article, *Quantum electrodynamics* at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quantum\\_electrodynamics#History](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quantum_electrodynamics#History). He’s also famous for being able to think outside of the mainstream on matters such as climate change. Let me move on to philosophy and theology by way a quote from Dyson:

The reason why new concepts in any branch of science are hard to grasp is always the same; contemporary scientists try to picture the new concept in terms of ideas which existed before.

[From Pat Ballew's website for the day of 2017/12/15:  
*Pat's Blog* at [http://pballew.blogspot.com/2017/12/  
on-this-day-in-math-december-15.html](http://pballew.blogspot.com/2017/12/on-this-day-in-math-december-15.html).]

Scientists, being human, have trouble accepting new ways of viewing the world, but the very limits of empirical reality and its perceptibility means that most of the natural sciences and even much of mathematics are subject to corrective forces which often act effectively over one or two generations. Philosophers and theologians deal with matters for which there are no such fast-acting corrective forces.

Let me return to Polkinghorne's description of the wavefunction of quantum mechanics as "a rather wraith-like entity." The wavefunction is what concrete matter is shaped from. To me, this points to rather obvious lines of thought which question the modern distinction between concrete being and abstractions which don't really exist but are useful for describing what does exist. In fact, the concrete, thing-like being of this universe is shaped from some strange abstract form of being which comes not to our eyes or hands or other sensory organs; it comes to our minds as abstractions. In my work since the late 1980s, and with some clarity since 2006 or so, I've been willing to claim this wavefunction is abstract being, true being. This would mean that all of mathematics is abstract being. And all of metaphysics; even metaphysics which has gone off-track starts from some body of truths—as one good example, Nietzsche's metaphysics started with a critique of subjective, man-centered thought and flew right past the possibility that the modern, liberal Protestantism into which he was born was, and is, a subjective distortion of objective truths. (Those liberal ideas didn't improve any when taken up more recently by mainstream Catholic thinkers.)

Perhaps, the ultimate strangeness of quantum physics is that it tells us that relationships, encapsulated in quantum wavefunctions as spectrums of possibilities, are primary to concrete stuff. Are there other such relationships? There is love which should lead us to remember that St John the Evangelist told us that God first loved the world. . . and then He created it. He loved the world we know, indeed—He loved all of Creation so much, that He manifested, through His Son, the truths from which He began to shape this world and the world of the Resurrected where the friends of Christ will live for time without end in perfect communion with God and with each other.

We need something as radical as a worldview which includes a metaphysics consistent with St John's theology as well as with quantum physics and other branches of the sciences of created nature, We need to understand what God is telling us through the work of the natural sciences. We need this to move forward in the formation of the Body of Christ, to move toward a sharing of God's life—a sharing which will give even inherently mortal human beings that life without end.

And it will be a life of peace and joy.

Merry Christmas to all and to all my hopes that you might come to share the peace and joy of life in the Body of Christ.



# 687 Dualism: Why Are Conspiracies So Prominent in American Political Discourse?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2477>. It was finished and uploaded on 2018/01/02.]

Short answer: conspiratorial worldviews and attitudes are necessary to preserve the fiction that the United States has no ruling class.

Who were and are the members of this ruling class?

They are the ones who went to the well-funded secondary academies of the Northeast, such as Phillips Exeter Academy, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phillips\\_Exeter\\_Academy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phillips_Exeter_Academy) and all the many with less money. They went on to the Ivy league elite socialization centers in Cambridge and New Haven and Princeton and Philadelphia and even the unlikely location of Ithaca. As the saying goes, they went on to marry each other's sisters and to work in the investment banks and law-firms of their own grandfathers or those of their school-chums or distant cousins. In the early days, they went on to make their family fortunes in the African slave-trade or the Chinese opium trade. To be sure, the various members of the Adams family were taking care of the nation's interests, at least as they saw them, and seeming to live well but not so well as the Cabots and Perkins and Delanos (such as FDR) who got their money from trading slaves or opium.

In more recent decades, the membership of the ruling class has been expanded to take in the powerful oil-families of Texas and California and the overlapping group of families who made their money in California water. See the movie *Chinatown* for a less than flattering view of those water-

barons.

Ghost-like, they flowed into the State Department; the Dulles brothers acted as if cutting deals for their clients was one of their central duties, from the World War I era up to the 1960s—they were often active partners of the law-firm of Sullivan and Comwell. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sullivan\\_&\\_Cromwell](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sullivan_&_Cromwell) for a typical cleaned-up Wikipedia article on a powerful American institution or Stephen Kinzer's *The Brothers: John Foster Dulles, Allen Dulles, and Their Secret World War* [82] for a mere part of the truer and very disedifying story of American blue-blood corruption and sheer criminality, often in the form of coldblooded disregard for old-fashioned morality and concern for human beings outside of one's own family or 'tribe'.

More ghostly still, young blue-blooded men looking for excitement flowed into the OSS and then into the CIA, sometimes performing dangerous public service but also starting the first international heroin and cocaine cartels to raise money for the war against communism—some claim our elected officials wanted a very big world-wide war against communism but didn't like the estimated costs and thus sent the CIA out with partial funding and a directive to raise the rest of the money somehow. The CIA Watergate burglars, E Howard Hunt and Frank Sturgis, were from blue-blood families though not ones of the greatest wealth and power. These blue-bloods were reinforced by fresh blood recruited by a number of Ivy League professors, especially at Harvard and Yale, who were in cahoots with the Dulles brothers and other powerful men and sources of funding.

The CIA's criminal minority, the deepest part of its covert-operations, the All-American drug-smugglers and murderers and destroyers of countries innocent and guilty alike, was—and perhaps still is—a gathering heavy in graduates of Yale, many or most of them in the early years of the 1950s being members of Skull and Bones. Since then? Who knows? Maybe potential CIA thugs are now recruited at state universities and engineering schools along with those who will become the more respectable analysts or covert information gatherers?

But ruling classes can change. In the years of 1861-1865, the ruling classes of North(eastern) and South(eastern) fought a war to the death; the white aristocrats of Virginia and the Carolinas lost. There is an oddity of the sort which should be disturbing to most conspiracy theorists: the Northern(eastern) elites completed the destruction of the Cherokee elites who had been driven west by the South(eastern) aristocrats; in the War

Between the States, those Cherokee elites had allied themselves with their earlier enemies.

It's not the specific criminal operations or complex fantasies which matter the most for now. The first is no more than what professional criminals do whether blue-blood or Sicilian, whether capable of handling a complex hi-tech attack or capable of handling no more than a suicidal vehicular bomb attack. The second mostly doesn't exist though there might be some semblance of that sort of conspiracy in the hi-tech criminal conspiracies which might have taken advantage of insider information on the lesser crimes of other power-elite insiders. If we Americans could see the world clearly and simply realize that we do have a power-elite class and to further realize it has moved toward a criminal shape as it chose to hide and to raise their sons in the conspiratorial atmosphere of groups such as Skull and Bones—itsself founded by the Tafts and the Russells, the latter family being the core of the blue-bloods who made their families' fortunes smuggling opium into China. That "China Trade" was itself opened and dominated by the British Imperialists and was an effort to save the British Empire: the British people were buying so much tea from China—tea from India or Ceylon wasn't good enough—that the Empire's silver was spilling into China. The British government exploited Eastern Asian (mostly Chinese) opium addicts to draw the world's silver back out of China before the Chinese ended up owning the British Empire. Our national security agencies exploited junkies around the world to raise money for the war against communism. Progress of a sort. And all invisible to the American people though much of the story has been told by quite respectable historians and journalists; the story up to yesterday can be had in public libraries with updates to be found on Websites of journalist more honest and competent than well-paid.

I don't know if the British tea-drinkers knew they were endangering an Empire their power-elite was wedded to; I don't know if the British people even knew their dignified Colonial administrators and diplomats and military leaders and even! Queen Victoria were enabling opium smugglers to get that silver back out of China. I do know that Americans seem determined to be ignorant on very similar counts with respect to our power-elite and their attachment to an empire which is draining away American wealth and destroying American moral character. I also know that this American ignorance is enabled by the desire to pretend there is no such thing as an American power-elite. It isn't a Matrix but it was a club of those who went to the old Northeastern prep-schools and then on to Yale

and Harvard and so on and is likely still something similar. This desire to pretend we are a nation of people equal before the law is common to members of both the power-elite class and of all other American classes.

That American power-elite, once productive (probably) of more great men than drug-smugglers and slave-traders and not yet productive of assassins operating on the whole-sale level and regime-changers destroying entire regions of the world and dooming generations to poverty or struggles out of poverty, wasn't really so bad by the standards of history. And then Europe tried to destroy itself in the Great War of 1914-1945; with China and India prostrate for various reasons including British imperialism, the United States found itself in 1945 as the only great power in the world. The Dulles brothers and Rockefeller brothers, the Harrimans and Walkers and Bushes, the Fords and Watsons, the Roosevelts both Teddyites and FDRians, even the newly recruited business or military 'experts' such as McNamara and Odom, the intellectuals such as Kissinger and Brzezinski who provided an ideology glorifying American Hegemony as something different from and infinitely superior to mere empires, all led us on a crusade not to spread democracy and goodness but to turn the world, including the American homeland itself, into a plantation to be ruled by the American power-elite.

All of this is hidden because nearly all American citizens, members of the power-elite and servants of those and nearly all others, feel a need to pretend we've instituted forms of equality not possible in this world. It's led us into a pretense describable as a dark and morally sick joke. "They" occupy positions of wealth and power, grabbing more wealth and power; at the same time, "They" pretend they are just like us and want to be just like us. For a couple centuries, the ordinary folk of the United States have demanded this pretense and have brainwashed themselves to believe it. The ruling elite have gone along with the game, committing the crimes all such classes do in hidden, conspiratorial ways. They have raised some of their sons to form conspiratorial groups not so much different from such criminal groups as the Mafia and the Latin Kings and MS-13, partly through such institutions as Skull and Bones and CIA. Over the past two centuries, they have made or increased fortunes for various families of a bluish caste by whatever provides the highest rate-of-return. They pushed oil exploration in Texas and Oklahoma and the Gulf of Mexico at times when that provided that all-important highest rate-of-return and at other times destroyed the governments and societies and condemned millions in Southwest and Central Asia to death or to lives of poverty and victimhood

at the hands of misused American troops or Sunni terrorists. At times, they invested in pharmaceutical research and at other times they engaged in drug-smuggling in East Asia or Southeast Asia or in Mena, Arkansas.

We have a ruthless and fundamentally amoral ruling class going for the highest rate-of-return in legitimate business or in smuggling drugs or weapons and a large body of citizens who are determined to be oblivious to all this unless it impacts them immediately and personally. When something goes terribly wrong or terribly right depending on the perspective, it stinks to outsiders of a sci-fi sort of conspiracy when it is nothing more than the same-old thuggish behavior of power-hungry and money-hungry men. It's true that the technology of the modern world allows for spectacular crimes, but they are spectacular crimes possible to the likes of CIA or Israeli paramilitaries and other similar operatives and not really possible for the typical Salafis who have learned a little about fighting on the modern battlefield but otherwise are at the limits of their capabilities when they drive a vehicle loaded with explosives into a building.

I'll backtrack a little to note there there is a Matrix-like conspiracy: it is the agreement of the criminals in the American ruling-elite and the rest of the American people to pretend we have no powerful criminals among us of the type found in unexceptional countries such as Russia and China and Medieval France and Renaissance Italy and so on. And so it is that much is obscured though it is blindingly obvious to those who simply look at the American ruling-elite with the same skepticism appropriate for understanding the rulers in the days of William Tell or Robin Hood. Not that we have solid historical information about the clearly historical Tell or the probably historical Robin Hood, but books such as Barbara Tuchman's *A Distant Mirror* [135] relate the historical truths about the brutality of a ruling-elite, bishops and abbots as well as kings and dukes, when instability threatens their power and wealth. Some may have even believed their wars upon the "common people" was justified by the need to protect some level of human community.

A warning: the Swiss at the time of William Tell and Portuguese peasants about the same time defeated their exploiters from Austria and Spain only because they developed weapons and fighting techniques which could overwhelm those knights on horseback. Our situation is much different because of modern technology in weapons and communications technology and transportation and so on, but the principle remains that an exploitive and criminal overclass can only be tamed over many generations or upon

some sort of bloody battlefield. Even with the conversion of the German warriors to Christianity, it took many centuries to mold them into somewhat moral aristocracies in Western Europe despite the fact they willingly participated in that conversion to a (partly) Christ-centered life. Historians will likely find those German warriors of violent impulse were more easily converted than would be an amoral ruling-elite devoted to the abstraction of rate-of-return even in their materialistic greed.

I sadly predict we Americans will pretend that ruling-elite doesn't exist even as we grind our way toward relative poverty and powerlessness and probably fragmentation into a number of smaller states.

# 688 My Position on Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2493>. It was finished and uploaded on 2018/04/06.]

Pope Francis has recently caused a stir by allegedly claiming there to be no Hell and even possibly once claiming there to be no Hell, Purgatory, or Heaven. See *Francis, Spin Doctor To Himself. His Latest Exploits* at <http://magister.blogautore.espresso.repubblica.it/2018/04/05/francis-spin-doctor-to-himself-his-latest-exploits/>.

I also have speculated there be no Hell and tend strongly to that view, but I'm a firm believer that the purpose of Creation is to provide brothers and sisters to share the life of the Lord Jesus Christ for time without end—in the world of the resurrected or Heaven, if you prefer. I'm also a firm believer in the need to be properly prepared to share that divine life and, thus Purgatory is necessary for some (many?) of us. Sharing the life of the Son of God would undoubtedly be so intense as to require a properly matured human being.

Before I'd thought this through in the context of an evolving human race within a universe of evolutionary and developmental processes, I'd already questioned the existence of Hell because of my reading of the Bible.

First of all, the Old Testament vision of Hell seems to be little different from that of the Greek pagan view. Hell is a dreary place of the 'souls' of all men separated from the bodies which had allowed them to experience the pleasures of this universe; the afterlife was a matter of dread to ancient Greeks and Romans and Semites.

Second, references to Hell in the Gospels occur mostly (entirely?) in parables meant to teach (usually moral) lessons and not meant to be taken

literally in all details anymore than we take Aesop's fables to be literal statements about talking hares and tortoises.

Third, Jesus Christ does sometimes talk more explicitly about the after-life, especially in the context of the Eucharist, the most definitive statement in my opinion being: "For this is the will of my Father, that every one who sees to Son and believes in Him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day." [John 6:40] The general thrust of the discourses of John is: eternal life is not something inherent to human beings but rather something God can give us if we respond properly to Him, especially through His Son. Only those who are saved are resurrected, though it's logical and not at all inconsistent with the statement of Christ just quoted that there be a place where some might be punished in a purging sense and others 're-educated'.

For me, this line of thought eventually lead to exploration of modern knowledge of human being as a physical embodiment within the realm of biology, not as a pasting together of body and soul as was believed by ancient men who recognized the special nature of human being but had no appreciation, for example, of the dynamic and responsive nature of mortal flesh. In fact, they generally couldn't understand dynamic events in the material world and posited spirits to do all the moving; the later, 'higher' pagans reduced the population of this spirit-world which surrounds us but never totally denied it to my knowledge. In any case, the fears of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas that the brain was inert and not capable of engaging in abstract reasoning were proven wrong by modern understandings of cells and DNA and neurons and brain-structures at various levels and so on.

God is a competent Creator and didn't need to shim here with an immaterial soul or brace up things with an immaterial mind. What He created, what can be observed and measured in some very important ways, is sufficient for producing a species with a body suited to the needs of the incarnate Son of God.

So, we should be asking—if we have the faith and courage: at what point did some small group (only Adam and Eve?) of our ancestors become part of some covenanted relationship with God that they could have damned all their descendants by breaking that relationship? By the time that human beings existed with the abstract reasoning ability to understand in a coherent way the possibilities of one or more beings transcending this world of 'mere' matter, by the time they could even understand moral relationships in a human way, there were almost certainly multiple family lines separated

from each other but also interbreeding to some extent into each other; it even seems that we have genes from interbreeding with Neanderthals circa 40,000 years ago and—in the case of some ethnic groups—from very primitive human species at a similar time. There was no Adam and no Eve who could have contingently damned us and there were many human beings who simply never responded to God or His Creation, never rose above the state of being a human animal, perhaps out of choice and perhaps because it was beyond their capabilities or the capabilities of their communities. It would seem most plausible to think that ‘mere’ human animals would have the same fate as canine animals or chimpanzee animals or shark animals: the end of their mortal life is the end of their existence. On the other hand, there is the possibility of many who never form a personal relationship with God being saved because of membership in one or more communities of human beings who have such a personal relationship. This latter possibility has been badly reduced in scope in the modern West though it is frightening to think of the share we all have in national or other communities which have committed great crimes in recent years—such as the American invasion of Iraq in 2003.

I could be wrong, but not entirely. God is a competent Creator and there must be coherence between what we know of man empirically and what we know of man through his only inborn transcendental property: being capable of acknowledging and responding to a transcendent God. But, it is not clear to me if this transcendental property is truly inborn with all human beings—individual or communal. No less than the scribes and pharisees, modern defenders of Christianity strain at gnats and swallow camels. They worry about souls and angels and demons—our problematical inheritance from our pagan ancestors; they slide over the problems and opportunities of our relationships with the God of Jesus Christ, all-powerful and all-knowing and all-loving; they defend angels against the likelihood that Biblical angels are manifestations of God’s presence rather than independent creatures as if it be better to be visited by angels than by God.

This points to another problem with human beings, one which might require some re-training and remedial education institutes in purgatory: most people, even those with high IQs and capable of learning difficult material, have minds which seem to form once and then harden like instantly cured concrete. They become incapable of honestly and intelligently questioning what they were taught in second-grade Sunday School or seventh-grade CCD or tenth-grade American history class, they become incapable of re-

sponding to ongoing natural revelations from the Creator, they become incapable of responding to information indicating our understanding of the Bible or of the Creed is imperfect or is incomplete given new possibilities raised by modern thought, they become incapable of supplementing their idealistic high-school images of the United States without everything breaking in their understanding of the world.

At the same time, many modern men and women of the West—including Pope Francis—seem quite capable of somehow adopting parts, maybe many parts, of the dominant thought of their day, currently liberal secularism. I think their liberal secular thoughts and attitudes to be channeled through concrete ducts formed during their early education as Christians, but that is very much speculative and doesn't change matters too much. In any case, they can sometimes pick up some good ideas about history or human biology or the nature of logical and mathematical truth, though distorted in most cases. Liberal secularists also have such rigid minds and aren't any more comfortable with empirical fields of knowledge than are religious believers with rigid minds—or those who trust in the words of priests and ministers and writers who have rigid minds. Those religious believers with rigid minds wish to reduce empirical knowledge to a state of submission to their particular schemes for understanding life, the universe, and everything—which schemes include, nowadays, a lot of empirical knowledge circa 1800 or so. Secular liberals seem to have heads cleared of ideas and filled with a lot of policy goals; in the United States, they are those who have minds so open that their brains have fallen out; that sad state is not due to their own decision but rather to the moral irresponsibility of their parents and clergymen who retreated in front of the profit-seekers of Hollywood and the publishing companies as well as the ideological evil of those who set educational and cultural policies in the United States. Other countries, especially in the developed West, are in similar conditions.

Yet, Pope Francis starts out right if he's acting on the intuition that the Christian churches and other institutions, as well as authors and other individuals, have failed to deal with the discrepancy between traditional understandings and ways of life and newer possibilities. Some of those possibilities are no more than modern statements of ancient desires for freedom from the constraints of mortal human being. Some of those possibilities arise because of better knowledge and understanding of Creation, including even the revelations found in Holy Scripture. Some of those possibilities arise from the creation of new forms of human being, especially commu-

nal human being, as human populations have grown so large and human relationships and activities have grown so complex.

We need more serious creative thinkers addressing the issues, thinkers also with serious knowledge of tradition and respect for tradition, not an ignorant, weak-minded group which seems to be so progressive as to imagine they can jump to something resembling Heaven on Earth without bothering with inconvenient knowledge from the Bible or other sources of traditions, without bothering with the flesh-and-blood nature of fundamental human communities, without bothering with the constraints of the evolutionary and developmental processes which God Himself uses in Creation. The secular liberals have used modern science and pseudo-science to beat Christian believers into submission and then began creating their own systems of superstitious thought.



# 689 I Have No Horse in This Race

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2496>. It was finished and uploaded on 2018/04/14.]

I've proposed that the Body of Christ, the real and not nominal or virtual, community into which the friends of God will be integrated is a civilization with the Christian Church as His central organ. In this proposed understanding, the Church isn't the entirety of the Body; after all, I think that all that is good and proper in human nature will be completed and perfected in those resurrected to live with the Son of God for time without end. Our lives in the world of the resurrected, including the life of Jesus Christ, will be full and rich human lives which aren't lived in only the Heavenly Church pews where we sing and worship.

Sandro Magister has posted an article by Roberto Pertici who is "a professor of contemporary history at the university of Bergamo and has focused his studies on Italian culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with particular attention to relations between Church and state." See Magister article *Bergoglio's Reform Was Written Before. By Martin Luther* <http://magister.blogautore.espresso.repubblica.it/2018/04/13/bergoglios-reform-was-written-before-by-martin-luther/> for the article, *THE END OF ROMAN CATHOLICISM?* by Professor Pertici.

I was going to write an essay with the title: *I've Got No Horse in This Race Between Those Catholics With Leaking Brains and Those With Hardened Brains*. Pope Francis and his boys—and girls?—have mostly leaked out their brains and some might have dropped those organs on the sidewalk as one gloppy mess. On the other side are those who have brains

made of concrete cured as hard as those 2000 year-old Roman aqueducts.

So, the folks with no brains know something has changed in the world and know something should be done and. . . From there on, it's worse than politicians making sausage and butchers making laws.

The folks with concrete brains think that ideas borrowed from Hellenistic philosophers and forms of organization borrowed from Imperial Rome make up some sort of manifested truth as absolute as the Creedal beliefs of Christianity and the Bible from which they came. "If we've discovered that God had the bad judgment to run the world by way of evolutionary and developmental processes, then that's His problem. Special creation starring Adam and Eve is good enough. And, besides, my brain isn't flexible enough to admit such a new idea."

We need to respond to the empirical truths which we've discovered in the modern era, such as those regarding human origins, and we need to respond to new empirical truths which are being created as human being itself is enriched and complexified, such as new forms of political organization not yet found in the world. We need to so respond while remembering that we are still human beings with a specific history which dictates most aspects of our individual and communal human being. There are a lot of cultural variations between, say Maasai and Eskimos—see Chapter 683, *Dualism: The Split Between the Practical and the Ideal*, but they and nearly all human ethnic types who have survived are much alike in, for example, forming marriages of a type more like traditional Christian marriage than not.

# 690 A Plea From Syrian Christians—Will Any Western Christians Respond?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2498>. It was finished and uploaded on 2018/04/18.]

The Orthodox and Catholic Christian patriarchs of Syria have made a plea to Western countries and their citizens, especially to their fellow Christians in the West. This statement, follows on similar pleas over the years by Christians, including Orthodox and Catholic bishops, from various countries in Southwest Asia, a region which we Westerners, especially Americans, have turned into a suburb of Hell. The latest plea centers on the particular problems of Christians and other minorities at risk from the overthrow of governments which protect all these minorities from the head-chopping, liver-eating allies of the US and the UK and other western countries. Usually, when the US government and its European lapdogs get involved in a region, ancient Christian communities will disappear and individual Christians will be killed or enslaved or otherwise badly hurt; similar statements hold for Alawites, Kurds and Druse and other minorities.

I first learned of this recent plea from the blog post, *Here’s What Syrian Christian Leaders Think of their Western Saviours* at <http://www.theblogmire.com/heres-what-syrian-christian-leaders-think-of-their-western-saviours/>, a weblog well worth following by anyone concerned with the internal or external problems of modern Christianity.

The actual plea by Syrian Orthodox Patriarchs is *A Statement Issued by the Patriarchates of Antioch and all the*

*East for the Greek Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, and Greek-Melkite Catholic* at <http://syriacpatriarchate.org/2018/04/a-statement-issued-by-the-patriarchates-of-antioch-and-all-the-east-for-the-> It's on the website of *Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch*. I'll provide just a short quote from that statement:

This brutal aggression [the recent missile attack by the United States, the United Kingdom, and France] is a clear violation of the international laws and the UN Charter, because it is an unjustified assault on a sovereign country, member of the UN. It causes us great pain that this assault comes from powerful countries to which Syria did not cause any harm in any way.

The Western countries bomb countries which are not doing anything against the West, the Western countries train and arm ISIS and Al-Qaeda terrorists, they steal the natural resources of Syria and Iraq and Libya and others.

The Orthodox and Catholic patriarchs of Antioch are crying for some respect for the sovereignty of Syria, for some peace and respect for the lives of Syrian peoples. They would like Western countries, most recently the United States, United Kingdom, and France to cease regarding Syria and other countries as means to the prosperity of those who, rather than working as most of us do, would rather steal, send armies into action, smuggle drugs and arms, train terrorists. These are men who seize or inherit power and, being incapable of doing something useful, wage war against the powerless who happen to live on or near reservoirs of petroleum or natural gas, near key transportation routes which can be profitably controlled by unscrupulous men.

Christians in the United States, the United Kingdom, France and non-Christians as well better realize they have a leadership made of those men described by Lord Acton in these quotes:

And remember, where you have a concentration of power in a few hands, all too frequently men with the mentality of gangsters get control. History has proven that. [From *BrainyQuote*, [https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/lord\\_acton.](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/lord_acton.)]

Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. [From *BrainyQuote*, [https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/lord\\_acton](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/lord_acton).]

These men are now turning against the American people—see Chapter 687, *Dualism: Why Are Conspiracies So Prominent in American Political Discourse?*. That chapter is an update of similar analyses I'd published in past years, an update motivated by a reading of a book about two brothers who definitely had the mentality of gangsters: Stephen Kinzer's *The Brothers: John Foster Dulles, Allen Dulles, and Their Secret World War* [82].

Modern day Christians of the West seem hardly to have the historical or other knowledge to recognize such gangsters though they dominate the West—not in the way of a great conspiracy organized by B-school brain-trusts but in the way of a disordered nation or even civilization which has become the battleground of gangsters who fight each other; sometimes combine to exploit the decent, law-abiding citizens, and often engage in wars against other countries or civilizations.

I'll make a point in closing: we should also consider our duties to the American soldiers who have suffered physically and mentally and in damage to their moral characters as a result of all the criminal *Kinetic military action[s]* (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kinetic\\_military\\_action](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kinetic_military_action)) in which they were inserted. We don't do our duty to these young men, and some young women as well—itself a matter of moral shame, by holding parades and picnics. We do our duty as voters by learning enough to know the location of these countries our leaders wish to invade, what their history is—including, if applicable, their recent decades or centuries of exploitation by Western countries. We do our further duty by identifying trusted commentators or by perhaps reading serious history books by well-regarded historians, including some retired diplomats and military officers—colonels are generally more to be trusted than generals. Most people can, and should, take shortcuts by finding friends or neighbors who have some 'bookish' talents and have taken the trouble to read a little about Syria and Iran and Iraq and the crimes we and the British and the French have been committing against them for at least a century and a half. And we reach a mature level of doing our duty by asking good questions about any proposed "kinetic military action" and forcing a serious and honest public debate. We become wise old men and wise old women by

finding replacements for those senators and representatives and presidents who don't measure up to the questions or don't live up to any promises they make, maybe showing themselves to be ignorant or simply giving signs they have weak moral character or the mentality of gangsters.

# 691 The Ultimate Christian Authority on Earth is the Pilgrim Body of Christ

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2522>. It was finished and uploaded on 2018/05/29.]

At his most authoritative, the Pope of the day has been the one who speaks on behalf of the community of Catholics, at times even on behalf of the community of all sacramental Christians—in centuries long past, those now called Eastern Orthodox accepted the authority of popes of the caliber of St Leo the Great—see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope\\_Leo\\_I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_Leo_I). In recent decades, non-Catholics accorded some substantial personal authority to St John Paul II.

In a similar vein, those who translate and explain the Bible as well as those who give us narratives of the history of the Pilgrim Body of Christ (and not just the Christian churches) also exercise substantial authority (validly and invalidly) over the ways in which Christians understand even the revealed truths.

I entered the Catholic Church in the late 1980s because of my readings in the history of Christianity and the belief I developed that the Church of Rome was in some strong sense the center piece, or at least the largest piece, of the pilgrim Body of Christ—though I wouldn't have phrased it that way until the past decade or so.

That pilgrim Body of Christ has various organs and I now believe the Christian Church is the central organ of that Body—unlike St Paul who seemed to think the Church is the entire Body of Christ. Starting more than a decade ago, I'd been emphasizing the importance of a civilization

to the pilgrim Body of Christ and then about eight years ago, I began to suspect that the Body of Christ is like a civilization—the completion and perfection of all aspects of human being—with the Christian Church as its primary organ.

The Body of Christ existed on Earth in an embryonic form so long as Western Civilization existed, however uncertain its true adherence to Christian beliefs and practices. This should not be taken as a chauvinistic claim—Western Civilization wasn't more pure or more Christ-like than, say, Russian proto-civilization, rather was it more complete in having manifested a relative fullness of human attributes in communal forms. (See Chapter 594, *Freedom and Structure in Human Life – What Can We Say About the Body of Christ?* or download the book, *The Shape of Reality* [56], for a discussion of my developing views on communal human nature.)

Yet, the Eastern churches are also manifestations of the Body of Christ, those in communion with Orthodox patriarchs; there are also the ancient churches of Southwestern Asia—neither in communion with the Latins nor with the Greeks nor with the Russians, yet having a valid priesthood with an Apostolic succession. Western Civilization has been so successfully purged of its Christian foundations, and there are not available 'pagan' foundations to replace them—assuming it be possible to do something of that sort without bringing the original civilization to a crashing halt and then starting a multi-century reconstruction. We Western Christians have been passive collaborators in the destruction of the pilgrim Body of Christ.

In any case, I'm not making an effort in this essay to settle this issue conclusively as there are many groups with at least a plausible claim to be (perhaps radically incomplete) manifestations of the Body of Christ. What I am trying to make clear is the primacy of the Body of Christ rather than the primacy of the Pope or the entire hierarchy of Rome or the entire hierarchy of all plausible Christian churches. The descendants of the Apostles themselves are those selves only so long as they are part of the Body, leaders in some ways of the Body but also humbly subordinate to that entirety.

Christ is the point of it all, and that means that the Body of Christ is the point of all earthly human being.

We don't understand the Body of Christ in real-world terms and it would be a sheer grab for power if the leaders of the Catholic Church in Rome were to claim that Body is necessarily and inherently centered on the Pope or the Roman hierarchy in general. Those particular Christian leaders have,

in fact, been morally irresponsible in not seeing the clear need to respond to God's Creation; some, such as Pope Francis, seem to see some need to respond but they are far more likely to do as Francis is doing—trying to make peace with the dominant inhuman and inhumane ideology of the recent past, secular liberalism or cultural Marxism or whatever term you may prefer. Those terms are largely misunderstandings.

A truer understanding points to a deformed human mind, truly inhuman and inhumane in some important ways. Don't go to modern books of political philosophy, whether the creative originals or textbooks; don't go to modern books of religious thought or spiritual feelings; don't listen to the frantic analyses of the Web's political and religious commentators. Read Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story, *The Birth-mark*, and contemplate the self-serving, calculating coldness which defined the human being of the Calvinists of the Northeastern states of the US. It was the Calvinists of the American Northeast (call them New Englanders for short), dark of mind, self-centered and cold, who are the source of much which is wrong in the modern world or, at least, they are the most prominent manifestation of this distortion of human being.

We are in a mess because we are a mess. Pope Francis and most other Christian leaders, including the so-called Christian intellectuals, are worse off than most are.

To the extent that I'm right, Western Civilization was once the bulk of the pilgrim Body of Christ; if it was not the God-ordained center of the entire Body, it was certainly the dominant part of that Body—for good as well as bad. It is that Body, not even so central an organ as the Church and its hierarchy, which comes to some understanding of God's Creation, of our relationship to our Creator, of our history, of our futures as individuals and communities in the Body of Christ.



# 692 Is Modern Atheism a Result of High Loads of Genetic Mutations?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2526>. It was finished and uploaded on 2018/06/12.]

The basic idea is simple.

For decades, geneticists have been able to chemically separate and analyze genes. This made possible a fruitless search for the magic gene which ‘causes’ schizophrenia or depression or intelligence or other human qualities or disorders of human being. A lot was learned, perhaps most importantly—there are no such magic genes. Complex qualities and disorders involve complexes of genes. Intuitively, this would seem to emphasize the gradual side of evolution—that is, a build-up of changes of the genotype can result in sudden and dramatic changes of the phenotype.

As a result, complex attributes, such as intelligence or sociability, have developed not from a small number of dramatic mutations in a single gene but rather from a build-up of mutations over a number of genes each of which have only a small effect on the attribute; problems in those attributes might be similar in being caused by problems in a number of those underlying genes. An added complication: “high mutational loads” in these important human qualities will result (always?/often?/sometimes?) in immune system problems—thus under ‘natural’ conditions of selection—ie, no modern hospitals, someone with high mutational loads in intelligence will die young and not reproduce successfully. This is above and beyond the usual (Darwinian) selection pressures against such organisms as human beings who are asocial in our highly sociable species.

In particular, higher or abstract intelligence in human beings seems to involve better than 1,000 genes and similar statements can be made about tallness and some other human qualities; a single mutation causes problems on the order of 2% or less. Some disorders, such as schizophrenia and severe forms of depression, involve high rates of mutations across a number of genes playing a role in producing healthy versions of human characteristics. It seems to be, and was suggested by evolutionary theorists years ago, that the human inclination to engage in “mass-worship of moral gods” is fundamental to the formation of the particular community oriented human personalities we have and, thus, to the formation of complex communities as we know them.

It’s important to know a little about the background to these ideas. I’ll consider as evolutionary theorists scientists of different sorts: paleontologists, archaeologists, geneticists, linguists, and evolutionary theorists ‘proper’, along with various technical experts and general thinkers such as philosophers commenting upon the theories and speculations.

These various sorts of evolutionary theorists have been exploring selection pressures coming from cultures as well as from the non-human environment. A certain group of human ancestors learned how to control fire somewhat and there arose a new form of selection: upon the capabilities of humans to handle and advance technology and also upon human abilities to develop social mechanisms for maintaining and developing that technology and transmitting it to future generations. It appears from some ancient, prehistorical knowledge and is glaringly obvious in the records as humans learned to write that collective worship played a major role in shaping human communities—in politics and in setting us on the road to philosophy and theology and eventually to physics and mathematics. Most readers, at least Americans middle-aged or older, will be most aware of the centrality of religion in forming human cultures and states and civilizations from reading the Bible; skepticism as to details but not disbelief is warranted in reading the Bible. The non-Semitic literature of city-states and empires and expansive religions tell substantially the same story. Even the power of kings seems to have begun in the temples though it might mature by way of spears and disciplined bodies of warriors and by way of large-scale farming or mining and disciplined bodies of civil servants.

Putting it strongly, enflashed human social and moral natures evolved and developed in well-ordered societies on a foundation of “collective worship of moral gods” as some scientists put it. Healthy human being is tied to

religious practice. This is not a proof of God's existence, let alone a proof of the truths of particular revelations from Christianity or any other religion. It does point to the idea that complex human societies, and the individuals of those societies, will be unstable, disordered in morals and other ways, if those societies don't provide at least rich religious rituals for collective worship. Or if a large percentage of the individuals of a traditional community of a complex sort turn away from their temples and their gods. In the light of this knowledge coming from empirical science—including the historical analyses which try to make sense of ancient Uruk, the ancient pagan Romans had good reason to think of Christians as something like atheists.

It could be argued a different human race might have evolved but we are what we are.

So, there is something of a 'model' of a human being capable of forming and maintaining and living in a complex society, even a civilization. That model includes such traits as a reasonably high intelligence—a matter which should be considered relative to family lines of those capable of fulfilling roles in complex societies. It should also include the small-effect genes for general personality traits which almost certainly overlap those for general (or global) intelligence traits.

Again, the key idea is that there are no magical genes for complex attributes such as intelligence or the (collective-worship-centered) human social nature—communal human nature as I prefer to call it. There are a number of genes for such attributes, each having a small effect and also having an effect on general health. That is, a 'broken' human being, schizophrenic or not inclined to that collective worship is very likely to have a defective immune system as well their more obvious problems; prior to the industrial age with good sewer systems and fresh water systems and modern hospitals, those 'broken' human beings tended to die young. Now they can live lives of length similar to those of the healthy, more 'complete' human beings, producing more 'broken' human beings.

We now have two major problems in much of the developed West:

1. a growing part of the Western-descended population is made up of people not equipped to live in complex societies because of genetic mutations, and
2. another growing population coming from heavy migration of people

from regions of the world where evolutionary processes didn't produce high levels of some of these attributes necessary for living in these very complex societies which are parts of civilizations.

In my writings over the previous 12 years or so, I've developed a way of making sense of this in the context of Christian beliefs. Let me sketch this for you:

1. All human communities, and the Body of Christ in a complete and perfect way, are true communities and not just voluntary gatherings of freestanding individuals. Thus, we have communal human being which is as real as individual human being.
2. The Body of Christ is the true civilization with the Christian Church as the central organ—with my current understanding of that Church being: all sacramental Christian churches with a priesthood having Apostolic descent.
3. In my book, *The Shape of Reality* [56], I speculated on the possibility of using modern geometry of the sort used in Einstein's Theory of General Relativity to describe human communities with each 'point' representing a human being (point of spacetime) and the entire ball of wax being the Body of Christ (the universe). In practice, this could be complex and, for example, each individual might be a plane which is partly bent to the shape of the overall manifold.

Here are two links to a couple recent, (relatively) accessible discussions of the situation with growing numbers of human beings who have high mutation loads:

- *Are Atheists Genetic Mutants-A Product of Recent Evolution?* at <http://www.unz.com/article/are-atheists-genetic-mutants-a-product-of-recent-evolution> and
- *The Mutant Says in His Heart, "There Is No God": the Rejection of Collective Religiosity Centred Around the Worship of Moral Gods Is Associated with High Mutational Load* at <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/32df/6da2640d57af0fb5af42072c0351d65ea775.pdf>.

There is much to be done here. We need deeper and more reliable understandings and from such understandings, we need to revise our behavior to better protect the future of our children in the West without harming others, but perhaps by no longer helping others, if that help is at the expense of the futures of our children. (And I think there is good reason to believe we've hurt a lot of people and peoples greatly while thinking to be helping them.)

One final qualification: These analyses of genetic mutations don't seem to directly address the issue of highly intellectual forms of atheism or asociality, but it may encourage those holders of those intellectual ideas to think twice, or more, before trying to take away the faith of those of simpler ways of thought—especially their students. It may even encourage some of those holders of those intellectual ideas to evaluate their own beliefs.



# 693 Why Middle-class American Men Don't Care Much If They Die.

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2529>. It was finished and uploaded on 2018/06/27.]

I'll ramble a bit in a way suited to a discussion of a life lived in the chaos and moral coarseness of Western Civilization in its period of advanced decay.

Why are there so many men, mostly white and middle-class, who are said to have been living good lives and said to have been happy, and yet they are committing suicide? There are, of course, the relatively many men who have various problems in their family lives or their memories of their participation in the criminal wars of the leaders of the US and its allies or their frustrations at finding a 'spot' in a West built by white European men which has been stolen and is being wasted by those who don't see the rather obvious differences between the races (indeed there are significant differences between some ethnic groups inside the races) or the more obvious differences between men and women.

I'm no expert in suicides or severe mental/emotional problems, though I learned a bit from occasional comments of my late sister who was such an expert—officially a psychiatric social-worker. I've also gotten into conversations with men back from the war-zones to which we send young men after doing our best in church and school and in 'entertainment' products to make those men soft inside so they can meet the standards of the priests who never heard of King St Louis and school-marms wishing everyone to be well-behaved in those horrible bla-bla sessions they hold in classrooms and the Hollywood creatures who've never met a lie they won't tell if it can

make them some money.

More to the current point: this is very personal to me for I find myself in a strange position. Moment to moment, I usually enjoy life. I think I'm doing important work which God has called me to. Yet, I feel strangely unmoored, dissatisfied with a life where I've bypassed the chance to have a wife and children, to gain some sort of moderate prosperity—the best kind in most cases, and I develop ideas and literature which could be part of a new Christian civilization. . . . And I get nowhere. And I get to watch the of ongoing processes of moral and spiritual and intellectual decay in which I'm trapped as well as other human beings in the modern West. (See Jacques Barzun's *From Dawn to Decadence* [9] for a magnificent analysis of the decay in quality of literacy from 1500 to 2000.) Even in the Catholic Church with its deep ties to the traditions of the West, I was told more than 20 years ago by a priest running a prominent press that American Catholics don't (can't?) read difficult books. So. . . pep rallies. We publish books of low intellectual and moral caliber and think we are honoring the Creator by turning **His** ideas to childish mush—not childlike but childish. Guides to a better pep rally also do well as guides to feeling comfortable in your ignorance and complacency. And, of course, we've been trained to expect something different from the upcoming television season or movie year—expectation of something new overwhelms our sense of tradition and that, only seemingly a paradox, prevents creative responses to what is truly new.

And nobody wants to look at the elephant in the room. Catholics and other Christians claim they wish to restore the Christian West and then, as one example, they go off to Masses or other worship services in which they joyfully howl out music which would have horrified the musicians of the rise and magnificent height of the West: Palestrina and Byrd and Bach and Mozart and so on. I'm not a expert in music and only a wannabe expert in Christian theology, but I've gathered that Bach's *Mass in B minor* (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mass\\_in\\_B\\_minor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mass_in_B_minor)) is a magnificent synthesis of what might be called the heart of St Francis of Assisi and the mind of St Thomas Aquinas. The Gospel message at the very heights of Western art. Now we have. . . Well, Luther himself and Samuel Wesley (a convert to Catholicism who was the nephew of the founder of the Methodist church) wrote some pretty good, singable hymns. If you can't do better than what we already have, why produce stuff to crowd out that better stuff. If you can't ascend in mind and spirit toward Heaven, then you

maybe should work on that rather than propagating mediocre stuff which can't be part of the life of God which the saved will share. We aim low to middling and wonder why we aren't shooting bulls-eyes. We look for that something new even when it's of lower quality than what we already have.

This is very depressing to watch the horrors building up around me and to know that I could help move forward a process of rescuing much which will otherwise have to be rebuilt over generations. And the depressing mood is intensified as I see ever more clearly the truth of the claims made by better thinkers, such as Joseph Ratzinger and Etienne Gilson, that the West was not destroyed by enemies from the outside—it was ours and we gave in to the enticements of dangerous thinkers and doers who were our younger brothers and our nephews and the sons of our friends from college. The West was corrupted and destroyed from the inside, by its own residents and by some of its seemingly respectable citizens and also by well-meaning citizens of the West, even clergy and old-fashioned teachers and others who just wished to make it easier for all to understand or participate. To which I would respond: If the medium was mediocre, then the message wasn't Jesus Christ.

I repeat: Moment to moment, I usually enjoy life. This was a problem for me. I was a gifted student in a completely inadequate school system—at least, it was inadequate for me. Despite the statement of one teacher that he hated to watch what that high school did to me, I managed to enjoy myself much of the time. And I managed to respond too well to the gentle pressure of my peers, nice children who grew up into well-behaved adults—some of who are practicing Christians. Yet, I had to give up some of my reading time during which I had been discovering history in order to watch shows such as *The Monkees* but also a few 'family' shows about plastic creatures living in suburban gatherings of individuals and 'nuclear families'. So it was that a number of Christians and others with at least nominalistic ties to rich and profound traditions watched with approval as individuals and "nuclear families" held beach parties with the tsunami waves already moving in; so it was that more families moved off the remaining foundations up on high ground and set up their flimsy shelters on those sands. I didn't like it but had neither a well-formed moral character nor a well-formed mind which would have helped me to object or at least quietly protect myself or maybe some others around me such as my younger siblings.

When I went to college, I had no work habits worth talking about. Despite a significant—but not total—recovery by my junior year, that sent

me into a spin for about 10 years, at which time, I began a conversion to a Christianity which was largely alien to me after my upbringing in a mainline Protestant church where I'd learned Jesus was a nice guy and I should be as well. I went through Hell for nearly another 5 years and destroyed my career which was less than booming to start with.

Others might have had different problems, such as gentle children in a modern school system struggling to deal with the moral coarseness of the modern West. Some might have brutalized by a more traditional form of coarseness in their homes. But that moral coarseness isn't softened by current school curricula, especially those white males of European descent who learn of their innately evil nature and who learn they're responsible because Africa and Haiti and most regions of Latin America are remarkably lacking in sewage and fresh water systems and have not produced a lot of Nobel prizewinning physicists.

Actually, a lot of students are out of place in their schools and a lot of Westerners, most certainly including Americans, are out of place in their workplaces or churches, their communities in general. The modern workplaces and other sorts of human spaces are different from anything encountered by even our fairly recent ancestors. Of course, we are adaptable and opportunistic creatures, but we aren't being presented with natural, random or patterned, changes to our various sorts of spaces. Some of the talk about the alienation of human beings in the modern West is on the mark—because the West has moved ahead so rapidly in so many ways and also because the leaders, cultural and academic and political and religious, in the West have been so, shall we say, inadequate in providing guidance and assistance to those most affected by those rapid changes.

In fact, our leaders have become our enemies, maybe not so murderous as Stalin nor so destructive of traditional values as Mao, but they are our enemies as they realize they've made an utter mess of things, are about to fall, and need to secure their power and to grab any available wealth—soon to be that which is needed to operate American public schools and hospitals.

We are being presented with potential changes limited to those which suit the established powerholders and wealthholders. I'm not trying to advocate any radical sort of cynicism. I am trying to note that we live in a world not so different from that of any collapse from an age of great prosperity. I am also trying to convince my fellow Americans, and all Westerners, that the world has not changed since the "bad, old days

of kings and emperors and conquerors on horseback.” Psychopaths, exploiters and outright gangsters, gravitate towards centers of power and wealth. See the interesting study *Psychopathy by U.S. State* (at [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3185182](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3185182)) for a discussion of the very dense concentration of psychopaths in Washington, DC—Connecticut has the highest concentration of any state but Washington’s concentration is far greater. In the case of Connecticut, think of all the hedge-fund managers and investment bankers who live in the Southwest of that state and work in New York City. But there are hints that some of these psychopaths were created by their nearness to power and wealth and maybe to the stresses of living in a region filled with aggressive, ambitious men and women. So it is that I can repeat some quotations from Lord Acton that I’ve used before:

And remember, where you have a concentration of power in a few hands, all too frequently men with the mentality of gangsters get control. History has proven that. [From *BrainyQuote* at [https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/lord\\_acton](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/lord_acton).]

Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. [From *BrainyQuote* at [https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/lord\\_acton](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/lord_acton).]

Note that the first of the quotes supports the idea of psychopaths being drawn to power and wealth and the second of the quotes supports the idea that some maybe not psychopathic, or not so much, can be corrupted by exposure to temptations greater than their moral character can handle.

Following the prophet Jeremiah and Lord Acton, I plead with God for some insight into the reasons He has made a world where such moral wretches are so disproportionately powerful and wealthy. So far as I can tell, God is leaving us to answer the question by proper exploration of reality and by intelligent analyses of the results through the disciplines of evolutionary biology, history, genetics, moral philosophy, etc. Another depressing matter: there is a notable lack of Christian thinkers dealing with these issues and a great number working to dumb-down the thoughts of earlier great thinkers so that we can have shallow explanations of the Creator and His work with those explanations set in the context of pre-modern empirical knowledge and theories. Of course, everyone is quick to note they accept

evolution—but it has remarkably little to do with explaining such matters as the moral nature of human beings; everyone is quick to accept quantum mechanics—but it has remarkably little to do with explaining that physical stuff which is a necessary part of a sacramental world, a necessary part of the Sacraments—including the Real Presence on the altar.

With my depression deepened, I go off to Mass or to pray by myself in front of the Tabernacle holding the Blessed Sacrament and. . . I find the darkness inside of me breaking up. Or I might go off to a volunteer project, perhaps scrubbing pots at a pasta dinner or starting off a pie-cooking project for the day—at 6:30AM, and. . . I find myself joking with the other volunteers and being concerned that a spouse is suffering badly from allergies. Some ordinary sad news and some good fellowship on top of work which should now belong to the young men and women who don't show up for worship or for volunteer projects.

More reason for my depression to deepen and, yet, I'm happy in various little ways. If you ever have problems being happy in this increasingly degenerate world (degenerate in moral and other aspects), then try a feisty attitude: Don't let the bastards get you down. The best revenge might be to go on to live a good life, but that's not always possible in terms of prosperity or worldly prestige. You can also remember the wisdom in the words: smile and the happiness will follow. Soon, I'll be writing an essay on the true religious nature of human beings, seemingly embodied in our genes: "collectively worship of moral gods" and faith or belief will eventually come—but seemingly after generations if you pay attention to the Bible or to the histories of ancient civilizations. Smile first and you'll be happy; worship God and praise God and thank God and you'll find yourself starting to believe. It remains hard to do so, especially for men—if you can forgive me for claiming men are different from women in some important ways, perhaps many.

There are different sorts of happiness. The happiness of being with pleasant and good human beings is of greater moral satisfaction than that of a good meal or a good mug of beer. All these are trumped by the happiness which can come even in a miserable life which is lived to a greater good. As for me, I live to better understand Creation and to use that better understanding to better understand our relationship with the Creator. And, so, I could mention. . . mathematics. I've argued for a need to draw concepts from those fields but especially from mathematics. See my book, *The Shape of Reality* [56], for an attempt to describe human communities (even the

Body of Christ) by way of concepts drawn from the same mathematics Einstein used to describe the universe in his General Theory of Relativity.

When I do such work, even when I prepare a small essay for the purposes of God and the needs of His children, I feel a deeper sort of happiness, perhaps a very weak foretaste of the bliss which is felt when sharing God's Own Life.

I don't feel such bliss so often as I once did when I devoted a greater share of my hours to serious study and thinking and writing. With all that is coming out:

- The Church continues to shrink leaving the likes of me to care for those who didn't pass on their faith to their own children; we, the current volunteers, can look behind us and see no one to do the same for us.
- We, the laity, continue to be surprised by the occasional revelation that there is still more moral filth and rot, more sacrilegious behavior, in the clerical regions of the Catholic Church. There is no reason to believe the situation is different in other Christian churches nor in the schools nor hospitals nor other institutions of the Modern West.
- Recent revelations of filth and rot in the Catholic also reveal that much was known to bishops and other priests free of those particular sins but too cowardly and self-serving to speak out, let alone try to call the sinful and predatory bishops to some sort of account.

So it is that we laity are being protected by our bishops, wise moral giants that they are, from knowledge of how some . . . ummm . . . bishops like to stick their penises up the butts of altar-boys and seminarians and also like to force young men into their homosexual networks which are apparently spread across the United States and maybe across the solar system. And, again, there is reason to believe such predators and their networks exist in the leadership ranks of all parts of the West—political and cultural and . . .

Much there for a practicing Catholic to be proud of. Much to make him happy to give money which partly goes to buy silence from the victims of . . . ummmm . . . bishops and priests and . . . soon to come to a diocese near you . . . lay bureaucrats and teachers and . . .

Much there to make me wish to encourage a man to enter the Catholic Church and to bring his children with him. Much to make me wish to encourage parents to send their sons off to seminary.

Just plain depressing.

And, yet, while I feel frustrated in not being able to respond fully to God's call to me, I'm reasonably happy in some ways. I'm looking forward to a Holy Hour at my parish in two days. Next week, I'll attend two meetings of prayer groups which are populated by holy and very likable Catholics, though not seemingly aware of the well-documented crimes of our political and religious leaders and... DEPRESSING!!!

But I happily make and execute plans to finish the second of four parts of the second volume of a planned three volume novel of a spiritual conversion of a man only vaguely like me. Sometimes I'm happy writing sentences which would be well-structured by old-fashioned grammatical diagramming techniques but... they go deeper, even just three or four levels, than a weak mind can follow. I'd suggest: read good books and your mind will grow stronger. Again, read Jacques Barzun's *From Dawn to Decadence* [9] to understand the destruction we've done to the literary standards which were necessary for Western Christian Civilization. I won't let the bastards get me down and I won't let a lack of truly literate readers weaken or corrupt the work I do for God and for that human community which is the Body of Christ.

Certain types of happiness are to be actively sought. I think I'll cut down on my volunteer hours and devote that time to such activities as studying mathematics and writing about new ways to understand relationships between human beings and those between God and human beings. I'm willing to give up some moments of lesser forms of happiness.

And losing myself in an effort to produce a better understanding of Creation, to produce better thoughts in general, is better than drinking more whiskey and beer or using crack or putting a gun to my temple. Not that I'll stop drinking a modest amount of whiskey and beer.

If only more of those lost souls could know of the better options, some of which are not available to all, but my study of mathematics and the writing of books could be a career as a volunteer counselor at a center which helps impoverished young mothers or a volunteer tutor or a volunteer companion and aid to an elderly man or woman.

Speak to God, perhaps on your knees at a church which is your own or could be your own. Then speak to a pastor—most are ordinary men who've

taken on a difficult and important task and are generally more trustworthy than most higher-level Christian leaders. Then speak to God again. And to some of His good friends you might meet at that church or the place where you're starting as a volunteer.

And smile. And worship. Praise and give thanks.

Happiness of lesser and greater sorts will likely come and maybe faith as well.



# 694 Seeing Creation as It Really Is

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2539>. It was finished and uploaded on 2018/08/06.]

I have begun a new research and thinking and writing project which bears the tentative title: *Through Christ: Creation*. It is intended as a step or two forward rather than a step or two toward a different goal than I've been pursuing in recent years: the use of modern knowledge of the world to build a new understanding of the world, a Christian worldview.

Some, including allegedly Christian leaders of Christian communities, act as if this is a world in which we can conduct our daily business as if God doesn't exist or, at least, isn't truly present. I think the Almighty, as Augustine told us, is deeper in us than we ourselves can reach. He is deeper in the constituents of matter than the most powerful of particle accelerators could ever reach—even with a boost to the energy levels found in the very early fractions of a second of this expansionary phase of... something we think of, sort of, as the Universe.

At the same time as we are to carry out most of our activities as if God doesn't exist or, at least, isn't truly present, we are also to understand God in His freely chosen role as Creator of this world as if we can just restate the understanding which grew up in the period of 1500-1800 or so, the early years of modern science. This early modern view of the world developed by Christian scholars and adopted by many Christians was partly as an effort to undo the damage caused by Galileo's persecution by men more occultists and magicians and desperate powerholders than Christian thinkers,

Separated for two centuries or more from much of the exploration and analyses of the real world, Christians have a bit of work in front of them to

make sense of reality in Christian terms. We were sometimes rescued by the strategy of “save the phenomena.” There are various ways to model reality—after all, Plato and Aristotle produced understandings of the world which were defective relative to the underlying empirical reality or “how God actually did it.” Even the great scientists, Archimedes and Galileo and Newton produced understandings of physical reality which were radically inadequate and sometimes wrong by the standards of 21st century physics and chemistry and astronomy. And, yet, they “saved the phenomenon,” their theories (call them “models” of reality, if you will) saved the appearances of macroscopic reality. The same can be said of, for example, Christian understandings of human being or of revealed knowledge. Intellectual leaders and other leaders of Christian don’t seem to even realize they sound like fools when they say they accept evolution (more generally: the idea that human beings arose in the natural world and our special relationship to God comes ‘after’ that) and then go to the pulpit or publish books which teach that human beings were a special creation of God who lived in Eden and...

We seem to have reached a point where Christian thought has lost most of its credibility. From my viewpoint: Christians started to rebuild their understanding of Creation based on empirical knowledge of this concrete region of Creation and then the effort halted, resulting in a reconstruction of a magnificent temple upon a foundation of sand. The tide has come in and the foundation is washing away. Yet, the strategy continues: God revealed (some of) the answers to us so we don’t have to bother learning how to reason toward the known answers based on what we now know about empirical reality and why bother reasoning toward new answers needed as human being (largely in its communal forms) grows ever more complex and complicated and as we learn much more about the matter and energy and spacetime of this universe.

Before moving on, I’ll give an example more clear than most of how an unconscious “saving of the phenomena” had allowed physicists and others to advance right up to 1900 with an understanding of matter, specifically of its stability, which was destroyed by the work of Planck and Einstein in founding a version of quantum mechanics which itself proved to be inadequate, a mere “saving of the phenomena.” And that’s it. Physicists, philosophers, theologians, engineers, and the rest of humanity had simply assumed matter was the stable and inert stuff it appears to be when you pick up a rock and examine it. When Planck and Einstein showed mathe-

matically (with Planck and others verifying it in the lab) that energy isn't continuous—it exists in quanta or units, pre-existing fears came out of the shadows and scientists realized that continuous energy transfers would have prevented matter or a material universe from ever stabilizing.

Now to move to the realm of human being and its sexual and moral traits. We've known since at least the time of the, more or less, final redaction (high-level edit) of the Hebrew scriptures adopted into the Christian Old Testament, that men are defectively monogamous—quite defectively in some cases. So, the laws of many religious communities, the kind of communities successful over time, enforced monogamy or at least a tightly regulated polygamy. See Chapter 692, *Is Modern Atheism a Result of High Loads of Genetic Mutations?*, for a discussion of the religious nature of evolved human being. For this essay, the important point is that evolutionary science, and the resulting reasoning—sometimes speculative, tells us that there are strong advantages to strong family and clan/tribe societies where the father is strongly tied to his own wife and children, but there is an advantage (in terms of fathering children) in being open to the occasional opportunity, enough of an advantage for this tendency to stray to remain in the behavior repertoire of the human male and to be lived out more fully in ages of moral disorder.

At this point, it's perhaps helpful to think of the Jesuit priest and professor of biology in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Left hand on Darwin's *Origin of Species*, he claimed it to be a description of what man is; right hand on the Bible, he claimed it to be a description of what man can be if he accepts God's offer of salvation. Western Christians never adopted any such coherent understanding of our general situation, choosing instead to assume that all individual human beings have a recent common ancestor (true enough so long as you take 100,000 or more years as recent) and that we've all changed or not changed as if soldiers marching on parade. This magic act of synchronization is thought by many oh-so modern thinkers to have linked together evolutionary forces in northern Eurasia and in Borneo and in the Americas and in central Africa and so on.

But even if we start to honestly accept the facts and information, sometimes processed into knowledge, of modern investigators of empirical reality, we have not enough. A universe can't be built out of its parts. See Chapter 193, *A Universe is More than it Contains* for a discussion of the inadequacies of such an understanding even from a purely material viewpoint. And things go beyond that: only God can make a Universe, or a Creation,

though it be possible we might one day gain the dangerously immoral power to ‘make’ a human being.

Going from embodied abstractions to that abstraction we know as ‘understanding’: We need a greater understanding of Creation than can be assembled from the pieces of modern science and mathematics—though it should certainly use the great knowledge and powerful tools of those and other ways of thought found in modern times, including the insights and tools of Biblical exegesis, theological and philosophical thought, historical investigation and analysis, literary arts and other arts as well.

I’ve been building an understanding of that sort for the past 12 years on my websites (*Acts of Being* at <https://loydfueston.com/> and *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* at <https://loydf.wordpress.com/>). For nearly two decades before that, my efforts had been directed toward the goal of simply enriching what seemed to be an increasingly impoverished Christian civilization—the West.

I’m ready to rebel more openly and more energetically against the claim that God has died or at least gone away. He’s alive and present and, anthropomorphically speaking, He’s probably not happy with us.

I’m ready to dispute the claim that man is what he wills to be, and even the claim there is such an abstraction as ‘man’. Rather is it the case that human being is concrete, individual and communal, and complex types of communal human being form in an appropriate and potentially stable way, first of all, through the “collective worship of a moral God who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving.” Communal human being is also real and concrete as is individual human being. The Universe we live in can also not be seen but, like a strong human community, its effects can be observed and sometimes quantified. To be sure, even an extended family group in the late New Stone Age would have had something of political and economic structures, but Babylon and Ur formed as small communities of human beings came together to worship in larger communities. And to build clusters of houses and shops, irrigation systems in some cases, eventually defensive walls, and then palaces and buildings for the bureaucrats.

Both moral and religious inclinations come from our innermost being as coded in our DNA and manifested in our bodies through developmental processes which work from that DNA but with some limited options due to DNA which can respond to environmental conditions—such as lower body sizes during general periods of lower prosperity. Yet, there are other factors at work. When Western Civilization was Christian and strong, the minds

and hearts and hands of even those with little inclination toward religious belief or practice could be shaped to be much like the minds and hearts and hands of those with strong inclination toward religious belief and practice.

Let us pray. . .

Lord God, please help us to open our hearts and our minds to you, please help us to order our hands to help You do your work. You are always with us, if you were not present to and within any creature, it would cease to exist. And, yet, we've shielded our hearts and our minds from Your presence, refused to order our hands to your purposes.

Yet, some were blind from birth, deaf, not inclined to bend the knee to what couldn't be seen, to what didn't seem to be conducive to immediate profit. A father of faith can conceive a daughter who is good in human ways but shows no signs of perceiving God. A mother regular in her private and public devotions can give birth to a son who doesn't bend knee or lift his voice in praise and thanks.

Lord, we don't know why you created the world in this way, but current estimates of genetic science indicate that inclination to belief in the "moral gods" is less than 50% heritable and the same is true of the inclination to engage in worship of those "moral gods." What are we to do, Lord, if we wish to help our children to enter Heaven if they're not so inclined to believe or practice as we are?

I've already developed an answer to the last question in the above prayer based upon my expansion of Pope Benedict XVI's explanation for the problems of the Western Christian churches and I'll be working to put that answer in a richer context, with the help of the grace of the Lord God Almighty.

This project might go slowly at times and I plan to write occasional short pieces on other topics, but I'll produce the rough draft of this book one essay at a time, maybe one thought at a time and maybe a rush of thoughts at a time.



# 695 St Paul Just Might Have Been Right.

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2557>. It was finished and uploaded on 2018/10/09.]

In Romans 9:19–23 [141] (RSV Catholic Edition), we can read:

You will say to me then, “Why does he [God] still find fault? For who can resist his will?” But who are you, a man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me thus?” Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for beauty and another for menial use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the vessels of wrath made for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for the vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?

So, maybe we have those who have chosen to turn to God, however unfaithfully or cowardly, in this mortal realm and we have those who have turned away from God. But, some who choose, do so because of their own embodied self? Some have genetically determined characteristics which incline them strongly to turn away from God? Maybe to live the life of a virtuous human animal? Maybe to live a life of vice? Some are “vessels of mercy”? Some are “vessels of wrath”?

I think the above is a tad too simple, though I threw in a few complications. Along those lines, I would propose four populations of human beings

as a better start to our understanding that St Paul’s “vessels of mercy” and “vessels of wrath”:

1. Those who are friends with God or trying to be, who would be happy in Heaven sharing the life of Jesus Christ and, through Him, God.
2. Those who have turned away from God for reasons understandable on the part of creatures—horrible death of a child or ????. Such might include those who would be happy in Heaven sharing the life of Jesus Christ and, through Him, God, and also those who would hate sharing the life of Jesus Christ.
3. Those who are enemies of God, who would hate sharing the life of Jesus Christ.
4. Those totally uninterested in the question of God or that of the meaning of life, who would hate sharing the life of Jesus Christ.

I think those four types exist. There may be some overlap of those who can move in one direction or another—that is, we mortals aren’t of one mind or one heart or one set of hands.

I may have missed one or more possibilities, but the above list of ‘types’ of human beings is a good starting point.

I also think the speculation of some Medieval thinkers was right:

Who will be saved?

Anyone who could enjoy life in Heaven, who could enjoy sharing the life of God.

Those Medieval thinkers were so to speak, following the somewhat speculative path of St Paul in asking the question: Is Heaven really a place which could be enjoyed by all human beings? Are there some human beings, creatures of God, who are made so that they would not be able to enjoy Heaven, perhaps because they are indifferent to issues beyond those of a human animal? Are there some human beings, creatures of God, who are made so that they would not be able to enjoy Heaven, perhaps because their brains and personality characteristics aren’t proper, perhaps causing them to turn away from God’s offer of friendship?

In any case, I would strongly say we presume wrongly when we presume that God made a Heaven which the most nonreligious human animal could

enjoy alongside the great saints. We also presume wrongly when we presume that God will necessarily save those who could enjoy Heaven but turned away from God in this mortal realm. We don't know, but we now know this: genetic analyses along with more general analyses of human being tell us there are some strong constraints on our individual human beings but also, sometimes, substantial freedom for development. There is such an entity as a genetically healthy human being—apparently inclined to “collective worship of moral gods”—and there are patterns of small mutations which are correlated with autism, atheism (of a deadening of mind and heart and not an intellectually active sort), homosexuality, and other complex problems. Such problems can be overcome by becoming a member of a community which gathers for the “collective worship of moral gods,” but preferably one which gathers to worship Christ and His Father and Their Holy Spirit, to worship and to learn their ways and their thoughts.

I'll close with the speculation that the term *free will* is a dangerous one, implying some agent, independent of our embodied human being, and able to override all human desires and inclinations. It's possible to override much that is bad or bad in a certain context, but possible only with a mind—perhaps more of a communal than individual mind—shaping the will (part of the heart in my usual way of discussing human being) and both guiding the hands.

We need to work from the concept of an embodied creature with limited but real freedom; we need educate and train young ones and our own selves by way of stories of moral import and by the development of habits of mind and heart and hands. We need to explicitly realize we have to find much that God wishes for us in our open responses to God the Creator, that is, in our open responses to Creation. Such a path will allow us to learn God's ways and God's thoughts and to make them our own.

[For background on some of my claims about genetic problems, see Chapter 692, *Is Modern Atheism a Result of High Loads of Genetic Mutations?* and Chapter 339, *What is Man? And All That?.*]



## 696 Here Be Dragons

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2560>. It was finished and uploaded on 2018/11/27.]

Despite the urban legend I had once accepted, the phrase *Here be dragons* (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Here\\_be\\_dragons](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Here_be_dragons)) was not often used on maps and sometimes the dragons or other monsters drawn on unknown regions were decoration rather than warnings. Yet, they clearly state what “should have been true” though it was only “sometimes” true:

“Here be dragons” means dangerous or unexplored territories, in imitation of a medieval practice of putting illustrations of dragons, sea-monsters and other mythological creatures on uncharted areas of maps.

The above is the summary at the beginning of the above referenced article though that article goes on to tell us the phrase was rarely used and might have referred to the quite real Komodo Dragons of Indonesia. The decorations of exotic and monstrous creatures were mostly...decorations. I’ll use it in full-blown ‘urban-legend’ form. “Here be dragons” identifies regions which promise catastrophes or even apocalypses. Enter at the risk of utter oblivion, perhaps painful at that. Enter at the risk of feeling the threats, of being terrified, even before something happens.

The entire human race is sailing full-speed into a region which should be labeled as “Here be Dragons,” but bubble-headed people—including most Catholics and other Christians—see only a continuation of the same-old possibilities, including that of a return to the good times which had held in the West since 1960 or so and had held in the US for a bit longer than that. (There have been some hard times but some of those would have seemed like paradise to those living in, for example, the 14th century after

the end of the very prosperous period labeled the 'High Middle Ages'. See Chapter 553, *Are the Gangsters Keeping Each Other Under Some Control?*, for a discussion of the similarity, especially in the US, of the end of the High Middle Ages and the past few generations—periods of declining but still substantial prosperity. Notice: that earlier period was, as we now know, approaching a brutal period [the 14th century] which ended with much smaller populations which were more prosperous and that wealth and power were more widely distributed.

But worse than that is coming to Christians, their faith and their beliefs will be tested by deep, deep conflicts between those beliefs and the realities of how this world works, conflicts between those beliefs and the “effects of the Creator in this world,” as Medieval thinkers would have expressed it. If we have faith in the God of Jesus Christ, we must re-evaluate those parts of our beliefs we draw from empirical facts and from contingent lines of reasoning. To anticipate what I've not yet said in this essay: we need to learn how to obey Christ's commandments without badly damaging the Body of Christ and threatening the futures of young Christians and those not yet born. This has come about because of deeper and broader understandings of the workings of God's Creation—understandings nearly all of our leaders are ignoring out of morally culpable ignorance and cowardice.

Arguably, many of our current and approaching problems could have been mitigated or even avoided entirely by prudential (timely and firm and courageous) action by the leaders of the West, political and academic and cultural and religious leaders alike. The deeper problem is that the easy solutions to the practical problems are in conflict with Christian respect for life. This is, to say the least, quite inconvenient to those who think being a Christian in this world is quite simple—a child can do it. But we are called to be not childish but child-like in accepting Creation as the work of God and in trying to obey the revealed commandments of God in that Creation and not in a Creation which is imagined by either Manichaeistic thinkers or idealistic dreamers. Our thoughts and dreams should be founded upon reality, upon the facts and derived relationships of Creation.

A practical example: we should have been wary about the possible dangers of entering the lands of tribal peoples, some at a level perhaps comparable to the Iron Age of Europe (think of the millennium beginning about 3000-3500 years ago and also think of Conan the Barbarian) and some at the level of the New Stone Age (ending perhaps 6000 years ago and indicative of the social forms and technologies and ways of hunting and

foraging of Central African Pygmies and Khoe San of South Africa) and most somewhere in between. Did the missionaries and conquerors really think these people to be “just like us,” waiting for us to come along and build them 1950s American dream-houses? Did they think those peoples indigenous to non-civilized regions were waiting for us to come along before moving from trial by fire or by combat to trial by abstract systems based upon intertwined natural law (philosophical and theological—sort-of) and positive law (legislated or ordained by recognized leaders)?

Culture and individual characteristics evolved together in the human species, though I think it better to think more generally, and more in tune with reality as being primarily relational and secondarily substantial. In fact and using evolutionary terms, it seems likely that the selective advantages of certain types of increasingly complex social organizations, communal agricultural communities (irrigation) and communities of warriors and metal-workers, drove human intelligence to higher levels and also forced the development of more cooperative personality traits. Something of the sort is also true of other social creatures, including rats and mice—as will be seen as important a little later in this essay.

A good number of those belonging to tribal peoples, and presumably having the intellectual and personality characteristics appropriate to tribal peoples, have moved into the regions of Western Civilization—along with a good number coming out of tribal peoples but having at least partially the characteristics appropriate to civilization.

What could go wrong?

In the case of those many immigrants who are fully and truly tribal peoples, perhaps a massive onslaught upon the very abstract, rules-based judicial and political systems of the West? Perhaps a return to blood-based and personal forms of justice and politics—as did happen in Rhodesia->Zimbabwe and is now happening in South Africa and other parts of Africa? Perhaps a tribalization of our own lives so that we, or our children, experience an increase in impulsiveness, a shortening of time-scales, so that we, or they, spend relatively more on immediate pleasures than did our ancestors and sacrifice relatively less for the future of the children and of generations not yet born?

In the case of those immigrants who have at least some of the abstract reasoning power and the personality traits appropriate to civilized communities, perhaps a draining into the industrialized and civilized countries of those necessary for the peoples of Africa to move towards a different future?

Let us be clear that selection processes give survival into adult lives and the consequent reproductive opportunities to those who meet the standards of those particular processes—in a particular context; those who ‘win’ also must be lucky at some minimal level. Prosperity, as Darwin speculated with respect to the ongoing Industrial Revolution—in ‘less modern’ terms, might endanger human communities by allowing the survival and successful reproduction of human beings who have high loads of mutations—especially important is the immune system which might have problems with fighting infections, which problems could impair development of the brain and other body parts and lead to early death. The problem of survival of those with, say, impaired immune systems might well prove to have been major factors or even the dominant factors in such events as the fall of Rome, the collapse of Western Europe into chaos during the 14th century, and even the collapses we read about in the Bible or in books of ancient history. (The struggle to fight diseases with an impaired immune system leads to the loss of crucial resources for development—including brain development.)

Though I read serious books in history, my knowledge is not wide—perhaps deep in small regions. My impression from those books is that there are multiple factors involved in the decay, often seeming rapid, of a great civilization or a prominent city or perhaps in a community of artists or scholars. Those factors do include purely external events such as climate change or invasions by, say, Central Asian nomads, but there are a variety of causes and effect-causes (probably effects of something more fundamental which go on to cause specific forms of damage) which include diseases which are a result of immune-system failure along with an invasive organism which might be new or old to the people under assault, loss of vigor, seemingly rapid loss of specific skills of civilization such as literacy or numeracy due to a decrease in both intelligence and the related personality traits. I make no pretenses of having thought long or hard to produce a complete understanding of this important, and repeating, historical situation: decay isn’t logically necessary given what we know but it does seem to always happen to be best of human communities. The takeaway is that much of these factors behind the decay of civilizations, or complex communities less than civilizations, might be caused by or aggravated by high rates of mutations in members of those civilizations surviving to reproduce successfully.

These are not matters to be taken lightly, especially by Christians who are forced—in my opinion—to consider human communities to be at least potentially part of the Body of Christ and maybe (Western Civilization?)

a very substantial part. Yet, the leaders of Christian churches and those who head up secular do-gooder agencies and many others, do take such matters lightly—we might note to the profit of manipulative politicians and financiers who seem to seek to consolidate their control over political and economic structures by replacing peoples suited for freedom and at least some self-rule by other peoples, tribal peoples, who can be more readily dominated. (My use of the word ‘seek’ in the prior sentence applies in the sense of an ‘invisible hand’ or in the more general sense of a dynamic, self-organizing system.)

So, many Western leaders and pseudo-intellectuals want to bring into the West a whole lot of people who, by their own inclinations and according to their own traits, continued living in family groups and tribes while the peoples of northern Eurasia and China were evolving to live in societies of ever greater complexity—in response to events often quite bloody and typically murderous towards the males, young and old, on the losing side of the fight. Do those leaders understand that we of Indo-European regions—including Iran and parts of Afghanistan and India—became what we are, the Han Chinese became what they are, because of monopolization of reproductive opportunities over generations by powerful men and their direct descendants? Over half of men of Western European descent are said to carry Y-chromosomes descended from that of one man who lived 4,000 years ago or so, probably somewhere in central or eastern Europe. My Y-chromosome comes from men who were present in the British Isles about that time and were closely related to that powerful man whose sons and later descendants dominated Western European reproduction. The Han Chinese went through similar processes, perhaps with even more extreme selection of ‘breeding’ males.

The Africans didn’t go through those sorts of processes and, logically enough, their intelligence levels and forms of personality are what we might expect in societies roughly, perhaps very roughly, equivalent to the Neolithic and Iron Ages of Indo-European societies—in the middle or so of the rapid increase in the intelligence of the peoples of those societies which covered much of Europe, parts of the Middle East, and parts of South Asia, as well as Northeast Asia. And we have to always remember that there are personality traits which also play a role in forming and maintaining communities as complex as civilizations, though those personality traits are closely related to the cognitive abilities and probably overlap with them.

Yet, things are worse than that, as I’ve discussed before; see:

- Chapter 692, *Is Modern Atheism a Result of High Loads of Genetic Mutations?*, and
- Chapter 339, *What is Man? And All That?*.

The results of certain experiments on rats and mice in the late 1950s to the early 1970s pointed to recent rigorous versions of these ideas about the dangers to communities of social animals caused by widespread survival of those with heavy loads of mutations. In two different experiments which produced substantially the same results, the experimenter kept alive as many rats or mice as possible in an enclosed population, the unhealthy and socially perverse rodents as well as those which were healthy and should have had proper behavior towards their communities and towards other community members. But even the healthy rodents picked up much of the perverse behavior of the mutants. The community decayed so that they even stopped reproducing. See *Behavioral sink* at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Behavioral\\_sink](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Behavioral_sink) for some description and some explanation—density of population was hypothesized as the destructive factor of rodent communities. ‘Density of population’ didn’t hold up to further tests and that idea has been cast aside. High loads of genetic mutations seem to be the problem rather than high population densities or the very questionable explanations proposed by others than the original experimenter, John B Calhoun. In fact, high loads of mutations can be tested for and have been tested for in indirect and direct ways—it seems likely to be the reason for the destruction of the communities of highly social animals when they are kept alive despite health and other problems, whether kept alive by a curious scientist or an Industrial Revolution.

The basic idea is simple and goes back to Darwin, though he didn’t know how inheritable traits were transmitted or how they could change and, thus, knew not of the concept of ‘mutation’. This is it: mutations occur naturally because of external insults to DNA and also because of the complexity of the chemical processes in genes. Most mutations in genes carrying important traits are bad. Those bad mutations are culled by death, usually at a young age, or inability to successfully reproduce. Darwin warned that the Industrial Age might cause a decay in desirable traits as it kept alive humans who would have died in the normal processes of selection.

Along the same lines, we have this frightening article by Lance Welton, “the pen name of a freelance journalist living in New York”: *Are*

*Southpaws Really Sinister? Increased Incidence Suggests We’re Headed for a Mouse Utopia Collapse* at <http://www.unz.com/article/are-southpaws-really-sinister-increased-incidence-suggests-were-headed-for-mouse-utopia> “Mouse Utopia” is a nickname of sorts for the experiments of Professor Calhoun as summarized above and described in the referenced Wikipedia article.

This mysterious journalist was the source which referenced the article which started my ruminations along this line. The ‘non-existent’ Mr Welton wrote the article, *Are Atheists Genetic Mutants- A Product of Recent Evolution?* at <http://www.unz.com/article/are-atheists-genetic-mutants-a-product-of-recent-evolution/>, which linked to *The Mutant Says in His Heart, "There Is No God": the Rejection of Collective Religiosity Centred Around the Worship of Moral Gods Is Associated with High Mutational Load* at <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/32df/6da2640d57af0fb5af42072c0351d65ea775.pdf>.

So, what’s the takeaway?

Firstly, and not for the first time, we can see that Christians have a misunderstanding of this world which is part of God’s Creation; this misunderstanding is more ‘God-centered’ but otherwise just as bad a misunderstanding as that of other modern peoples.

Secondly, this has led to unwise and ultimately very cruel forms of charity. Perhaps more importantly, these forms of charity have done a great deal of damage to the Body of Christ and threaten more damage before the healing can start and perhaps many generations before the Body of Christ is once more robust.

Africa has been turned into a showcase of stupidity and exploitation beyond even that of the earlier colonizers. In *A Farewell to Alms: A Brief Economic History of the World* [22], the economist and historian Gregory Clark tells us that many Africans now have a lower standard of living than they had some thousands of years ago when most Sub-Saharanans were living as hunter-foragers or simple agriculturalists—perhaps as non-sedentary agriculturists such as some Indo-Europeans were living four or five thousand years ago with some continuing to live in such ways for generations after that. (Note that I use ‘Indo-European’ a bit loosely and intuitively; though having much in the way of common genetic roots, especially with respect to the male chromosome—the Y-chromosome, the Indo-Europeans were not a ‘people’ nor even—in a cultural sense—quite a ‘proto-Indo-European’ peo-

ple. They were biological ancestors from a small group of male-lines along with a significantly larger group of female lines; their traits made it easy for an initially closely related family of cultures to form and to spread over much of Europe and parts of West and South Asia. I also will use ‘African’ in the rest of this essay to mostly refer to Sub-Saharan human beings—individual and communal.)

Africa, that continent which was the birthplace of humanity—though there are some interesting qualifications to that claim, had a population of about 250 million in 1955, the year I was born. The UN projects an African population of 4 billion by 2100. We might look at all that has been accomplished in medical care and building some modern infrastructure in Africa but we have to realize that this has reversed the brutal, but not always bloody, way in which the human race has progressed, or even just maintained its good traits, over the millenia—in a world which is part of God’s Creation and operates as He intended. How else could the world operate if its Creator is the All-powerful and All-knowing God we Christians worship?

The important concept is ‘reproductive advantages’, though we have to survive before reproducing. And, with human being which is both communal and individual, we have to remember that both components are involved. As I put it a few months ago, relying on thinkers dealing with these issues in an honest way:

[E]nfleshed human social and moral natures [at least in the western Eurasia] evolved and developed in well-ordered societies on a foundation of “collective worship of moral gods” as some scientists put it. Healthy human being is tied to religious practice. [See Chapter 692, *Is Modern Atheism a Result of High Loads of Genetic Mutations?*.]

Africa does not now have, and never has had, the environmental conditions to provide reproductive advantages for those with the mental abilities compatible with civilization, European-style or Indian-style or Chinese-styl. These mental abilities cover not only ‘high-level genius’ but also metal-workers and highly disciplined farmers. There is one obvious, and disconcerting, exception I know about and perhaps others I don’t know about: the Igbos and other tribes began to develop signs of higher mental abilities in recent centuries, likely because they controlled the riverways coming out

of the inland regions of West Africa. The mental abilities of these African peoples seemed to rise and they began to also show related merchant-type personality traits as they traded with the Europeans—slaves as well as natural resources. This isn't unusual. The first, Nordic, aristocracy of Russia became prosperous because of trade with the Islamic regions to the south and their trade included Slavs sold as slaves—said to be the origin of the name 'Slav'. Some of the prominent American families of the Northeastern states, including many of the notable families of the northeastern American states, Cabots and Perkins and Russells and Tafts and Delanos and Walkers, made their money in slave-trading or opium-trading. Maybe some worked both trades.

If we Westerners had not intervened in Africa in ways exploitive or charitable by intention, perhaps Africans, as individuals and as peoples, would have moved towards societies which gave reproductive advantages to those with higher reasoning abilities or inclinations towards developing good work-habits or some combination of the two. Perhaps and perhaps not; and, if they chose to remain tribal peoples, so be it. After all, to wish that sub-Saharan Africans had lived under conditions to bring about higher IQs than they now have is to wish away many of the Africans who exist now. We should realize this. You can't magically 'elevate' someone suited to 'Iron Age' tribal life to make them compatible with life in a technologically advanced civilization.

There are differences in the distribution of IQs among even the most intelligent of peoples so that Europeans, including European Jews who also have higher average IQs, produce proportionately more geniuses than the highly intelligent peoples of East Asia. The leaders of the West, since at least the 1960s, have chosen not to educate the educable and nurture the academic talents of those who have any in the interests of trying to provide higher education to those with no talent or no interest. When that failed, they—consciously or otherwise, began to socialize all students to the simultaneous profit of government-allied 'private' corporations and left-wingnuts who are opposed to all that is good in the West—except for coffee-bars and European sports-cars. And so, in at least this way, we further aggravate the problems coming from a build-up in genetic mutations in the peoples of the West and from the entry into Western countries of those who are not suited to life in a civilization—certainly not one so technologically advanced. In fact, it's likely that many of the businessmen and ideologists profiting off the decay of the West—think of them as maggots on a dying

body if you wish—are sociopaths with a heavy load of genetic mutations or humans of more ordinary sorts of weak moral character who are picking up the personality traits of the sociopaths around them.

See Chapter 693, *Why Middle-class American Men Don't Care Much If They Die*, for a discussion of the way in which the leaders of the West behave in the way of psychopaths—though it's likely that only some are true psychopaths and many are humans of low moral character who pick up the behaviors and attitudes of surrounding psychopaths to prosper in a decaying civilization. That essay refers to the academic study, *Psychopathy by U.S. State* at [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3185182](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3185182), where we learn of the very dense concentration of psychopaths in Washington, DC—Connecticut has the highest concentration of any state but the region of Washington has a far greater concentration. In the case of Connecticut, think of all the hedge-fund managers and investment bankers who live in the Southwest of that state and work in New York City. But there are hints that some of these psychopaths were created by their nearness to power and wealth and maybe to the stresses of living in a region filled with aggressive, ambitious men and women.

A proper sort of personality is necessary for a people to build or even maintain a civilization. That proper sort of personality is made of traits which can make for mathematicians dealing with abstractions and not 'just' triangles and novelists who can produce works exploring wrong or plausible philosophies of history or of human society and theologians capable of dealing with abstract metaphysics and politicians capable of dealing with such abstractions as impartial justice—non-tribal justice from a perspective important to understanding what is happening on American campuses and many other parts of our decaying polity. All citizens, and not just mathematicians and novelists and philosophers and politicians, must be comfortable with the ways of abstract justice, justice of laws and not justice of blood-ties; all citizens must be comfortable with abstract financial transactions and promises to be kept years in the future.

We should remember there are a large number of smart and capable Africans, intelligent human beings with personality traits at least sufficient to begin transcending tribal ways of thought and feeling and action, but too low a percentage of the total population to build a civilization and probably too low to maintain a civilization given to them—if that unwise project of Christian and secular missionaries had ever been possible. This has created a situation where those Africans who have the proper reasoning abilities

and personality traits often choose to migrate to Western countries. Those without such abilities and traits also choose to at least try to migrate to Western countries. The first travel quietly in jets carrying luggage bearing their diplomas from African or Western universities, the second travel with great publicity in boats, sometimes fragile, across the Mediterranean. This is all encouraged by unscrupulous politicians, as well as by those who have ideologically malformed senses of guilt for our past crimes against Africans, not recognizing that the slaves brought over to the United States were harmed far less than many of the descendants of those left behind in Africa who now are said by Professor Clark (see *A Farewell to Alms: A Brief Economic History of the World* [22]) to have lower standards of living than they had in their 'primitive' days before missionaries and investors and colonial administrators reached them.

I'll make a horrible speculation: Africa will suffer the greatest humanitarian disaster in history within the next two generations; hundreds of millions will die of starvation or disease or humanly-inflicted violence as a result of the breakdowns coming as Africans continue to try to take over the pieces of a civilization built for the benefit of the departed colonists and for the alleged benefit of African peoples. It's likely parts of Africa will be re-colonized by Asian and/or Western peoples wanting the natural resources and needing miners and plantation workers. As this is happening, desperate people will flee to safer regions which have cultures alien to the Africans. Many of those will probably die on the way or arrive to die soon or to live in poverty at the edge of the civilizations whose benefits they desire; some might survive and even prosper. In fact, it is happening already at a scale far smaller than what is all but certain. Both exploitive men and well-meaning men have created a situation moving towards a crisis which can't possibly end well so far as we Westerners or the Africans are concerned.

I've contemplated the problem for a few months or so, and managed to descend into a dark night of the soul, of sorts. I've ascended somewhat by putting aside any goal of reaching a good answer anytime soon. Instead, I'm trying to write about it, from different angles and using tools from different intellectual traditions. This more active approach has stopped the cold-war between my faith and my reason, my faith in God the Creator and my trust in established empirical facts. One faith-based fact is that God has told us to respect, to try to love as appropriate, all human beings. One empirical fact is that God has created a world and forms of life such

that constant culling of living creatures with genetic defects is necessary for the very survival of their family-lines and the entire species. Another empirical fact is that there is a build-up of mutational loads in the human race because we can now keep alive those who would have died young in that vast period prior to the Industrial Revolution.

And I remember also one claim I've made consistently for ten years or so: the Heavenly Body of Christ is a perfected and completed civilization with the Christian Church as the central organ. When we damage any Christian civilization, we damage part of the pilgrim Body of Christ.

What will happen in a society in which reproductive success is independent of selection for the traits so necessary, at least in a significant minority, for the human race to remain what it is or to move still closer to being an image of God? We are not only making choices which have already led to perhaps a 10-15 point drop in average intelligence in the West since 1900 or so, we have also made overlapping choices which have led to the destruction of the individual and communal traits which define the Body of Christ.

We Christians of the 21st century, and all of the secularized Christian and Jewish heretics of the West, need to realize that we weren't created by a special act in some paradise and can't create any paradise on earth by the best of motives and the strongest of wills. We live in a world of evolution and development. We need to make the best of such a world rather than developing delusions about our powers to keep all human beings alive while maintaining our human communities—ultimately, the Body of Christ. We need to do our best rather than assuming great good will come from the migration to civilized regions of peoples who have not the traits and characteristics for such ways of life; we also delude ourselves by thinking to do good by building technologically advanced infrastructure in those regions of peoples who have not the traits and characteristics of civilized peoples. Without a technologically advanced civilization, Africa can perhaps sustain a population in the tens of millions, probably far less than the 250 million population of 1955. As I noted, Africa could probably sustain a larger population if it were re-colonized and re-enslaved, but we should consider a policy of benign negligence: let nature take its course and then let the Africans choose their own future. Certainly, we can't let masses of pre-civilization peoples into regions of civilization without doing great harm to those regions and even to the immigrant peoples.

“Here be dragons.” Indeed. Here there are dangerous creatures, but real creatures of God's making, which are probably an even greater danger

to Christian thought and faith than are the various sexual and financial scandals of our days.



## 697 What is the World?

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2579>. It was finished and uploaded on 2018/12/17.]

I'll start with a digression to the question, "What is paganism, really?" In a simple comparison of paganism vs Christianity (in the sense of comparison and not of combat), I'll be able to better define the "world" from the Christian viewpoint but for modern sensibilities.

I'll write of higher paganism.

To a pagan, the world is what it is.

To a believer in a Creator—most strongly Christians, the world is what it is, given that God created it to be such.

In other words, the true dividing line between Christians and pagans is that the pagan thinks of the world as given to even the God or the gods or both or neither. Divinities and lesser spirits, if they are seen as existing, are also seen as having great powers over the world, though the Platonic God didn't even know of the existence of contingent things. He was lost in self-contemplation as His perfection was said to make Himself the only proper object of His attention.

The Christian believes the world to be contingent in the strongest way possible—it might have been different or might have not been at all. Or so should the Christian believe if he pays attention to the first verses of the Gospel of St John or to the first verses of the Book of Genesis as understood through those gospel verses. Yet, there are many Christians who think the pagan assertion, "God doesn't play dice with the universe," as spoken by Einstein, is the position consistent with Christian belief. From the human viewpoint, God first "played dice with the universe" by deciding to create it. Einstein's position is consistent only to Christian belief as deformed by the outlook of paganism that the world necessarily exists and is necessarily

what it is as is true also of any God or gods seen as existing. This pagan outlook, in this higher and self-aware set of beliefs as well as in naive sets of beliefs of pre-civilizational tribesmen, is something of a a stage of evolution towards a belief in a Creator.

Let me put matters in terms which are both spiritual and scientific.

First, we can start with my analysis in the short pieces: Chapter 156, *A Christian's View Einstein and Bohr's debate on the meaning of reality*, and Chapter 157, *Quantum Mechanics and Moral Formation*.

The idea is slightly more mature terms is:

Stuff isn't primary—hence, Einstein's overall view of reality isn't viable. Relationships are primary—hence, the strange view of reality held by Bohr and other 'radical' quantum theorists or philosophers is possible.

Relationships create stuff and can change stuff even in quite fundamental ways.

It's more than reasonable, perhaps necessary, for those creatures which respond to God to pray to God and to pray for contingent matters, such as the return of their children to faith and worship. Such God-responsive creatures can include those struggling with faith, including those who claim to be atheists or even some of those who are truly atheists. Indifference, the state of lukewarmness, is the ultimate blocker for entering Heaven—though even that can be overcome if the indifferent human being is a member of a community, at least a family, which has a good relationship with God. So I believe and teach.

“What is the world?”

Maybe it's better to ask: “What is Creation?”

It is a set of relationships involving God and all He created, with all that He created being a dynamic soup of sorts in which entities form and disappear, evolving and developing, all because of relationships formed:

1. by God creating and then interacting with what He created,
2. by non-living entities forming and interacting to change each other or to bring more such entities into existence,
3. by living entities forming and interacting with their environment, including each other, and changing each other as well as their environment and being changed by their environment,

4. by ever-more complex entities, non-living and living, coming into existence through all of this dynamic interaction,
5. by the ongoing formation of the Body of Christ and all He contains—I have no definitive catalog of who or what will be part of that Body or its true home in the World of the Resurrected.

[In item (3) above, I'm being redundant as each entity, non-living or living, is part of the environment. So far as item (5) goes, I tend to accept a Medieval proposition that everyone who could be happy in Heaven will be saved into Heaven though perhaps through a long period of re-formation and remedial learning in someplace we could call 'purgatory'.]

If we of the geographical West could put flesh upon this bare skeleton, we would be on our way to building a new Western civilization, that is, such an en fleshed understanding could provide the complete worldview for a Christian civilization.



# 698 God Can Do What is Forbidden to Men

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2594>. It was finished and uploaded on 2019/01/30.]

Christians in the past century or more have failed utterly to face up to the biological reality:

God has created a world where family-lines of organisms are kept in good condition by Darwinian selection processes leading to death or reproductive failure of organisms with ‘inadequate’ traits—often caused by mutations. Complex traits, such as intelligence or height or immune system health, are the results of complex systems of genes (more than 1000 for intelligence, more than 700 for height) and can be damaged by a load of small mutations. Damage to the immune system, or bad luck with diseases when young, can damage the developments of any or all traits.

If you only accept the above claim for the sake of argument, consider the possibility that the human race in 2019 includes many who would not have survived under past conditions, most because of undesirable mutations. There are now somewhere around 7.7 or so billion human beings alive. Would that population decrease to perhaps 3 billion if we didn’t have the resources to keep alive so many with weak immune systems or low intelligence by the standards of complex, technologically advanced countries which made it possible for them to survive and perhaps live in some state of comfort? Maybe only 2 billion? Or even 1 billion?

Is this horrible, this probable great loss of life if even so little as an economic depression makes it more difficult to feed and cloth and house many who would lose their incomes, make it more difficult for hospitals to offer cancer treatment for all or even more difficult for hospitals to stay open? Perhaps by human standards, but it's God who created this world and who still rules over it—mostly, at least to our perception, through the properties and laws of the created stuff of this Universe as well as the properties and laws of the Universe as its own self. The human species came to be by way of the sometimes nasty processes of biological evolution.

Think of parasitic wasps:

Parasitoid wasps are a large group of hymenopteran superfamilies, with all but the wood wasps (Orussoidea) being in the wasp-waisted Apocrita. As parasitoids, they lay their eggs on or in the bodies of other arthropods, sooner or later causing the death of these hosts. [See *Parasitoid wasp* at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parasitoid\\_wasp](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parasitoid_wasp).]

The wasp larvae live by literally sucking the juices out of the bodies of their hosts. Not so much different from some of the parasites in parts of the world which infest human beings, destroying their vision or stripping them of their energy.

Or we can consider the brutal stories told by human genes. The major groups of American Indians carry Y-chromosomes (male sex genes) from the eastward migrating Ancient Northern Eurasians (ancestors of Mongols and Siberians and others, cousins to the westward migrating Ancient Northern Eurasians who gave rise to various 'Indo-European' peoples) and maternal genes from ancestors to the modern Han Chinese. What happened to the husbands and fathers and brothers and sons of those women? A lot of Mexican men carry Y-chromosomes from European men, mostly Spanish, while most of the Mexican women carry maternal genes from native American Indian populations. Oppressed peoples sometimes carry Y-chromosomes and other genes from the conquerors and exploiters of their indigenous ancestors.

Certainly, the histories implied by many a genetic study are pretty nasty.

This 'nastiness' is not something imposed upon God's world and a 'fallen' race by demons—'fallen angels' or otherwise. This is part and parcel

of the fundamental way in which God's world, this thing-like phase of His Creation, operates.

Let me take up a related process: miscarriages, most of which are the weeding out of human embryos which the mother's body detects as being unviable or perhaps just sub-optimal. Estimates of the percentage of fertilized human eggs which miscarry, including some which first reach relatively advanced stages of development, go up to 75% and would seem—by some quick checking on the Web—to be at least 50%. We human beings are forbidden to kill defenseless human beings, including most certainly embryos. God can do so.

In other words, evolutionary selection processes and some of the biological processes which have evolved are roughly describable as eugenic, often by nasty means. They are part of the world as God created it, where I use 'world' as this physical universe as seen in light of God's moral order. The Almighty can do what we are forbidden to do.

So it is that we Christians, and others who have a strong—if often inadequate or wrongful—understanding of God's moral order for this world, are in a difficult position. We can watch as the human race deteriorates in intelligence (probably a decline of at least 15 points in the average IQ of the people of the West from about 1850 to now), sociability, immune system health, and other important characteristics. We have likely reached a point where few, if any, peoples of the West have a large enough percentage of smart human beings to sustain advanced technologies. It is all but certain we couldn't rebuild our advanced political communities or economic communities or scientific research communities if they continue to deteriorate. We aggravate our problems by thinking to educate the ineducable, to over-educate the somewhat educable, and to force those with greater learning and thinking capacity down to the level of the somewhat educable. Our hubristic educational and political leaders of Western countries think it more or less given that the good times will never end and also think that anything they do will work.

For discussions of this general problem of the decay of the West, see:

- Chapter 692, *Is Modern Atheism a Result of High Loads of Genetic Mutations?*,
- Chapter 693, *Why Middle-class American Men Don't Care Much If They Die*, and

- Chapter 696, *Here Be Dragons*.

I have posted discussions of this issue from other perspectives in past years. A search on “Barzun” or “Ortega” or “Acton”, “conspiracy” or “conspiracies” or “gangsters” is one way to find some of them—in my speculations, power-elites turned to conspiracies of a more criminal type in response to their inability to innovate, to find solutions to the developing problems of the West. The problem of a population with general declines in intelligence is greatly aggravated by the decision I noted above to treat those talented in intellectual matters as if they have no such talents or, perhaps, as if those talents develop naturally in high-IQ individuals who are bored out of their minds for years and who are kept from developing the attitudes and habits proper to the development of—we can hope—innovative genius. We certainly don’t treat young athletes with serious talent in such a way.

I’ll note here that there are ups and downs and the West has come back from similar periods of decay. After the collapse of Western Christendom at the end of the 13th century, following the High Middle Ages, the population of Western Christendom fell by about half—a precondition of sorts of the recovery and not something which could have been avoided.

Could we of the Modern West do something to mitigate what we will suffer and to make it more likely there will be a recovery before long? Maybe, but we, in general, aren’t even paying attention. For example, we Catholics have been trained to chant, “We believe in biological evolution; aren’t we just so-so modern?” Then we pretend that such a belief, if it were for real, would have no effect upon our understandings of human morality or human behavior in general, no effect upon our understandings of our social organizations or their shaping. Evolution is just so-so clever in shaping our eyes, but it could never shape our moral or economic or political decision-making. Those human traits are just so-so soul-like and not at all affected by our stomachs or our sex organs.

Aquinas and some other thinkers of that magnificent period called the High Middle Ages (see *High Middle Ages* at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/High\\_Middle\\_Ages](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/High_Middle_Ages)) claimed that most of what we know about God, we know from His effects (results of His actions) in Creation. In recent centuries, both quantitative and qualitative knowledge of this part or phase of God’s Creation filled with thing-like being has grown to immense heights but the leaders of Christianity, ecclesiastical and scholarly alike, haven’t considered it important to do much with these Himalayas, many piles of

data and some of verifiable facts and less often of facts processed into knowledge and very rarely indeed of a mountain knowledge distilled into wisdom. Those Christian leaders, as I have written before, have acted to increase the problems to come rather than to mitigate them. Africa, at a level of technology manageable by the indigenous population—I write mostly of Sub-Saharan Africa, can perhaps sustain a population of 200 million; their population now is believed to be about 1.7 trillion less the population of Northern African countries. Use your imagination to think of the suffering when the developed countries suffer their own decline and can no longer ‘help’ the Africans. Any mitigation at this time would require very elitist, caste-based societies in which of the vast majority of individuals in the indigenous peoples would be slaves of a sort—to the indigenous elites and to others from the developed countries.

From a theological and salvational viewpoint:

It’s clear we Christians of the modern West know mostly wrong things about the God we imagine as some sort of fuzzy-wuzzy, open-handed Grandpa with brains perhaps a little addled.

We sent missionaries around the world to act on an extension of Christ’s commandment to “love our neighbors” so extreme, so extensive, so patronizing, so based upon ignorance, that we’ve helped to create a huge disaster in the making.

We of the modern West, perhaps Americans most of all, worship a God we’ve conjured up for our convenience and the true God, the God of Jesus Christ, is probably quite angry with us. I don’t know what He’ll do but the Bible and modern knowledge alike indicate we should prepare for an afterlife starting off with long and painful periods of remedial training. At best. And those alive in the next generations should be prepared for a time of suffering and bloody struggle and—perhaps—recovery from the disasters we’ve been creating for the past 2 centuries or so.



# 699 First the Natural, Then the Spiritual.

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2608>. It was finished and uploaded on 2019/03/05.]

On 2019/02/24, Roman Catholics who attended the Mass for Seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time (Cycle C) heard St Paul telling the Corinthians:

It is written, ‘The first man, Adam, became a living being,’ the last Adam a life-giving spirit. But the spiritual was not first: rather the natural and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, earthly, the second man, from heaven. [The entire reading is 1 Corinthians 15:45–49.]

Let me put this in terms compatible with our current empirical and verifiable knowledge about human beings:

The man who is natural is the human animal who evolved from an ancestor common to humans and chimpanzees.

The man who is spiritual has developed a sense of wonder and a higher level of capacity for abstract reasoning. He has looked into the sky and has wondered if there is some meaning behind all of this confusion. He has detected the presence of some divine force though he might misinterpret it as forces of multiple spirits, some of them more mortal than immortal. At some point, men at this level of evolution gathered into communities increasingly complex over time, communities which gathered and which stayed together to engage in the collective worship of moral gods. (See *Is Modern Atheism a Result of High*

*Loads of Genetic Mutations?* 692.) Eventually, some such men began, and still begin, to worship the one true God. Eventually, the Son of God came to teach men a little about the internal life of this one true God, an internal life of interaction between Father and Son and Holy Spirit. He offered a share of this life to those who wished to be His friends.

The meaning of St Paul's analysis is retained as it is re-interpreted in terms of what we now know about God's acts-of-being, His acts of Creation and His acts of sustaining, acts described better by Einstein and Darwin than by those who saw the Almighty as a magician.

It's time for us to move on and, in acknowledgment of God as Creator of this evolutionary and developmental world, to realize that the Church Fathers were wrong, though their error was understandable: we need to confess we are conceived and are born as human animals (particular human natures in some philosophical and theological terms) and are raised by God to the status of His friends, as we play our role by properly responding to the Almighty or, at least, to His Creation.

The soul isn't necessary. What's necessary to me as an individual is for God to choose me as a friend to share the life of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, in the world of the resurrected. Arguably, the conjecture of a soul is nothing more than a pagan-like attempt to guarantee our survival into an afterlife (the region of the damned or that of the saved). Wrongful metaphysics and wrongful theological speculation couldn't see how we could survive without a part of us having continuous existence, though they couldn't have told anyone what it meant to have such continuity between this part of Creation and the part in which the resurrected share God's life. God created each of us one time in our mother's womb and, yet, we continue to exist only because of acts of sustaining us in being, acts-of-being which aren't so much different from an act of creation from nothingness. Each of us exists as a focus of God's love. He can direct His love into the world of the resurrected and, then, we exist there as the focus of the same love, the same act-of-being which is us.

Claiming we came into existence as a special act of creation, an act in which an 'eternal' soul is attached to flesh and blood is an effort to claim a form of being which doesn't belong, can't possibly belong, to any mortal being—even a mortal being which God will sustain in existence for time without end in that world of the resurrected.

# 700 Love and Stuff, Part 1: Introduction

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2626>. It was finished and uploaded on 2019/08/13.]

[This is the first in a series of some number of articles on this subject—*Love and Stuff*, which will be defined over the course of the series. The past eight months of so began with writer’s burnout, went into a streak of sinus infections, followed by flu in early July. I’ve also endured a rapidly developing cataract that messed up my vision in unusual ways starting around March of 2019. I can’t yet predict when I’ll be fully back on track, but I’m on my way.]

Years ago—perhaps 12, I had planned on writing a book titled: *Love and Stuff*. The basic theme for the book can be stated in a simple way though the underlying ideas are complex and complicated and sophisticated:

Relationships are primary, starting with God’s love and extending to relationships involving Creation and all its creatures. These relationships are primary, create stuff and shape stuff in various ways—‘developmental’ and ‘evolutionary’ are perhaps the two most important (or only?) such ways though we Christians have to be open to God’s direct intervention in a way which might seem instantaneous or ‘miraculous’. This is different from the basic assumption of most human thought that stuff exists and then it begins to form relationships with its own stuff and with other stuff.

I tend to think of this human intuition that stuff exists and then forms relationships as being ‘pagan’ or ‘paganistic’—not implying insult but rather

in acknowledgment of the great pagan thinkers, ancient Greek philosophers and Hindu theologians and Chinese philosophers and others, who developed magnificent and insightful ways of thought based upon that understanding of being. Despite my admiration of those thinkers, I'm arguing for a change of our understanding of being to that of St Thomas Aquinas—a radical existentialist in the teaching of Etienne Gilson. I find Gilson's viewpoint to be quite compatible with my understanding of creation from the viewpoint of empirical science and of mathematics.

But let's go back—in terms of human knowing. We'll start with existing stuff and temporarily put aside the question of the ultimate nature of the stuff we directly perceive. My contention is that stuff interacts in ways that actually change the stuff with which it interacts—the various bits and pieces and things and living creatures which are stuff. I've found this idea stated, perhaps as a dogma or perhaps in a more cautious and speculative manner, in two different contexts which are fundamental to two different fields of human thought:

- in the formulations of quantum mechanics (but various areas of modern science in general), and
- in the ideas taught in the writings of the Johannine school—the school of St John the Evangelist.

In both cases, we seem to have 'stuff' which is, at very most, partially explained but mostly assumed as if having necessary being—the electrons and photons which interact in strange ways in quantum mechanics and the higher-level forms of being which are of primary concern in the teachings of St John and his early disciples. In each case, in very different ways, we can penetrate to a deeper understanding of being though scientists and theologians alike—but for a few—refuse to speculate in ways that are radical and provide possibilities of deeper and more complete understandings of created being and of divine Being. In both cases, there is—or seems to be—something of the pagan view (with no insult intended):

- to empirical scientists and likeminded philosophers and theologians, matter exists though processes described by quantum mechanics, electrons and quarks come to be from something unknown, more abstract, and more formal; and

- to Biblical scholars and likeminded philosophers and theologians, matter co-exists with divine beings (or even one divine Being) and divine beings can impose their will upon that matter with lesser or greater effectiveness—with absolute effectiveness for Christians and some other religious believers and with lesser effectiveness for most pagans and for some Jews who seem to take literally the hints in the Hebrew Bible that men, at least Jacob, can outsmart God.

We can go beyond that in both cases, seeing that both quantum mechanics and Christian theology contain bright pointers to deeper layers of being—more abstract and closer to something which might be called ‘primordial being’.

We can see first what we can learn about God’s Creation from quantum mechanics.

Many have read about such mysterious ‘quantum’ phenomena as virtual particles (which arise from the ‘vacuum’ which is not nothingness) and a particle which might not have even so much as firm existence or non-existence until something interacts with it. This sort of thing is a consequence of the formalisms (systems of mathematical equations) of quantum mechanics, which formalisms describe relationships. So far as I know, there are three such formalisms: those of Heisenberg and Schrodinger which were developed in the 1920s and that of Feynman which was developed in the late 1940s.

There are ongoing efforts to discover particles (or even forces/interactions) which are more elementary than those currently known. For example, the weirdly-named quarks are considered to be a fundamental constituent of hadrons such as protons, neutrons, and mesons—see *Quark* at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quark>. The electroweak interaction is “the unified description of two of the four known fundamental interactions of nature: electromagnetism and the weak interaction.” Quarks make up a variety of particles, the electroweak interaction makes up two interactions.

This is what is going on:

In recent centuries, science has been remarkably successful at building models which reproduce much of nature’s phenomena by way of simple components of fewer types. In general, this has been misunderstood as an ongoing march into nature which will

produce a small set of ‘stuff’ and ‘relationships’ (forces) which can then be used to build an accurate, and perhaps precise, model of all of nature—those parts of nature we can observe directly and at least some of the parts we can’t observe directly and may not ever be able to observe directly. To use a weak but suggestive analogy: skyscrapers are constructed from ‘simple’ components, steel-beams and copper wires and wallboard and so on, but a skyscraper is a greatly complex (and generally unique) thing—to build and to maintain and to demolish without damaging nearby structures. A theorist knowing only about those steel-beams and copper wires and wallboard could not design a skyscraper—it has taken prolonged and complicated learning processes for architects and engineers, steelworkers and electricians, to build those skyscrapers scattered across the earth.

For background on my claim that relationships are primary over stuff, see one of my earliest and shortest blog posts included as *A Christian View of Einstein’s and Bohr’s Debate on Reality*, Chapter 156. The referenced chapter is in *Love and Stuff*, Part IV. In this series, I plan on expanding on this matter or, perhaps, pulling together various expansions I’ve made over the past 13 or so years.

For now, I’ll address one specific, related issue: the ‘fear’ of some mathematicians that modern, very abstract mathematics is showing hints that the quantitative and formal structures of mathematics may rest upon a foundation of qualitative and less-formal forms of thought—or forms of being in my expanded and updated version of the radical existentialism of St Thomas Aquinas.

There seem to be qualitative transitions in going from one ‘type-level’ of being to another—where the scare-quotes indicate I can’t quite define what these ‘type-levels’ of being are though I can warn that naive use of both ‘type’ and level seem quite relevant. By ‘type’, I mean primarily—but not exclusively—qualitative vs quantitative. This speculation about mathematics perhaps resting upon qualitative foundations first appeared in my writings in *Adopting Mathematical Reasoning in Non-quantitative Fields of Thought*, Chapter 144. I’ll be addressing this issue by way of pulling together various lines of thought developed over the past six or seven years or, perhaps, pushing those lines of thought further.

So it is that I've speculated over the previous 13 years from both a mathematical and empirical perspective that relationships are primary over stuff and that there are some other insights of modern mathematics and empirical science which have not been properly, or deeply, understood. Much of mathematics and empirical science should be re-interpreted in radical ways consistent with what we know of our universe and all that lies above, below, and around it.

So far as my reasoning processes go, these theological and empirical speculations about relationships engaged in a dance of sorts with my speculations bringing thing-like being back through the abstractions of quantum wave-functions and back to some sort of being in which mathematics itself has become qualitative rather than quantitative.

Let us now see what the Gospel of St John has to tell us.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. [John 1:1–5]

“[Christ] was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.” [John 1:2-3]

Christian theologians and philosophers and preachers and poets and others have put strong interpretations upon these ideas of St John and his followers. I'll not say much in this essay but to endorse the interpretation that God, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, created what is not Him from nothingness—what doesn't exist in a somewhat weird way of speaking. Furthermore, we Christians see in this act-of-being, this act of creating, something important in the relationships of Father and Son and Holy Spirit:

The Father commands that Creation come into existence, the Father commanding in complete communion with the Son and the Holy Spirit; Creation came into existence and continues to do so with ongoing acts-of-being, through the Son and using the Son's Being as the source of created being, the Son giving of Himself in complete communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit; and the Holy Spirit played some special role sometimes

described in terms such as “breathing life into the world and its things and its living beings,” again done in complete communion with the Father and the Son.

‘Communion’ in the above paragraph indicates the sort of relationship described in conventional Christian (Trinitarian) theology: Father and Son and Holy Spirit remain individual Persons, yet are one in Being or Divine Nature. This is the same that is intended for those who enter the Body of Christ as friends of the Son of God and the act of communion, consumption of a consecrated host (Body of Christ) or consecrated wine (Blood of Christ), can be part of the process of entry. It all depends upon the intentions of those receiving communion. In any case, we as individuals who are also members of various communities such as families and tribes, become more fully and completely members of the Body of Christ. We become one Man with Christ as our Head.

This all points, again, to the existence of a transcendental God who created what is not Him and then set to work sustaining that ‘what’ and shaping it to His purposes, which purposes included the evolution of a species of living beings who bear a special resemblance to the Son and are capable of forming such a relationship with Him that we can enter into the Body of Christ where we remain individuals and, yet, we are fully part of that Body, sharing His life and His nature.

I’ll move on in upcoming essays to start elaborating the above ideas and to discuss them in various ways, including those of theology and philosophy and mathematics and physics and evolutionary biology. I will try to produce an outline of a reunderstanding of the Bible and the Christian theologies drawn largely from the Bible, of human history, of human arts and literature, of mathematics and empirical science. More fundamentally, this reunderstanding will be of the true being of all that is Creation or part of it. At the heart of my effort will be a strong belief that the most primary relationship of all is the love of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for each other—and I would add the love Each feels for Their unified Being, Their love for their divine Community. Given that God chose to bring into being much that is not God, though coming from God, the next most important relationships are the love and loves God feels for Creation and for the individual bits of stuff, the things, the living beings, which are of Creation.

## 701 Love and Stuff, Part 2: A Kinder and Gentler Manichaeism

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2631>. It was finished and uploaded on 2019/09/17.]

We have with us always—in this mortal realm—various heresies which take too seriously the theological quandary: how could an all-powerful and all-good God have created a world in which there is so much evil? The great thinkers who have seeming headed this way, Isaiah and Jeremiah and Lord Acton are just 3 examples, have eventually retreated to a prayer such as, "Lord God Almighty, why did You create a world in which such a high percentage of powerful and successful men are outright evil?" In modern psychological terms, this is somewhat equivalent to asking, "Why is it so easy for men with the 'mentality of gangsters' (Acton's term) to gain power and wealth?" or even "Why is this world made so that psychopathic men can so easily take advantage of the bonds of trust which are necessary for complex (and potentially wealthy and powerful) communities to form?" The parasites eventually invade any successful centers of power and wealth, destroying the relationships which are productive of that power and wealth.

To think matters through to the formation of tightly phrased questions is good. In doing such, we are being honest to the workings of God's Creation, honest to the acts-of-being which God performed in creating from nothingness and in sustaining and shaping what He has so created. (Per Etienne Gilson, 'act-of-being' is an English-language term to give us a sense of the sheer action in God's interaction with contingent being, a sense of the radical existentialism involved in Thomas Aquinas' understanding of a true Creator-God.)

So it is that we can derive insights from analyses of and contemplations

upon this matter of a Creation with high levels of natural evils (volcanoes and parasites and so on) and seemingly higher levels of human evils. We can't draw anything that could be called answers or explanations which are more than partial and contingent. Yet, many try to explain this world of mixed goodness and evil in absolute terms, not always simple but absolute.

One possible set of explanations start with the idea found in ancient pagan traditions that there was some sort of a fall from perfect being which is 'spiritual'; our 'material' world is a mistake and must be conquered in such a way that 'material' being disappears and only 'spiritual' being continues to exist. This is more extreme, though similar to, the Greek idea of a Golden Age which decays to a Silver Age and on to the Bronze Age through a Heroic Age and on to the low-point of the corrupt Iron Age. (See *Ages of Man* at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ages\\_of\\_Man](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ages_of_Man). See *Yuga* at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yuga> for a Hindu version of this sort of a system. Note that the Greeks and Hindus both came from the people we can describe roughly as 'Indo-European people' who are discussed in *Proto-Indo-Europeans* at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proto-Indo-Europeans> and *Indo-Aryan migration* at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indo-Aryan\\_migration](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indo-Aryan_migration).)

One aspect of this whole matter confuses me: why is it that this idea of a fall, by stages or all at once, so thoroughly dominated any theories that man arose from more primitive creatures? Why do we tend to think of ourselves as being descendants of more perfect men? Is it a trait of Indo-European modes of thought only? I don't know enough to provide even tentative answers and doubt I'll explore this particular line of questions, but—even unanswered—such questions can point to interesting ideas.

My intent is to look at one particular problem coming from this: the tendency on the part of Christians to hypothesize a conflict between a more perfect state of being, spirit, and a state of being, material, which is imperfect at best and maybe outright evil.

A powerful thinker, *Mani*, lived during 216-274—see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mani\\_\(prophet\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mani_(prophet)). He was of Persian origin (Indo-Aryan in all likelihood). He drew upon *Gnosticism*—see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gnosticism>—which taught (roughly and simplifying over a variety of similar but not identical sets of beliefs as listed in that Wikipedia article):

- All matter is evil, and the non-material, spirit-realm is good.

- There is an unknowable God, who gave rise to many lesser spirit beings called Aeons.
- The creator of the (material) universe is not the supreme god, but an inferior spirit (the Demiurge).
- Gnosticism does not deal with "sin", only ignorance.
- To achieve salvation, one needs gnosis (knowledge).

This Wikipedia article on Gnosticism also tells us: “A major question in scholarly research is the qualification of Gnosticism, based on the study of its texts, as either an interreligious phenomenon or as an independent religion,” pretty much the same as my question regarding this entire line of thought and of feeling which I’ll simply label “pessimism about matter.”

Mani’s system, *Manichaeism*—see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manichaeism>, taught:

an elaborate dualistic cosmology describing the struggle between a good, spiritual world of light, and an evil, material world of darkness. Through an ongoing process that takes place in human history, light is gradually removed from the world of matter and returned to the world of light, whence it came. Its beliefs were based on local Mesopotamian religious movements and Gnosticism.

Using categories of Christian thought: what exists necessarily (it couldn’t not exist) is good and pure; what exists contingently is evil and impure, but that which is good and pure has become trapped in this material world, which has basic stuff, matter, which is evil and impure. These lines of thought are so complex that its hard to properly criticize or analyze them without a good deal of study and a good deal of words. My goal is to deliberately stay at a more general level to drive home the point that there is no good reason to consider the usual understanding of the fall of Adam and Eve as even plausible while there is also no good reason to reject evolutionary theories as being incompatible with Holy Scripture or with nearly all subsequent Christian theologies—though some versions of Darwinian evolutionary theories have been corrupted by thought due more to Karl Marx than to Darwin and some versions of Christian theology have been corrupted by borrowins from Manichaeism and Gnosticism.

One aspect of Christian speculative theories (yes—not settled dogma) which puzzles me is: if we are to think about spirit as perfect and good and matter as evil and defective, why would we imagine that we share in spirit? Why do we think there is a form of human created being (matter or body) which is evil and defective and a form of human created being (spirit in the form of soul) which somehow shares in divinity? Mani, and his possible Gnostic forebears, might have been able to believe this because of their polytheistic religions and the confusion in or their lack of concern with various forms, but Christians believe in one God who is the one Creator, in divine Being and in contingent being. We should be more careful in blurring boundaries, while confessing that God has crossed the boundaries in creating what is not Him and then in taking on, through the Son, a human nature of contingent being.

Yet, it would seem that most modern Christians don't generally see the world as outright evil or even bad in a strong way, though anyone with open eyes and an active mind will see there is much in this world which is not good. Some might even perceive that such non-goodness might be the result of processes which lead to goodness. But... Modern Christians, and most other modern peoples in the West, form—or, more likely, adopt—their core beliefs as if the world were irrelevant, and so it is easy, as one important example, for them to absorb the liberal position that only individuals matter and communities have only nominalistic existence. (See *A Very Simplified View of the Woes of Christianity—Now and at Two Earlier Times*, Chapter 674.)

It becomes not only possible, but mandatory in a sense for those modern Christians to think in terms of soul as eternal (contingent being as eternal?) and matter as something ephemeral and created for the use of our 'pure' and 'eternal' souls. Even our bodies can be mutilated if we feel ourselves to be of a different sex than that to which we were born. (Lest the reader think I be indifferent to the small in percentage but real population of truly troubled people: see *Individuality, Freedom, and the Real Conflict Facing Modern Christians*, Chapter 650.)

Modern Western Christians, other residents of the Western regions of decay still more, have conformed their thoughts and feelings in such a way as to accept God's declaration that what He created is good or very good while also thinking only the spiritual can be truly good, though the spiritual is no more than an undisciplined desire. The world is not "what it is" but rather "what we feel it is or should be." So it is that modern Western

Christians can accept both evolution and the story of a human race born in Eden of a special Creation which is in nature but not of nature. It allows some to move toward the radical, but consistent, position that we are what we feel ourselves to be, or think to feel ourselves to be, at the present moment. Government bureaucrats and their soul-mates, Christian leaders, can decide to move primitive tribal peoples from Uganda to Maine, feeling that all human beings are the same—why in the world would they think natives of tropical Africa evolved to the same characteristics as natives of the temperate and arctic zones? Despite the illusions of such as those Christian leaders of the modern West, or most members of their flocks, this is the same reasoning, low-quality and oblivious to the facts of God's Creation, which is found in those who advocate that a 6 year-old boy who feels he is a girl should undergo hormone treatments and surgical mutilations to become a 'girl'. Africans have the traits to live in a suburb of Boston and boys have the traits to be girls with a little 'help' from the medical industry.

The above paragraph discusses ideas so stupid as to be held only by Catholic bishops and others educated beyond their capabilities—while trying to function in a chaotic environment, many might have functioned well enough in a morally and politically stable world. More interesting, from my perspective, the tendency of the modern man or woman or child of the West to overlay their own illusions and delusions upon the world outside of themselves has allowed many modern Christians of the West to accept the material benefits of modern science and engineering while remaining in the mainstream of a Christianity which relies upon an understanding of Creation which is made of both Bible-based theology and modern science—as of 1700 or so.

To these modern Christians of the West, our physical natures don't really matter much. Our desires, taking the place of spiritual natures in Gnostic or Manichaeistic thought, overrule any considerations of reason or even basic facts; this sort of corruption has even overtaken the self-sacrificing religious and secular missionaries of the modern world: see *Here Be Dragons*, Chapter 696 for a discussion of the great dangers they, with our support, have nurtured.

To hell with reality, even the ways in which God has created and continues to shape and to sustain Creation, in particular—the ways in which the human race has evolved and continues to evolve. To hell with reality, even our own bodies to which we were born.



## 702 Love and Stuff, Part 3: Is 'Empirical' a Meaningful Term

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2634>. It was finished and uploaded on 2019/10/01.]

I'll start by quoting The Collaborative International Dictionary of English v.0.48 [140], where that dictionary draws upon the 1913 edition of Webster's dictionary for the particular terms of interest in this essay. (The reader is well-advised to pay attention to the definitions and maybe even contemplate their deeper meanings and implications because I'll be moving fast in this essay outlining a future discussion which will be much more complete and part of a still more complete and complex work, God willing.)

**Empirical** Pertaining to, or founded upon, experiment or experience; depending upon the observation of phenomena; versed in experiments.

In philosophical language, the term empirical means simply what belongs to or is the product of experience or observation. –Sir W. Hamilton.

The village carpenter . . . lays out his work by empirical rules learnt in his apprenticeship. –H. Spencer.

Both of the quotes following the definition are also drawn from the 1913 Webster. That dictionary gives a second definition concentrating upon what 'empirical' is not:

**Empirical** Depending upon experience or observation alone, without due regard to science and theory; – said especially of medical practice, remedies, etc.; wanting in science and deep insight; as, empiric skill, remedies.

Taken together, so that we can catch a better view of these definitions in light of the context of general human understandings of being as of 1913, we can see a true problem. One of the clichés of modern scientific thought is, “There are no facts without theories.” Following that path a little: “There are no rational, human experiences without theories.” Of course, explicitly stated and rationally understood theories, theories in this sense, began (at least mostly) with the early Greek philosophers—whose work overlapped with mathematics and physics. Think of theory in a general sense, including the creation myths of pre-literate tribal peoples and the more sophisticated myths of the higher pagans; including a smorgasbord of ‘old wives’ tales’, fisherman’s tales, tales of totemic hunters; including rules of thumb of justice and social order, and so forth. Thus, there seems to be some sort of a mistake or gap in earlier understandings of what ‘empirical’ could be, in 1913 understandings. Our dogs and cats aren’t frightened by comets flashing across the sky as were our superstitious ancestors. Nor are those animals frightened by a comet coming directly at us, or in a glancing manner, as we modern, scientific humans are. Of course, even animals far less intelligent than dogs or cats will be frightened when the comet is blindingly bright.

Here’s a link to an entry at a serious technological blog: *Cats and Vision: is vision acquired or innate?* at <https://computervisionblog.wordpress.com/2013/06/01/cats-and-vision-is-vision-acquired-or-innate/>. Cats raised in an environment where they see only horizontal (vertical) lines during crucial periods of brain development will not be able to see vertical (horizontal) lines for the rest of their lives. It seems likely that even the basic (innate or intuitive) elements of our perceptions aren’t direct but rather formed by interaction with what is in our environments.

I’ll relate some recent personal experiences here. I recently had two lens replacements because of an unusual situation. By the age of 62—2017, I had normal slow-developing cataracts and then, sometime between 2017/09 and 2018/09, a third cataract began to develop rapidly. That third cataract developed so that it picked up the false image from a defect in my cornea (astigmatism) and threw it someplace on my retina apart from the location which was in my lens prescription. My brain was confused and I was seeing a weird world in which objects were compressed when seen through my left eye but normal when seen through my right eye. So I had two ‘premature’ but highly successful surgeries to correct the situation. Six weeks after the

second surgery and three weeks after getting new eyeglasses, my vision of the world around me is stabilizing. I no longer see shadows as real objects, perhaps very strange objects. I see the tops of pew-backs in my church as being parallel to each other. The eye-surgeon had warned me it was possible my brain would shut down the eye giving it information it couldn't make good sense of. It didn't shut the eye down but it was reeling like a punch-drunk boxer.

See *A Mathematical Model Unlocks the Secrets of Vision* at <https://www.quantamagazine.org/a-mathematical-model-unlocks-the-secrets-of-vision-20190821/> for an interesting discussion of:

the great mystery of human vision: Vivid pictures of the world appear before our mind's eye, yet the brain's visual system receives very little information from the world itself. Much of what we "see" we conjure in our heads.

"A lot of the things you think you see you're actually making up," said Lai-Sang Young, a mathematician at New York University. "You don't actually see them."

Yet the brain must be doing a pretty good job of inventing the visual world, since we don't routinely bump into doors.

It would seem that the 'empirical', world or aspects, isn't what it was thought to be by the editors of the 1913 Webster nor by David Hume nor Aristotle nor any of the authors of the Bible nor by any past thinker I'm aware of.

If the reader follows some path of thought similar to mine, he might wonder if 'empirical' is truly a useful concept—such skepticism is a necessary attitude in these sorts of situations even if that reader is convinced of the need and importance of experience, including bodily perceptions, in our efforts to understand some of the various aspects of our world—I'll label as 'practical' or 'scientific' those aspects and the thoughts they lead to. I am so convinced. I'm also convinced that our higher or more abstract thoughts originate in those, mostly reliable, bodily perceptions. They originate by way of processes I'll be trying to at least sketch out in this series of essays, which essays I plan to flesh out and put into book form.

There is another, more specific error embedded in this way of thinking, an error which is unconscious and dangerous in the thoughts of Kant and

many who followed him even while opposing him in many ways. We imagine schemes of human knowledge which are really for human comfort and convenience and which, I claim, don't correspond that well to the actual being of our world. It's a fully conscious error on my part, one I make to ease the path for my modern mind and the modern minds of my readers or any who might hear of some of my ideas by various second- or third-hand routes. This deliberate mis-categorization of knowledge corresponds to some fundamental errors in the ways in which we learn in formal schooling and, most likely, in our various cultural and social activities. A small amount of deep thinking after recognition of the interaction of eye and mind in even seeing the tree outside my window points to the unity of knowledge, of various sorts of knowledge including even revelation. If I'm right, the reader might take comfort in this: it took me years of reading and contemplation and more reading and some serious studying of various subjects to absorb this insight and make it truly mine.

The fundamental error which leads to a misunderstanding of knowledge begins with a misunderstanding of the being which is the object of knowledge. One important and pedagogically useful form of this error is simply:

Being is of two types, one material and one immaterial. The two types of being cannot mix though they can, under some circumstances, be in such communion as to form a human being. The material part of human being is flesh and blood, while the immaterial includes something we can't describe except by way of comparison to our beliefs about the nature of divine Being.

Yet, we must ask: If man is entirely a product of biological evolution and if his thinking is done, consciously or innately, in his physical brain, how has he been able to even conceive of such concepts as 'infinity'? The answer for now is simple: we learn of infinity by interacting with God—though many great thinkers haven't been able to believe this is what they are doing when contemplating truly abstract, truly deep matters. This blindness is made possible since most of our dealings with God are through what the Medievals labeled His 'effects in Creation'. Another term, more useful and more powerful, is 'acts-of-being', His acts of creating and of sustaining and shaping what He has created. This leads to my draft conclusion:

There are but two types of being: the necessary Being of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and the contingent being that God has created.



# 703 Love and Stuff, Part 4: Empirical Knowledge and Transcendental Knowledge

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=2640>. It was finished and uploaded on 2019/12/18.]

If we are flesh-and-blood creatures perceiving only what comes through our eyes and ears, our noses and the nerves on our fingertips and our elbows, how could we ever have transcendental knowledge? How could we know of God as other than a conjecture? Are we even likely to make a conjecture under the dualist assumption that flesh-and-blood be not enough for a creature to have consciousness, self-consciousness, rationality, longing for what lies beyond this world of flux? Would our God have remained a this-worldly god likely tied to our particular tribe?

We know various possible answers to this question, one of which is considered by some to be **the** answer. That one and only answer, which is actually a speculation from earlier centuries, and based upon earlier understandings of human nature and of creaturely nature in general, is: we know of transcendent things and of the Transcendent God through a soul which is itself transcendent in some sense, is itself above mere flesh-and-blood.

Let me suggest a different line of thought, one that doesn't posit some sort of 'magic' in a Creation not seeming to be much of a 'realm of magic' (no matter how many Christians delude themselves into thinking Middle Earth has anything to do with the God who presented Himself through Jesus of Nazareth) nor with acts of special creation (mostly, the creation of a first man and a first woman) by a God who otherwise acts through His effects in a rational world which existed prior to that act of a special

creation of men and women. More concisely: let us see if we can take God seriously as the rational Creator of a rationally ordered Creation.

Human beings (designated as ‘men’ from here on) are creatures which evolved from lines of clever, apish creatures. Those long-ago ancestors likely had some simple technology, such as the twigs altered by modern chimpanzees to make good tools for fishing for termites; interestingly, for a while, our ancestors were considered to be ‘anatomically modern humans’ but existed for tens of thousands of years without going beyond chimpish levels of technology. By various paths, lines of such ‘modern’ human beings evolved and then developed in specific environments—the environments in which they developed so as to display interesting and useful traits might have been different from the environments in which their recent ancestors had evolved. The previous sentence gives only a slight taste of the complexities and complications which have to be considered when analyzing natural processes, evolutionary processes in this case. A plausible, global analysis true to human reality would be sophisticated and not so schematic as to be profitable material for popular science, though such knowledge has to be somewhat reduced to teach the basics to young people or to provide material for general understandings on the part of literate scientific laymen or to provide entertainment for those fooled by such phrases as ‘chaos theory’—which is actually about the study of systems modeled by equations, those systems and their plausible models being both well-determined and impossible to calculate accurately beyond a certain time.

If we take God seriously as the rational Creator of a rationally ordered Creation, then we must take seriously our best knowledge of Creation, starting with the levels of Creation which we can directly perceive, perhaps through instruments such as microscopes, and can most readily develop theories, which are explanations or even symbolic encodings of what is known and not speculations. In small pieces or specific attributes, Creation is an observable and even testable manifestation of certain thoughts of the Creator. When we theorize or speculate, in science or mathematics or theology or philosophy or making of music or images, we are reaching for those thoughts of the Creator. (See Chapter 676, *Making God’s Thoughts Our Thoughts, God’s Ways Our Ways: Why Christianity Is Not Simple..*

As man himself has grown more complex and complicated in the various (intertangled) parts of his nature—most especially in his intelligence and in his social relationships, he has changed the environments in which he lives and in which he evolves. Among other dynamic traits, men have rational

minds and social relationships which allow for the passing of knowledge from generation to generation through education and the accumulation of knowledge in libraries and by way of training in specific skills and so forth. These processes can become self-sustaining—so long as the surrounding human community survives. In recent centuries, such processes have been most powerfully productive in the physical sciences though also quite productive in the historical sciences and in small regions of other social, or ‘soft’, sciences when there were practitioners both talented and honest.

So it was that certain regions of the mind of the Body of Christ and lots of individual minds in the West and some in other regions, were advancing in many ways into Creation. That is, they were making the being of Creation into human mind-stuff. Human minds, or least some—especially the communal mind of the Body of Christ, were reshaping themselves in imitation of the relationships of the Creator to His creatures, human and other. Moreover, the process by its very nature was self-reinforcing—as man became more god-like though not often more God-like, he could learn more from studying himself and his increasingly complex and complicated relationships with himself and with other human beings and with all the creatures around him. **And** his relationships with all the abstractions which emerged so gradually—reading one or more accessible histories of mathematics will give some idea of what was involved.

Abstractions are relationships. Objects don’t exist in an abstract sense and can only be described abstractly in terms of relationships, their perception by God or a living creature or their attractions to (involving forces between) God or other creatures. (In mathematics and physics, a repulsion is a negative attraction.)

To think or even feel and act in a more abstract way is to think and feel and act according to a different and, in some ways, higher realm of creation. We move closer to God’s act of Creation, the Act-of-being in which the abstract foundations of our concrete, thing-like world came to be. And, yet...

My overall understanding of Scripture and of our world leads me to believe that God, the nature and common Being of Father and Son and Holy Spirit, is both the most concrete and the most abstract of all possible entities. He’s not concrete in quite the sense of being thing-like, though His divine Concreteness is as particular as any possible thing.

But I diverge. In a necessary way, creating various forks which will be explored in future writings.

My main paths and my divergences alike will allow me to deal with the questions:

- So how can we know about transcendent truths and regions, about the Transcendent God Himself, if we have a non-transcendent form of being?
- Can we directly access transcendent being, to know it or to be in more intimate communion with it?

These are two paths, starting out as if somewhat in contradiction to each other. The contradiction lies in the direction of movement for our explorations. The first item above attempts to jump, as it were, to someplace in transcendent regions and then to move to the concrete and thing-like regions in which man lives—top-down thinking and exploration of reality. The second starts in those concrete and thing-like regions and attempts to move toward transcendent regions—bottom-up thinking and exploration of reality. At any given time, a particular thinker might be able and willing to provide a plausible description of one path and not the other. More than that, expansion of one line of human thought or of human exploration of reality might well lead various human communities to think one path is the true way of human thought.

The modern world has seen a new complication due to the weak efforts of theologians—do they have weak minds or weak spirits or both?—at a time when the bottom-uppers have recently had a few centuries of (soon ending?) great accomplishments. The Christian top-downers continue to work as if the knowledge of our physical worlds circa 1800 were adequate for a theology for modern men and the explicitly Christian bottom-uppers have nearly disappeared. The bottom-uppers of more recent generations have not been devout Christians or have been Christians who have kept their beliefs private and separated from their work in the real world.

In any case, I plan on using, probably have been using, both pathways—bottom-up and top-down. And I use them imperfectly. Only one man traveled both directions of knowledge in their fullness and that was because He followed both directions of being. The Son of God came down from Heaven to incarnate Himself as man, ‘emptying’ Himself of divinity in the process. He rose from the grave which is the fate of mortal men, taking up His full divinity. Christ knew of both paths (even during His kenosis—see the ar-

ticle, *Kenosis* at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenosis> because He was and is and always will be both paths.

It's important to note I'm not claiming that men have traveled toward transcendental truths only through explicit belief in Jesus of Nazareth as being the Son of God. I am claiming that the fullness of these paths (top-down from God and bottom-up from Creation) are through Christ and are Christ. Yet, it's certainly true that, for example, mathematicians can move from the empirical world of simple counting and measurement by rulers into more abstract realms and then move back again. It's not always the same mathematician who discovers some truths in abstract number theory and then develops algorithms for encoding of secret information.

As a first step, think of this as such: There is a continuum of sorts here, some dimension of Creation which runs from concrete, thing-like being to abstract forms of being. In fact, this a crutch. We know of some aspects of this divide between the concrete and the abstract, thought it really isn't so smooth as to be a spectrum: the quantum wave-function is a form of being quite abstract and mathematical and that entity 'collapses' to concrete, thing-like being in ways still being explored by theoretical and experimental physicists alike. I'll note in passing that I'm writing in a highly speculative mode to provide ways of speaking and writing about these issues.

'Inside' of the system which is all, both God-to-Creation and Creation-to-God, and which is united in Jesus Christ, we can go partway toward the transcendental God, the source of all truths, and then return to Creation so as to make sense of it all. Some mystics might be able to start in transcendental regions and travel partway, not all the way, back to concrete regions of flesh-and-blood creatures—I don't know. In any case, all such journeys remain inside of Creation and most remain deeply inside of Creation; all such journeys enter abstract regions but do not reach God's primordial act-of-being, the act in which He created contingent being.

To say that the journey of a mathematician to even realms of transfinite (greater than 'ordinary' infinity) is comparable to the journey to the transcendental regions is a bit of an exaggeration, but it is—again—a way of starting a journey only to be completed by those who choose to accept God's offer of adoption as sons and daughters of the Father. In some abstract sense of distance, we travel a distance to God which is greater than infinitely long—Cantorian theories of transfinite numbers would speak of absolute infinity, the Omega, which is more than infinitely larger than the ordinary infinity of counting numbers (1,2,3,...); I would hedge any state-

ments that even Omega is truly comparable to Godleaving open the possibility that God is in some true sense still ‘richer and larger’ than absolute infinity. At the same time, I would freely admit that I don’t quite know what that could mean and would also point out that being as understood in any age of philosophers or theologians or poets has always proven to be richer and larger than any prior thinkers had thought it to be. And those thoughts prove to be inadequate to the possibilities seen in later ages of men.

But how can I speak of the abstract reasoning of some branches of mathematics and some branches of other fields of human thought as being analogous to the spiritual and theological thoughts of God?

My first response to the above question is: I can only speak of such a matter bravely and honestly, hoping to make greater sense of it than has been done in recent centuries. Catholic thought is wedded to an understanding of Creation, circa 1800; Protestant thought is that bad or worse—depending upon the denomination.

Though there are hints of the transcendental in some of the oriental religions, Christianity is the only religion which matches, I think exceeds, the great metaphysical schools in seeking transcendental truths. In addition, the history of science and technology indicates that Christianity, at least that of the West, also deals better with the concrete, thing-like aspects of created being. It’s perhaps more accurate, as well as quite sad, to say that Christianity, especially the Western Catholic parts, **once** dealt better with the concrete, thing-like aspects of created being.

It is in that tradition, the real tradition of Aquinas and his master—Albert the Great, that Christianity reaches for a unified understanding of all created being and even an understanding of the Being of God, however limited that understanding might be. The ancient, and potentially hubristic but noble—if properly controlled, goal of reaching for the heavens has become the goal of reaching far beyond the heavens toward what I call the primordial stuff of Creation—stuff which is a particular manifestation of the very Being of the Son of God.

We see certain aspects of the transcendental in the pages of the Bible, especially in the Gospel, but we see other aspects in the abstract realms of Creation explored by mathematicians and physicists, theologians and philosophers, poets and musicians, builders and sculptors, craftsmen and women taking care of children, and many others. This global vision, what I often call a worldview, is an incomplete and imperfect vision of Creation

including the boundary regions where the Son of God provided the raw stuff of created being from His own divine Being.



# Appendices



# Appendices



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## Colophon

This book was typeset using the LaTeX typesetting system created by Leslie Lamport and the memoir class written by Peter Wilson.

The LaTeX typesetting system is a set of macro commands using the TeX typesetting system written by Donald Knuth. The body text is set 10/12pt on a 33pc measure with

Computer Modern Roman designed by Donald Knuth. Other fonts include Sans, Smallcaps, Italic, Slanted and Typewriter, all from Knuth's Computer Modern family.

